PLAYING SITUATIONISM

Ludic Spaces in Transmedia Contexts

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Der Artikel untersucht die Aktualität der Konzepte des dérive und der Psychogeographie als Methoden, mit denen die Erfahrung von Open-World-Videospielen besser verstanden und genauer erfasst werden kann. Diese Begriffe für eine subjektive Wahrnehmung der urbanen Dynamik wurden ursprünglich von dem Philosophen und Politaktivisten Guy Debord und der Situationistischen Internationalen in den 1950er Jahren geprägt. Sie verwandten Praktiken der modernen Avantgarde, um gegenüber dem gewöhnlichen Alltag eine subversive Haltung einzunehmen. In einem zweiten Schritt thematisiert der Beitrag den Begriff der cineludischen Form als Bezeichnung für die Verknüpfung von Settings und Sequenzen, die mit bekannten Filmgenres assoziiert werden, mit unterschiedlichen Gameplay-Konzepten. In Verbindung mit Miguel Sicarts Konzept der Playfulness bietet die Wiederentdeckung des dérive und der Psychogeographie eine hermeneutische Strategie zur Erkundung und kritischen Reflexion der mentalen Landkarten, die Videospiele, Popkultur und das Kino verbinden.

ABSTRACT

This article examines how the concept of dérive and the idea of psychogeography can be reactivated to explore and understand the experience of open-world games. These terms for a subjective way of perceiving the dynamics of urban life were originally introduced in the 1950s by philosopher and political activist Guy Debord and the movement of the Situationist International. They employed practices of the Modernist avant-garde as subversive approaches toward everyday life. In a second step, this article introduces the idea of the cineludic form, which connects settings and sequences typical of film genres to gameplay concepts. Combined with the idea of playfulness challenging the routines of algorithmic culture introduced by Miguel Sicart, the rediscovery of dérive and psychogeography offers a hermeneutic strategy to explore and critically reflect the mental maps that link video games, pop culture, and cinema.

1.   SPACE (RE)INVADERS – SITUATIONISM REVISITED

In recent years, the ideas of Situationism, one of the key concepts of artistic counter-cultural approaches toward urban spaces, seemed to have migrated to the museum, or at least to have been delegated to printed volumes of oral cultural

histories covering the avant-garde movements from the streets of 1960s Paris to the interventions of the London punk scene in the late 1970s. But, at a second glance, Situationism, which had already seemed to be close to the nostalgic old school anarchism of another Sex Pistols reunion tour, who updated Situationist ideas in the context of the late 1970s British punk scene but not any more in the 1990s and 2000s, has gained an extra life within the realm of digital spaces. In 2009, the Game Studies blog *Subject Navigator* asked in what ways a dead continental philosopher by the name of Guy Debord, who was one of the driving theoretical minds behind the Situationists, could help us in understanding video games.[1] The gaming culture website *Rock, Paper, Shotgun* featured a series by Hannah Nicklin on the Situationist concept of psychogeography applied to video games and their designers.[2] Debord had defined the term *psychogeography* in 1955 »as the study of precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.«[3] Through the tactic of *dérive*, the Situationists produced mental and emotional maps of urban cities. They promoted a new way of perceiving the city with a rhythm that contradicted the logic of late capitalism. In his study *Avant-Garde Video Games: Playing with Technoculture*, digital media scholar Brian Schrank comments on the intentions behind psychogeography and dérive:

> The Situationists went beyond entertainment to remix urban space and reclaim the public sphere as a place for collective play with reality. They would drift through a city in a game they called the *derive*. A derive is a spontaneous journey in which travelers allow the aesthetics of the architecture and geography to affect them emotionally as well as subconsciously, and direct them so that they might foster new relationships with space.[4]

