The Rhetoric of Mimicry and Agon

(preliminary version)

by

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Play is an all encompassing notion, overshadowing subtle differences. Roger Caillois (2001 [1961], however, distinguished several modes of play. Two of them are agon (play as contest) and mimicry (doing-as-if, simulation). While agon is rule-based, mimicry is illusion-based. For Caillois, they are mutually exclusive, but many computer games motivate explicitly both modes of play. Therefore two corresponding rhetorical patterns can be identified: mimicry offers and agonal appeals.

First rhetoric will be differentiated into an inner and an outer rhetoric; then two levels of description will be introduced, the interface and the system, and linked to the player's understanding and the player's experience as heuristic dimensions of play. Building up on this framework, Caillois notions of mimicry and agon are discussed in relation to computer games. Subsequently, the patterns of mimicry offers and agonal appeals are explained as part of the inner rhetoric of games and exemplified. Finally, the importance of mimicry for persuasive games will be discussed, using the example of Peacemaker (2007).

The inner and outer rhetoric of games

There are two usages of 'rhetoric' in game studies: Bogost (2007) and Frasca (2001) write about the rhetoric of games to describe their capacity to persuade through procedural structures. This can be called an outer rhetoric, as it implies a reference to reality. Aarseth (1997), on the other hand, denotes the fundamental dialectic between aporiae and epiphanies, between hindrances and their overcoming, as the rhetoric of gameplay. This can be named an inner rhetoric, as it's concerned with structures regulating and motivating play itself. Both notions derive from classical rhetoric, which Aristotle described as technique of strategic communication. The categories can be confronted with Ciceros proclaimed tasks of the orator (*officia oratoris;* cp. Göttert 1998: 22f.): to entertain (*delectare*), to move (*movere*) and to teach (*docere*). The precondition for these tasks, however, is to secure the attention of the auditorium (*attentum parare*) and to gain their sympathy, e.g. by flattering them (*insinuatio*; cp. ebd.: 27ff*)*. Argumentation depends on a gripping speech. If it's boring, why should anyone listen? Hence, in oral speech too an inner and an outer rhetoric can be distinguished; the first being the precondition for the second. It's seems plausible that the outer rhetoric of a persuasive game is also in need of an effective inner rhetoric. If it doesn't look like fun, why play it? Obviously, every game possesses an inner rhetoric to motivate play and its continuation. It encompasses more than aporiae. Salen & Zimmerman (2004), for example, stress the importance of unambiguous feedback to inform the player about his action's impact to avoid confusion and frustration. Such feedback-patterns are a necessary part of the inner rhetoric.

For the analysis of a game's inner rhetoric, it's useful to heuristically differentiate between its system and its interface. The notion of 'interface' might be confusing, as some games like Half-Life (1998) are said not to have an interface. In that case 'interface' implies a layer of icons and gauges in front of the game space. Alexander Galloway (2010) calls this an *intra*face, an interface within the interface. An interface, on the other hand, simply is the totality of the mediating elements between the user and the computer. According to Manovich (2001: 69), it entails input and output devices, as well as "metaphors used to conceptualize the organization of computer data" and defined actions, the user can perform to manipulate the data. The interface is everything that mediates between the computational world and the user's earthbound perspective as human being. Even a threedimensional game space, like the one in Half-Life, is part of it (cp. Manovich 2001: 244ff.). As binary language is hermetic for most users, computational processes have to be represented by words and visuals. These representations on the screen constitute the graphical interface, designed to translate the functionality of programs. In design theory, this is often described as applying interface metaphors or similes (cp. Erickson 1994 [1990]; Mountford 1994 [1990]; Laurel 1991). An example: A data-structure might contain a node that can't be activated before performing a certain function. In the game it's represented by the visual of a locked door. Common sense tells that locked door needs a key to be opened. Therefore, the familiar concepts of doors and keys guide the player's understanding of how to interact with the system. The interface leads the unknown (the system) back to the familiar (e.g. the door) and by that it fulfills the purpose of a metaphor. Perelman (1980 [1977]: 120ff.) defines the metaphor as condensed analogy, in which a source and a carrier merge. In this case, the source would be the concept of a door and the carrier the node in the data-structure.

