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<- November 2013



COMPUTERSPILL-AUTEURENE Monitor critical voice

[06:09:13] Forget flying, acidic birds and monsters to be shot. Computer games are much more than entertainment. In these times explores a growing number of game developers media social criticism.

Steffen Moestrup

Film critic and journalist for *Le Monde diplomatique*

It has become an uninteresting fact that the game medium has overtaken cinema in turnover and market capitalization. In 2011, the global market for the games industry \$ 70 billion, and forecasts predict a market sector of more than \$ 115 billion in 2015, while the film industry will probably have to suffice with a market capitalization of \$ 86 billion in 2015. A telling example: The subscription-based role-playing game *World of Warcraft* currently has a turnover of about ten billion, whereas the world's highest-grossing film James Cameron's *Avatar*, had a turnover of nearly three billion. The games industry is a huge entertainment industry that is still booming. But during the mammoth-sized entertainment perspectives runs a number of interesting undercurrents that can quickly but should not be overlooked. Play is in fact much more than bouncing pixels, slaughtering monsters or dancing around to pop music. Or in other words: Play is much more than entertainment.

Especially within the past five to seven years, the game industry sprouted in several notable directions.

propagandistic project computer game is slowly reaping artistic recognition, which is linked to a number of ambitious game releases. In 2010, the Danish-designed *Limbo*, with a shade based graphical expression, ambient soundtrack and especially a very open game design got international recognition as one of the most artistic games ever. About the game's purpose said game developer Arnt Jensen Danish Information: 'I will tear people away. A kind of escapism.

That's what makes me even to admire something - when I can disappear into some universe. You get stolen a few hours of his life, but the hours can change one. I think it is a kind arkefølelse in your brain that you want to dream up somewhere. Disappear. " Arnt Jensen was compared to the film world's auteurs, the likes of Lars von Trier and David Lynch, while the gaming industry discussed whether that really was money in the art games. In fact earned *Limbo* \$ 7.5 million and was in the top three among the best selling games on Microsoft's Xbox game console. There are far short of the billions in *World of Warcraft*, but *Limbo* was nevertheless a reminder that art and earnings well be reconciled. Last year the game was released *Journey* created by Chinese Jenova Chen. Like *Limbo* was a case of a highly metaphysical game where the objective remained obscure. The player controls a cape-clad figure who is trying to reach the mountain. On the journey you will meet anyone interested individuals, players who might be heading towards the same mountain.

Communication between players takes place in musicality rather than words, which helps to give a very peculiar and different game experience. *Journey* has certainly expanded scope of what a video game can be. Also computer games as learning tools has exploded in recent years, has led to a number of gray areas. Recently launched the large Danish

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Fotnoter:

1 The game can be downloaded for free for PC and Mac here: [link](#) Also carrier KLM has just developed a game where you have to run an airline

([link](#)). 2 For a more detailed introduction to the discussion and an attempt to clarify concepts, see Mary Flanagan's seminal work *Critical Play*, MIT Press, Cambridge (USA), 2009.

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number of gray areas. Recently launched the large Danish shipping group Maersk game *Quest for Oil*, can be said to be an educational game about oil, but at the same time can be defined as a propaganda project that simply passes on the knowledge that Maersk wants us to have the oil industry. **A matured Industry Games** The media is still a relatively young medium, which is also marked by many fronts. There is still some confusion about the individual, genres and approaches to creating games. If we look at the more critical games on the market, we find it difficult an umbrella term that they all may benefit. Some game researchers chose the term *serious games* as opposed to the many games for fun that's out there. Others swear by the more bombastic *radical games*, while still a camp uses the term *critical games* where exactly the critical perspective in centrum.² Whatever term we use, we can summarize the concepts that we often have to do with games, which expands the scope of what a game can be said to be, and often have an inherent critical nature. Professor Lindsay Grace from Miami University in Ohio is among the world's leading researchers in gaming and digital culture. He uses even the term *critical games* and distinguishes between two main ways in which a game can be said to be critical: "First, there is a criticism directed inward toward the gaming experience where you as a developer exemplary challenges the typical goal-oriented *gameplay* where the player must perform specific actions in order to progress in the game. In addition, the game also be critical in the sense that they thematize and may require reflection on social, political, ideological and economic debates such as poverty, gender roles, inequality and marginalization. So play as a kind of initiator of social attention," explains Lindsay Grace on a noisy Skype connection between New York and Denmark. Grace participating in these days of the conference Games for Change, which in its tenth edition is bigger than ever and thus also reflects the fact that there has been a shift in the understanding of computer games: "There's certainly been a maturation of the industry. The people who grew up with arcade games, have grown up and are looking for maybe some new ground in gaming. We also see a jumble of budding and diverse views on what a computer really is a size," says Lindsay Grace. **Tired of killing dragons** trees do not grow into the sky. In England sits Cliff Harris with his one-man company