Debord had originally intended to bring about a change in perception resulting in revolutionary actions. Even though the dérive did not result in the radical utopia predicted by 1968, it provided a profound method to document the dynamics and pop-cultural mental images of famous cities that could be employed in works of cultural studies. Greil Marcus wrote *Lipstick Traces*, a vast history of the phantom avant-gardes in the 20th century. Jon Savage structured his epic history of the British punk scene, *England's Dreaming*, around the several epicenters of the punk movement around London, while director Julien Temple, closely associated with the Sex Pistols since the late 1970s, used the psychogeographic approach for a documentary on the founding members of the seminal punk band in 2007. He ar-

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1   Golding: »How Guy Debord Can Help Us Understand Video Games.«

2   Nicklin: »A Psychogeography of Games.«

3   Debord: »Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography.«

4   Schrank: *Avant-Garde Videogames*, 123.

ranged the interviews with Ex-Pistols John Lydon, Steve Jones, Paul Cook, and Glen Matlock around their home districts of London. It is no coincidence that the navigational menu on the Sex Pistols DVD *There'll Always Be an England* is reminiscent of the board game *Scotland Yard*, in which a group of players chases a villain who went into hiding across the map of London. As a playful form of improvisational hermeneutics, the tactic of dérive is very well suited for the exploration of open-world structures in which the once abstract city of the game board turns into an urban playground for enacting drama as well as performing playfulness.

The following article will discuss the renewed relevance of Situationist concepts in combination with the idea of playfulness suggested by Miguel Sicart as a basis for exploring new modes of approaching virtual worlds and genre settings. First, I will regard the development of video game spaces in connection to cineludic forms and place it in the context of dérive. In a second step, I will consider the transformation of the virtual game board into a stage for performance and playfulness, before a concluding outlook will discuss perspectives on a transmedia psychogeography that offers new modes of aesthetic experience and appropriation by performance.

2.   GAME-PARCOURS AND CINELUDIC FORMS

The development of sandbox and open-world games setting up a promenade for play and emergent dérives is closely connected to the development of simulated environments. In other words, the spectacle of three-dimensional virtual cities had to be created first before it could be appropriated and transformed by the players. Traditional arcade games and side-scroller platform games only hint at the possibility of detours resulting in dérive. In many cases, they are left to the imagination, like the rumor started in the early 1980s that you could discover a secret lair within the tank simulation *Battlezone* (1980) if you moved long enough in a certain direction. The evocative potential of the game space was established by additional information like the decoration of the arcade machine or the manuals from the video game box. Role-Playing Games (RPGs) like *The Bard's Tale* (since 1985)*, Ultima* (since 1981), or the post-apocalyptic scenario in *Wasteland* (since 1988) already hinted at the possibilities featured in the open-world structure of the *Elder Scrolls* (since 1994) and the *Fallout* (since 1997) series, but the representations in those early RPGs and adventure games were restricted to statistics and the redundant surroundings of invariable depictions of houses and landscapes. You had the freedom to move around those vast empty spaces, but there was not much aesthetic material to inspire the psychogeographic experience of the abstract setting.

One of the most disappointing gaming experiences I can recall were games based on the cult TV neo(n) noir detective series *Miami Vice* (1984-1989) and the fantasy epic *Lord of the Rings* in the 1980s. Far from the colorful recreation of Mi-