The crucial point is that a vivid metaphor is always given in a twofold state of consciousness, as "this is" and "this is not" (cp. Kurz 1997: 17f.). The word communicates on a meta-level that it's not used in its normal meaning. A dead metaphor (e.g. 'surfing the internet') in contrast, seems to be natural (it's also called a *catachresis*). Interface metaphors in computer games never die completely, as the player is often reminded of them being unreal. While the metaphor of the door enables him to grasp the systemic function, it also misleads. He might guess that a locked door can be picked or kicked in and search for corresponding options, only to find none. In this case he would be forced to adapt his understanding to the systemic conditions. Therefore, the understanding of the game is connected to the player's experience by a feedback loop. According to Peirce (1993 [1903]: 55), experience is constituted by resistance. It occurs where will and imagination clash with reality. The game's system resists the player's will, by making things impossible or hard to do. The player might understand the door as something to be kicked in and might want to do so, but the system resists by making it impossible. If he finds the right key, however, he could open it. In this case, the door does not constitutes a impossibility, but just a hindrance. Such an aporia can be described as systemic pattern, aiming at the regulation of experience.

The player learns how to interact with the game by starting with familiar concepts, but has to adapt them to the systemic reality. In Peirce (cp.: 1985 [1878]) epistemology, this is how knowledge is created: by confronting opinions (e.g. "The door can be kicked in") with the conditions of reality (e.g. "It's impossible!"). The reality of the game's system shows itself in a process of try and error. The extreme case of

such an adaption is the expert player, as postulated by Juul (2005), who tries to compete with the system in the most efficient way and strives to look right trough the interface (cp. Aarseth 2004). The understanding of most players, however, will be less radical: the door will probably be understood as normal door, bereft of some attributes. All players, nevertheless, will know that the door is not real. The door has two sides: on a systemic level, it is an aporia, resisting the player's will, but on the level of the interface, it is a metaphor, enabling him to understand what to do with it. The player can understand the door in myriad ways, but interact with it only in defined manners. The game just *guides* his understanding through metaphors, while it *regulates* his experience through systemic structures.

The player can strive to look behind the interface or give himself over to the illusion it summons. This has also been observed by Juul (2005: 2), for whom the player has "a choice between imagining the world of the game and seeing the representation as a mere placeholder for information about the rules of the game." But actually the player has no choice. He has to start out with a metaphorical understanding in order to be able to interact with the game in the first place. Taken for itself, in all its formality, the game's system is to abstract, to be easily understood. Everyone who ever studied logic, knows how hard it is to grasp formal structures. It surely is no playful activity. Therefore, the player's conclusions about the attributes of the system are derived by a secondary process of abstraction. To state the thesis bluntly: the primary understanding of a game is a metaphorical one, based on common sense; any systemic or formal understanding is secondary. Moreover, the player does not learn explicit rules, but simply how to interact with objects and features of the game (cp. Lindley 2005). This practical knowledge has to be adapted to the systemic reality in an ongoing process, in order to make it the most efficient. In the case of extreme adaption, the game is played as pure contest with or against the system. However, it's also possible to voluntarily fall for the illusion of the game world – to make oneself believe that the door is real. These modes of play are agon and mimicry. How are they defined?