Prospect Games. Harris is among other developer of the complex strategy game *Democracy*, which will soon be ready for its third edition. Although he acknowledges that the game industry is experiencing a maturing, he still thinks there is much to be done: "I live in a small English village. If you take the temperature here, there has been no change in the perception of what the game is. So we'll be careful not to say that games perception has changed in mainstream circles. People still believe that the game is a frivolous activity for children," said Cliff Harris. That being said, Harris still found a niche market and has a solid crowd of customers waiting anxiously for the next edition of *Democracy*. This is probably especially that *Democracy* is an extremely complex game that actually manages to give a very detailed insight into how politics and economics are related in a society. Harris is 43 years old and started the first *Democracy*, because there simply were no clever game. As Harris puts it, he was tired of killing dragons: "The vast majority of computer games provide almost up to the player is stupid. They are really talking down to people. It makes the game pretty much still, although there is more diversity in the industry. There are fortunately game developers who want to save the world rather than to make another version of *Angry Birds*," says Cliff Harris. intention of *Democracy* is perhaps not exactly saving the world, but to refine the political discussion. The game requires some prior knowledge of economics and politics, but even seasoned political scientists will experience unintended consequences of their actions in the game - just like politics and economics in the real world also can behave unintentionally. *Democracy* therefore calls for reflection, and the game makes it quite a different way than eg a film makes it: "Documentaries and films can draw your attention to a subject and the good documentary can be open, nuanced and let the reflection up to the viewer. But a game does something else. Games can give you a working knowledge of how your actions have consequences in a more complex system. I do not sell a piece directed and completed entertainment but rather a kind of complicated toolbox, where the player himself brings his ideas into the game. You see what happens when they do such and such. It all comes so to speak from the player. In other media, we are recipients where the content comes to you, but the game is self-creators of content," explains Cliff Harris. **Part of samtidsdiskursen** Among the most sensational game developers currently Italian Paolo Pedercini, better known as Molleindustria. The website molleindustria.org unfolds Pedercini its flash-based mini-games that are radical in nature and often takes a critical embrace with current issues. «News

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Games", a few researchers thus described Pedercini's game releases, among other *Operation: Pedopriest* where the player must attempt to cover up a sex scandal, *The Free Culture Game* which dealt with the struggle between copyright and openness, and *Oiligarchy*, a satirical play about the oil industry. Pedercini's games have - despite their simple nature and almost superficial content - often led to violent reactions. Most discussed is enough censorship in the Apple App Store the game *Phone Story*, where you had to produce a smartphone with the trimmings of child labor and polluting materials. Three hours reaching *Phone Story* to stay in App Store before it became too much for Apple, who promptly removed the game. The game is still available in Google's more open Android Market and online, but Platforms reductions might be a problem for critical games, believes Pedercini: "The future consoles, Xbox One and Playstation 4 will be more 'brick' than before, which means that we are moving towards a time when software, hardware and your possible content on your devices

increasingly dictated by the major manufacturers. It will likely be more difficult for indie producers to get their titles onto the major platforms," predicts Pedercini. Indie Producers - ie independent, often small development firms - are often the places where critical games for, although there are also examples of large companies that make *social awareness* games such as Zynga, who made game about female oppression. personally prefer Pedercini however, maintain its independence and make relatively simple, accessible game: "I would like that my game will be part of samtidsdiskursen and speaking into the topics that are popular these days. If the output device becomes too heavy, I quickly lose the distinctive, personal style that my game should have. It is essential that the game has personality," explains Pedercini, which, like the aforementioned Arnt Jensen also be seen as one of the newer gaming auteurs. Pedercini rests not on its laurels, though he has already achieved significant recognition for his radical works. Right now, he embarked on his next vision: An *open source* access to creating games. Pedercini want to facilitate tools not game savvy, who can provide experience of the world they live in. "I can not make a game about what it's like to be an African-American kid in a suburban ghetto, it's not my life experience," financing Paolo Pedercini. "But I dream of being able to establish an open game platform where content will come from the people who actually live the life that the game thematises. It will give a totally different sincerity and associate games with reality in unprecedented ways." ©

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