ami in *GTA – Vice City* (2003), the top-down perspective in *Miami Vice* (1987) did not feature any details, and the avatar's sports car exploded as soon as you hit the sidewalk. Contrary to the love of detail in J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, the first adventure game based on *Lord of the Rings* consisted of standardized text descriptions without any details or background story. The interaction was reduced to typing in walking directions through regions that felt like the backwoods of Middle-Earth. Any intention of dérive in those environments turned into a minimalist abstract performance and would have been analogous to the psychogeography of a chess board. On the other hand, games with more pronounced graphics like arcade, action, and platform games followed a strict rhythm that did not leave enough time for moving outside the designated frame. In a side-scroller, you could not leave the track defined by the designer and the game mechanics. In his study *Video Game Spaces*, media scholar Michael Nitsche refers to the concept of the tracks and the rail as a »distinguished spatial form in video games.«[5] He points out the ongoing implicit legacy of this structure, since »so-called rail-shooters move or guide the player along invisible tracks that allow little divergence from a given path. The world might appear to be accessible but can be navigated only in the confines of a very limited set track.«[6] In other words, games with elaborate graphics like the *Medal of Honor* (since 1999) and *Call of Duty* (since 2003) franchises are not too far away from the scenery in traditional arcade games like *Moon Patrol* (1984), which suggested futuristic cities in the background that you could never reach during the game. The pattern of movement along the tracks in a jump'n'run game could be compared to a parcours without the improvisational freedom of its real-life counterpart. The difference can be experienced in playing the ludic adaptation of the memorable stunt sequence from the James Bond movie *Casino Royale* (2006) that was included in the game accompanying the following film, *Quantum of Solace* (2008). This game demonstrates quite well that the restrictions prohibiting the application of psychogeography and dérive are not only linear narratives but also hard-rail gameplay mechanics following an algorithm enforcing strict rules. The opposite to this philosophy of design can be found in the experimental little red riding hood variation *The Path* (2009), which encourages you to go exploring in the forest.

The potential for dérive in single-player games improved with the inclusion of additional options in the gameplay and hidden extras. Regardless of its rather sarcastic and violent tone, the post-apocalyptic racing game series *Carmageddon* (since 1997) creates an interesting combination of ludus and paidia. Instead of winning a race by completing the track in time, you can also leave the road behind, cruise through the run-down city, and complete a level by attacking all the other vehicles. It is no coincidence that this concept is very much reminiscent of the *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* franchise, which paid tribute to *Carmageddon* in nam-

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5   Nitsche: *Video Game Spaces*, 171.

6   Ibid, 175.

ing a mission in *GTA – Vice City* adequately *Cabmageddon*. The affective appeal of playing against the norm in *Carmageddon* by going on a rampage, hitting passengers and destroying the surroundings, corresponds with those seductive techniques of gameplay that film scholar Marcus Stiglegger calls the Promethean impulse. It is also reminiscent of the experience that Miguel Sicart terms dark play:

> Play is a movement between order and chaos. Like tragedy, it fulfills its expressive purpose when it manages a fragile, oscillating balance between both. This echoes the concept of dark play, exploring the boundaries between play and not play, between performance and secrecy. Dark play, with its potential dangers and exhilarating results, is another example of the nature of play as a way of being in the world.[7]

There is a dialectical association between the promises of the Promethean impulse, laid out by the game designers in order to seduce the players to influence the game »with their own decisions and, in a radical step, even modify [it] according to their own ideas,«[8] and the players' decision to give in to the desire to leave the pedestrian walkways leading through the gameworld. A playful approach can result in a fulfillment of ludic and/or cinematic genre conventions as well as their deconstruction. In contrast to the clumsy idea of overemphasizing Anakin Skywalker's long-awaited turn to the dark side in *Star Wars III – Revenge of the Sith* (2005) by having him slaughter a full kindergarten of innocent young Jedi kids, taking a walk on the dark side in the *Star Wars* video games can turn out to be quite fun. If you behave contrary to the etiquette of most first-person shooters in the game *Jedi Knight* (1998), you will turn to the dark side and earn the special skill of firing lightning bolts like Emperor Palpatine in the *Star Wars* films. Observing the events from the original trilogy from the wrong side of the tracks through the prism of the Empire provides an experience that is not featured in the *Star Wars* movies yet but is well established in the Expanded Universe. In contrast to a game of *Star Wars* chess, the decision to go to the dark side has an aesthetic and emotional effect in games like *Jedi Knight* and *Knights of the Old Republic* (2004). It is almost reminiscent of choosing Darth Vader and Boba Fett instead of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia action figures on the playground in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the space combat simulation *Tie Fighter* (1994), you witness the hunt for the rebellion featured in *Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) from the perspective of an Imperial tie fighter pilot. Instead of praising Luke, Leia, Han, and their colleagues as heroic freedom fighters throughout the game, they are referred to only as mean terrorists. In the game's final stages, you may even act as the wingman to arch-villain Darth Vader. Those experiences are not exactly a free form of play, but they add to the psychogeography of the *Star Wars* saga in a play-

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7   Sicart: *Play Matters*, 3.