Mimicry and Agon

Caillois distinguished four modes of play: (1) play as contest (agon), (2) as gambling (alea), (3) as illusion (mimicry) and (4) as vertigo (illinx). In this paper, only the categories of agon and mimicry will be explored. For Caillois, all games of contest, like chess or boxing, are played as agon:

"A whole group of games would seem to be competitive, that is to say, like a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, in order that the adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions, susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner's triumph." (Caillois 2001 [1961]: 14)

Agon requires equal chances for all players and therefore an explicit rule-system that regulates play. Mimicry, on the other hand does not depend on fixed rules, but on individual or shared illusions:

"Play can consist (…) of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving. (…) …the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself..." (ebd.: 19)

It's sometimes said that all play is a doing-as-if, but that's not true for rule-based games. By complying to an

arbitrary rule-system, the player already separates himself from the ordinary world: "That is why chess, prisoner's base, polo and baccara are played *for real*. *As if* is not necessary" (ebd.: 8). While all play is separated, only some involves an "as if" or, as Caillois also writes, simulation. While games of competition (agon) and chance (alea) must be governed by rules to guarantee equal chances, games of illusion (mimicry) or vertigo (illinx) "presume a world without rules in which the player constantly improvises, trusting in a guiding fantasy..." (ebd.: 75). He therefore distinguishes between rule-based and illusion-based games and play:

"Many games do not imply rules. (…) I will state that in this instance the fiction, the sentiment of *as if* replaces and performs the same function as do rules. (…) Thus games are not ruled and make-believe. Rather, they are ruled *or* make-believe." (ebd.: 8f.)

For Caillois rule-based and illusion-based games are mutually exclusive. Contestants don't wear masks. It could be objected that an acted out contest, like a sport event, works as mimicry for the spectators, but in this case " the simulation is (…) transferred from the participants to the audience" (ebd.: 22). For the contestants, a boxing match is brutal reality, governed by rules, for the audience, however, it's a kind of drama. In Wrestling, the contestants do wear masks, but it's no real contest, but a kind of improvised theater play.

Juul (2005: 13) dismisses Caillois claim as "contradicted by most modern board games and video games", but to some degree this seems to be based on a misreading. Many modern board games come with elaborated visuals, but that's no necessary quality to enable make-believe. Mimicry needs to be distinguished from the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis*, which can be translated as representation or imitation.[1] The graphically elaborated gaming board or the visual of a machine gun in a video game are kinds of *mimesis*. If the player imagines himself to be a space marine, however, he is performing mimicry. The difference can be clarified with a passage by Walter Benjamin, who wrote fascinating, albeit unknown, fragments on play:

"Today, one maybe might already hope to overcome the grave error to believe that the look of a toy determines the play of the child, while, in truth, the opposite is the case. The child wants to carry and becomes a horse, wants to play with sand and becomes a baker, wants to hide and becomes a robber or a policeman. (…) The more pleasant, in a common sense, the toys are, the more distant they are from being means of play; the more all-embracing imitation manifests in them, the more they misleads from vivid play. (…) Imitation – so one can say – is at home in play, not in they toy." (Benjamin 1989 [1928]: 166; transl. by the author)[2]

Mimicry is an activity by he player. It can be motivated, but not be enforced by the game. It doesn't matter if toys offer a realistic look or games spectacular 3D graphics. They are just objects, the player uses to project his imagination upon.

While agon is regulated by defined and explicit rules, mimicry is guided by imaginary concepts. Children, playing cowboys and indians share ideas about the way these groups interact. They agree, for example, that Indians do not possess nuclear weapons or energy shields and to claim so would be unfair. Mim-

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1   While Plato thinks about mimesis as an imitation of reality, Aristotle's use of the concept is better translated with representation, as he believes it to be capable to caricature and idealization (cp.: Fuhrmann 2002: 157 & 170)

2   „Heute darf man vielleicht schon hoffen, den gründlichen Irrtum zu überwinden, der da vermeint, der Vorstellungsgehalt eines Spielzeugs bestimmte das Spiel des Kindes, da es in Wahrheit eher sich umgekehrt verhält. Das Kind will etwas ziehen und wird Pferd, will mit Sand spielen und wird Bäcker, will sich verstecken und wird Räuber oder Gendarm. (...) Denn je ansprechender im gewöhnlichen Sinne Spielsachen sind, um so weiter sind sie vom Spielgeräte entfernt; je schrankenloser in ihnen die Nachahmung sich bekundet, desto weiter führen sie vom lebendigen Spielen ab. (…) Nachahmung – so läßt sich formulieren – ist im Spiel, nicht im Spielzeug zu Hause." (Benjamin 1989 [1928]: 116)