8   Stiglegger: »The Promethean Impulse in the Interactive Feature Film,« 34.

ful way of switching sides. These examples indicate that the promises of play as a departure from the conventional formulas are not restricted to art and indie games but can also be found in mainstream titles like some of the *Star Wars* games.

3. GRAND THEFT GENRE PLAYGROUNDS

A promising backdrop for the dance between acting according to the implied rules and letting go by performing play can be found within the realms of genre concepts. Many gameworlds are built upon genre settings. According to game designer and scholar Richard Dansky, »the setting defines the world that the action of the game takes place in, including character races, languages, laws of physics and metaphysics […] and pretty much everything else necessary to define the game world.«[9] Genre-coded open-world games like the *GTA* series, *Red Dead Redemption* (2010), and *L.A. Noire* (2011) offer free roaming play as an additional alternative to the obvious hiking trail through the genre setting.

In 1999, Rick Altman suggested a pragmatic genre model for film studies that can be modified for game studies.[10] In contrast to essentialist notions of genres, Altman understands the dynamics of genre as an interplay between the aesthetic semantics, that means the iconography associated with a genre like laser swords and space ships with the science-fiction space opera, and the structuring syntax, for example the standard situation of a chase in an action thriller.[11] The family likeness to game rules becomes quite obvious when you consider the third element Altman added to his genre model. As a third component, the semantics and syntax get reconfigured and renegotiated according to the feedback of the audience.

The transmedia dialogue between artists and audience, game designers and players, as well as directors and their viewers, defines what I call cineludic forms. Within those non-essentialist dynamic structures, the genre discourse becomes part of a larger discussion involving ludic and narrative tropes, character iconography, the topography of settings and their staging in mise-en-scène as well as mise-en-game, and, especially relevant for this article, the psychogeographic mental maps of pop culture. They connect the *Resident Evil* films (since 2002) with George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and the popular horror carnival of zombie-walks that turn inner cities into a performance space for genre fans. They translate the death traps of the *SAW* franchise to the emotional challenges in a situation similar to the *SAW* films (since 2004) in the action-adventure *Heavy Rain* (2010) and create an associative addition to escape-the-room games. They also inspire the world-building of *Star Wars* (since 1977), *Star Trek* (since 1966), and

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9   Dansky: »Introduction to Game Narrative,« 3.

10   For a more detailed discussion, see Rauscher: *Spielerische Fiktionen*.

11   Altman: *Film/Genre*, 219.

Lord of the Rings (2001-2003) by a vast variety of video games and influence the do-it-yourself-stardom and creativity of cosplayers attending conventions in their stylized self-made costumes.

Cineludic forms pick up settings, situations, and character types from films and combine them with ludic operations like goals, challenges, rules, and obstacles. Instead of adapting a certain licensed film as a whole, they take inspiration from stock scenes, which of course are predictable (who would not expect a series of henchmen waiting around the next corner in an underground villain's lair) and are also inspired by cues from characters that might appear stereotypical in their habits and appearance but offer perfect material for action toys as well as avatars in video games because of their skills and equipment.

A significant example of the transfer processes of cineludic forms would be the new wave of comic book adaptations from the *Marvel* universe. Characters like Wolverine, Iron Man, and Captain America already provided perfect source material for video game adaptations on the Super Nintendo System before there were any major film adaptations. After one and a half decades of *Marvel* adaptations creating a meta-genre of their own,[12] the all-star-company outing *The Avengers* (2012) featured the game literacy of director and author Joss Whedon prominently. During a meeting of the superhero team, a character in the background is caught playing the prototypical space shooter *Galaga* (1981). In contrast to forced cross-referencing that treats its material as a retro-postmodern joke as it happened in the Adam Sandler vehicle *Pixels* (2015), Whedon uses the arcade video game classic in the same way in which Peter Greenaway would include references to high art and Quentin Tarantino would employ samples from Hong Kong films, Italian action movies, and Blaxploitation films from the 1970s. In the film's spectacular showdown, Captain America, Black Widow, Iron Man, the Hulk, Thor, and Hawkeye battle several waves of alien invaders, turning Manhattan into an arcade setting for creative urban gaming. The scenario builds upon the template from *Galaga*, featuring alien invaders that even occasionally fly in the same formation as the enemies in the game. *The Avengers* demonstrates how a cineludic form is defined in video games from the early 1980s and is then integrated thirty years later into a cinematic scenario.