icry therefore is not arbitrary, but guided by sort of fuzzy, implicit rules, like shared concepts about fictional characters and settings. Computers, however, can't deal with fuzzy rules, so they can't process mimicry. It nevertheless is obvious, that many computer games can be played as contest or make-believe at the same time, as especially role-playing games attest. This is justified by the two-folded nature of the computer game. As the player's experience is dependent on the game's system, it is always regulated as contest. This however, doesn't make mimicry impossible, as the player's understanding can manifest in many ways. The door might be a systemic aporia, but it can also be understood as magical gate to the dragon's lair.

Why then, does Caillois claim that agon and mimicry can't merge? Non-digital games of contest are based on rules, which the players have to agree upfront to be binding. The rules are a arbitrary social contract that can't be contested by fuzzy make-believe. Imagine the boxing champion suddenly forming his hand to a pistole, "shooting" his opponent and expecting him to fall down. While playing Monopoly, on the other hand, it's perfectly possible to imagine oneself to be a capitalist – but as soon as this imagination conflicts with the ones of the other players, the game's consistency is threatened (e.g. if someone wants to play a social revolutionary). Therefore, the game is intrinsically governed by rules, the player's have to agree upon, and not by make-believe.[3] Contrary, the system of a computer game exists outside of discussion – it simply is (cp. Liebe 2008).[4] Therefore, the player can imagine anything, without threatening the continuation of the game. If he desires, he can picture himself to be a pacifist while playing Doom (1993) – he won't come far, but the game won't care. Moreover, the player is not really situated within the rules, like a boxing champ, who literally stands in the game space. He resides outside of the game, observing and interacting at the same time (cp. Juul 2005: 164f.). He's not only a player, but also an observer (cp. Neitzel 2005 & 2007). Therefore, computer games can motivate mimicry in a far more sophisticated way then other kinds of games, by showing dramatized consequences of the player's actions, cut-scenes or dialogues. Thus, Juul's (2005) claim, that computer games are real rules and fictional worlds at once, can be understood as the fusion of two hitherto mostly separate modes of play. It's not a merging of games and narrative, but of games of contest and games of illusion.

Mimicry Offers and Agonal Appeals

In any case, it's an empirical fact that in many games patterns can be identified that motivate mimicry or agon. The corresponding rhetorical figures are the agonal appeal and the mimicry offer. Agonal appeals are textual or visual patterns that motivate an understanding of play as contest, while mimicry offers motivate play as make-believe, by addressing the player as character or actor within a defined position in a fictional

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3   The big and puzzling exceptions are non-digital role-playing games, which Caillois couldn't know at the time of his writing. Here, agonal play is governed by complicated rule-sets, while make-believe is guided by descriptions about fictional worlds. As anyone, who ever played Dungeons & Dragons, can attest, role-playing depends on a lot of trust. The players have to agree about a style of play and upon a shared illusion (a version of the game world, accepted by all), otherwise it leads to endless discussions.

4   If rules require a social contract (cp. Wittgenstein 2004 [1953]), then it is inadequate to talk about the 'rules' of a computer game. For the player, the system constitutes a space of possibilities, limiting what can be done (cp. Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 67). These limits can't be transgressed. The player can rewrite the code of the game, but then he is not playing. Cheating, on the other hand, is no real rule-breaking, as the system allows it.

world. One foregrounds an aporia, the other an illusion. In its most obvious form the patterns can be found in sales arguments. Consider this sales description of Mass Effect (2007):

"You take the role of Commander Shepard starship Normandy, the last hope for all life in the Galaxy [*mimicry offer*]. Saren, a rogue member of the elite and untouchable Spectre agents, has discovered the secret to unleashing an apocalyptic force upon the galaxy, and only you stand in his way [*agonal appeal*]..."

The first sentence is a mimicry offer, hinting at tempting power by rank, spiced up, by the alluring attribute "the last hope for all life in the Galaxy". Who wouldn't want that? The typical mimicry offer is an attractive one, as its purpose is to attract the player. It fulfills a crucial role in the game's inner rhetoric, as it secures attention (*attentum parare*). Moreover, like the *insinuatio* in a speech, it flatters the player. The second sentence points out a seemingly impregnable aporia and takes the player into responsibility. As agonal appeal, it challenges the player. Tension arises between the poles of the aporia and the hoped for epiphany. The player is provoked to ask himself: "Can I do it?" It's a kind of suspense, as the outcome is uncertain, but contrary to the one of the film theorists (cp. Brewer 1996), it's not concerned with external characters ("Can he/she do it?"). Ludic suspense puts the abilities of the player into question. Another exemplary sales description is the one of Doom (1993):

"Welcome to Doom soldier [*mimicry offer*]. Now shut up and start fighting because there's no time to waste! We're talking total war against the forces of evil with the only thing standing between civilization and the end of everything as we know it is you [*agonal appeal*] - an angry Marine with a hand gun and a bad attitude [*mimicry offer*]. (...) Strap on your ammo and prepare to spit lead. Because now's your chance to be a hero. Or die trying [*agonal appeal*]."

The mimicry offer is simple, but tempting: the player is invited to imagine himself as an all powerful space marine, connoting movies like James Cameron's Aliens (1986). The agonal appeal is as big as it get's: the forces of evil want to wipe out "everything as we know it". The ludic suspense is emphasized by explicating the possible outcomes of the risky task: "... be a hero. Or die trying." Together, agonal appeal and mimicry offer promise suspense and fun and sometimes even an emotional experience. Therefore, they contribute to the rhetorical tasks to entertain (*delectare*) and to move (*movere*). Another example are the descriptions of the chosen nations in Sid Meier's Civilization V (2010), like e.g. Egypt:

"We greet thee, oh great Ramesses, Pharaoh of Egypt, who causes the sun to rise and the Nile to flow, and who blesses his fortunate people with all the good things of life [*mimicry offer*]! (…) Oh, Ramesses, for uncounted years your people have endured, as other petty nations around them have risen and then fallen into dust. They look to you to lead them once more into greatness. Can you honor the gods and bring Egypt back to her rightful place at the very center of the world? Can you build a civilization that will stand the test of time? [*agonal appeal*]"

As in the other examples, the mimicry offer is tempting: The player is invited to imagine to be the god-like Pharaoh of Egypt, a person of power and utmost importance. This flattering offer is combined with a huge agonal appeal: to "build a civilization that will stand the test of time." Some player's might not care about the role and base their decisions purely on systemic attributes (Egypt can build wonders faster then anyone else). For some, however, it might be part of the fun to play a specific civilization. One could, for example, imagine to be the leader of the Zulu and to take revenge on the colonialists by conquering the virtual world. In any case, the mimicry offer can clearly be identified in the interface and is part of the game's inner rhetoric. During play it's reaffirmed through the direct address of the player by the other civilizations leaders, as well

as by music and graphics specific to the chosen nation.

A formal pattern can be derived: Mimicry offers propose an attractive role within an illusory universe, usually associated with power. They flatter the player, in order to raise his interest. Agonal appeals propose a risk and promise ludic suspense, fun and in some cases even emotions.