Game genres as well as cinematic genres can provide different levels of meaningful experiences. These experiences can be brought about by taking the challenge of fulfilling the rules as well as trying to break away from the monorail of generic narrative. An example of following the rules for affective surprises would be the cineludic form found in many survival horror games.

The fun of encountering what lurks behind the next door is an essential part of the experience of survival horror. The creaking doors in *Resident Evil* (since 1996) presented during the loading screens have become iconic for the experi-

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12 Rauscher: »Auteuristische Strategien der Adaption und Appropriation in Superhelden-Comicverfilmungen.«

ence of horror action-adventures. In the games from the *Silent Hill* franchise (since 1999), diving into the buried secrets of the protagonists is directly linked to descending into the mists of the endless fog surrounding the isolated ghost town. There can be pretty memorable jump-scares like the dog coming through a window in the first installment of *Resident Evil* or the invincible brutal Pyramid Head representing the self-denial and guilt of the widowed protagonist in *Silent Hill 2*. Nevertheless, the player experience in a survival horror game is closer to a fun-house ride in an amusement park (*Resident Evil*) or to the psychological subtext of the haunted house trope (*Silent Hill*) than to a playground. There is not much room for play with the scripted events unleashing the next zombie-in-a-box. And there are not many options to choose from in performing the main characters. They either offer exciting action figures with special skills as in *Resident Evil*, or you try to figure out their trauma in *Silent Hill* in the same way in which you would try to find out who murdered Count Eutin in a game of *Clue*. The traces of play can rather be found in games like *Ghost Master*, a strategy game by Chris Bateman reminiscent of Tim Burton's bio-exorcist comedy *Beetlejuice* (1988), in which you command the monsters and the undead trying to get rid of their uninvited annoying human housemates. But in order to choose between game track and playground you have to leave the house and roam around the city.

4.   PERFORMING PAIDIA AND TRANSMEDIA PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

In contrast to the hard-rail haunted houses and ghost towns of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*, the open-world structures of recent action-adventures like the *GTA* series, *Red Dead Redemption*, and *L.A. Noire* or role-playing games like *Fallout* and the *Elder Scrolls* series offer the player alternative roads through the simulated world. Characteristically, the games produced by developers Rockstar Games and Bethesda encourage different forms of gameplay. They can be navigated in quite linear fashion in a straight play through, but they also allow for detours that may never return to the main plot.

A psychogeographic experience can be achieved in both ways, either as a tour through the tropes and settings of genre cinema by following the main quest, or by finding your own way through the simulated gangster metropolis of *GTA*, the Western after its heyday and the closing of the frontier in *Red Dead Redemption*, or the *Mad Max*-inspired post-apocalyptic wastelands of *Fallout*. The first approach accentuates a love for detail that could not be provided by cinema. In *GTA – Vice City*, you can conquer the drug kingpin's villa as your headquarter, and it looks exactly like the domicile owned by Al Pacino's Tony Montana in Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (1982). The final missions during *GTA – San Andreas* take place during the L.A. riots of 1992, and *GTA IV* is set in the milieu of Eastern European immigrant mobsters in New York. Like classic gangster films, the games are set within a stylized variation of real cities featuring locations taken from films and TV series. In *Vice City* the look of the nightclubs is inspired by Michael Mann's cult se-

ries *Miami Vice* (1984-1989), and in all installments of the *GTA* series, you can switch between the sounds of different radio stations providing the soundtrack to your missions. With a variety of musical styles, ranging from underground hip hop and commercial gangsta rap to techno, country music, classic rock, and speed metal, you can create a psychogeographical experience by choosing different musical modifications of your game experience. The second approach is based upon thinking outside the (sand)box and leaving behind the role for the avatar laid out by the main quest.

Miguel Sicart comments on the games from the *Fallout* and *GTA* series, that, »although the game wants us to follow its linear, narrative structure, the storytelling nodes that move the plot forward are in fact props […] The narrative takes us into a game with form and structure, but we don't need to engage with it.«[13]

The varying experiences of the game can be compared to the difference between acting and performing that film scholar James Naremore discusses in his study *Acting in the Cinema*.[14] He defines acting as »a special type of theatrical performance in which the persons held up for show have become agents in a narrative.«[15] When acting, you follow the guidance of a screenplay, or, in the case of a video game, you execute the actions implied by the game's narrative architecture and by the attributes given to your avatar by the designer. In the neo-noir shooter series *Max Payne* (since 1999), you can very well experience the rooms of the run-down city in much greater detail than in any film, but you cannot change the character's behavior and development defined by the conventions of hardboiled literature and cinema. In the *GTA* series, you cannot change the plot points concerning the protagonist. No matter how hard you try, you will always be betrayed by your former friends in *San Andreas*, and in *GTA IV*, you have to go into hiding after a certain number of missions. The concept of performance, on the other hand, comes into play, according to Naremore, »when people are caught unaware by a camera, they become objects to be looked at, and they usually provide evidence of role-playing in everyday life.«[16] The idea of performance can be found in acting styles that take the character only as a starting point to find additional idiosyncratic elements that were not included in the script.

The sandbox provided by *GTA* and other open-world games can include this opportunity as well. The freedom of play is not only enabled in regard to movement through the gameworld but also in discovering the dimensions of play by performing the avatar outside of the acting routines connected with the goals given by the missions. When integrating elements of performance, you convert the props into toys. The psychogeographical experience is, then, no longer restricted to immersing yourself in the atmosphere of a pop-cultural epoch or the setting of

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13   Sicart, 56.

14   Naremore: *Acting in the Cinema*.

15   Ibid, 23.

16   Ibid, 15.

a well-known gangster drama like the 2006 video game based on Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*, in which you cross the key events of the classic mafia drama on several occasions. Instead of following the generic patterns established by the original context of the cineludic form, you discover the possibilities of playfulness in a similar way to children making up their own variations of films by playing with action figures.

The productions by *Rockstar Games* explicitly provide room for play. In *GTA – San Andreas*, the activity of car surfing became a popular trend. Instead of taking control of California's underworld, the players began to jump onto driving cars and try to remain on top of them during a drive along the freeway for as long as possible. Playing *GTA – Vice City* with a neighbor who had an impressive knowledge of video games a few years ago, I discovered a way of infiltrating an enemy's cocaine factory not in the standard gangster limousine that was designated for this operation by the quest design but by hijacking a tourist bus. The hit squad entered the alternative vehicle nonetheless. The drive-by turned into a sightseeing tour through 1980s Miami accompanied by the thumping beats of 1980s synth-pop, which is closely associated with the *Miami Vice* soundtracks. Another similar experience was to play the cop drama *L.A. Noire* in the way you would act in *GTA*. Of course, the accompanying cop being a non-player character with a scripted behavioral routine and strict moral values will not stop complaining when you leave the freeway to take a short cut through the park. Gaming experiences like this infiltration of hard-boiled gangster dramas by absurd actions recall what Miguel Sicart calls playfulness, »a way of engaging with particular contexts and objects that is similar to play but respects the purposes and goals of that object or context.«[17] The objects and the setting of *GTA – Vice City* and *L.A. Noire* remained intact. After cruising around the city in the tourist bus for some time, the hit squad even managed to conquer the hostile cocaine factory. Nevertheless, the action played out as if the director's chair had been turned over from Michael Mann and Brian De Palma to movie satire specialist Mel Brooks.

In comparison to their predecessors in the avant-garde like the Dadaists, Brian Schrank observes about the Situationists: »Rather than starting with art, the Situationists began by hacking entertainment.«[18] Concerning subverting the mechanics and toying around with the implicit rulebook of the depicted world, the idea of hacking art can be very well applied to the system of genres in a transmedia context. If the gameplay and the mechanics include the potential, the player can become more deeply involved with the role indicated by the avatar and use his or her own emotional experience in order to plunge into immersive acting like a method actor would. But he or she can also break away from the recognizable dramatic pattern and turn the stage of the game into a vaudeville show of sophisticated rage against the algorithm.

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17   Sicart, 21.

18   Schrank, 122.

The transmedia passages of cineludic forms thus include the potential of affirmation as well as deconstruction. Game developers like Rockstar Games seem to be aware of the potential and the meaningful experiences created by both approaches. Their games improvise upon templates provided by well-known gangster dramas and thrillers. Instead of simply emulating the values implied by the films, they create sandbox cities that include the adventure playground as well as hard-rail parcour installments. The most obvious example of how Rockstar Games extend the psychogeographic experience of film historical predecessors is their 2005 variation of Walter Hill's influential action drama *The Warriors* (1979), which inspired the video clip *100 Miles and Running* by the seminal gangsta rap group N.W.A. As in the film of the same title, a New York gang that gets wrongfully accused for the murder of a gang leader has to travel from Central Park to Coney Island during one memorable night in the late 1970s. The passage through hostile territory is combined with several challenges. Options like smashing in shopping windows and stealing car radios provide the seductive opportunity for dark play. Play becomes a hermeneutic approach for navigating the mental maps of imaginary cities from films and TV series.

The situationist strategy of dérive is not directly linked to real-life urban politics as Guy Debord originally intended. Nevertheless, it can be an enlightening tool for playing experiences beyond the invisible rail. The strict organization of a virtual theme park turns into an adventurous playground. The scripted routine of acting makes room for the performance pleasure of play. This shift also puts the aesthetic individual responsibility into the hands of the player, including the experience of the same unpleasant feelings an actor would discover on researching an ambivalent character. The risk of play is connected with pleasure as well as pain.

To find out about the creative as well as the destructive side of simulated playgrounds, recreating the mental maps of popular culture can be a very valuable hermeneutic approach that goes beyond the closed circuits of a singular work of art or the mechanics of an algorithm. A question that is open to further discussion would be how the dérive from virtual game worlds could use the performance quality of play to find new ways for reaching back into real urban spaces. That cineludic forms can develop subversive qualities has been demonstrated by Darth Vader running for mayor in the election in the Ukrainian city Odessa and Chewbacca being arrested during a protest rally in the same town. Actions like these prove that there is potential to rediscover the political side of Situationism and the dérive. The psychogeography of the fictional and the fantastic can be brought into a dialectical dialogue with the reality that initiated the alternative drafts found in worldbuilding as a utopian impulse.

In his 2007 book *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, the historian and media scholar Stephen Duncombe discusses the *GTA* series as an inspiration to rethink progressive politics from the quality of gameplay. For Duncombe, the appeal of the game lies in the popular desire to rebel and the fascinat-

ed approach toward the Other of the cinematic gangster culture.[19] The perspective of playfulness suggested by Miguel Sicart would provide an important addition to Duncombe's conclusions on the lessons that can be learned from Rockstar Games: »It is not the job of progressives to condemn popular fantasy and desire. It is our job to pay careful attention to them, learn from them, and perhaps – God forbid! – even enjoy them ourselves. Then carjack these desires and fantasies and drive them someplace else.«[20] The practice of dérive offers an effective toolbox for finding alternative ways to experience the cineludic forms of open-world games. Those experiences can be appropriated for playful gateways leading into real urban spaces.

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19   Duncombe: *Dream*, 56.

20   Ibid, 77.