Pattern	Form	Function	Corresponding tasks of the orator
Mimicry offer	„You are X!" (e.g. marine, pharaoh)	Raising attention Flattering Motivates *mimicry*	*attentum parare* *insinuatio*
Agonal appeal	„Can you Y?" (e.g. save the galaxy, build a civilization)	Promise of ludic suspense and therefore fun. Motivates *agon*	*delectare* *movere*

The patterns are not restricted to verbal phrases. The sales description of Doom, for example, is mirrored in its package design. Under the gargantuan letters of "DOOM" a space marine stands in the center of the picture on a rock in a reddish, volcanic landscape. His face is hidden behind a helmet, his right hand holds a gun, spitting fire, his left is in the grip of a red demon with huge horns and countless teeth. From all sides, even from behind, demons climb the rock to attack him. Another marine can be discovered in the background, running to help his comrade, but he's too far away. It's a picture of desperation. One stands against many. The picture is an agonal appeal, as it visualizes an aporia. At the same time, it seems like the player is invited to project himself into the role of the space marine. This mimicry offer is constituted by his centered position and the context of a computer game. Moreover, the demon on the far left looks out of the picture, right into the eyes of the observer. While his object of aggression should be the marine, he stares at the potential player. His look expresses: "I'm coming for YOU!". The observer is seemingly invited to feel like he's the one fighting against the demons. At that moment, his point of view is separated from his prospective point of action (cp. Neitzel 2007). He looks at his future avatar, fighting creatures from hell, while he's promised soon to act for him. Thus, the mimicry offer merges with the agonal appeal and the player is provoked to ask himself: "Can I do it?"
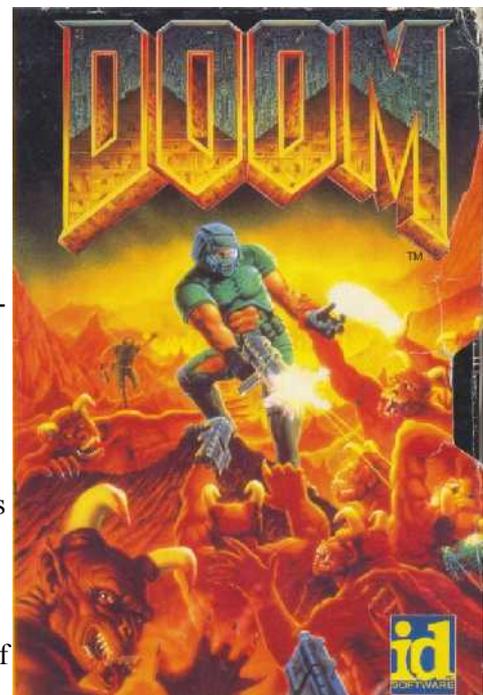
The famous advertising image of Doom highlights a characteristic of mimicry: it's an activity on side of the player, not the game. While the player is invited to imagine himself as the pictured space marine, the reality of the game looks quite different. For one, there are no rocks in Doom, the player could climb onto. Therefore, the shown situation could never occur in the actual game. Furthermore, the generic, pixelated demon-sprites do not nearly look as creepy, as the ones in the image. Doom plays far more formulaic, as the picture wants the player to believe. Moreover, he always fights alone, the pictured second space marine does not exist. During the game, little motivates the player to anything other than agon. Dooms mimicry offer is

primarily external to the game. Nevertheless, it's possible for the player to give himself over to the offered illusion. For some, it even seems to be important. This becomes evident in the fact that a series of novelizations by Dafydd ab Hugh were published – and someone bought them. The sequel Doom 3 (2004) strengthened the mimicry offer immensely, by including characters in the game that recurrently address the player in his role. Countless other examples for the rhetorical patterns can be found. Especially the opening scenes of computer games tend to combine mimicry offers and agonal appeals. Some are even partly interactive, like the first episodes in Dragon Age: Origins (2009).

Mimicry and Outer Rhetoric

An example of a different kind is Impact Games Peacemaker (2007), where the player takes on the role of the Israeli prime-minister or Palestinian president in order to solve their conflict. The game opens up with a cinematic, consisting of documentary video fragments. In a speeding up sequence pictures of escalation, violence, destruction and sorrow are shown, until the clip ends in the climatic image of a crying woman in the arms of her family. The sentence "Can you be a..." fades in, followed by "Peacemaker" and the game's logo (two combined puzzle peaces in the colors of the Israeli and Palestinian flags):

Despair...

„Can you be a..." - the *agonal appeal*

This intro can be described as agonal appeal, as it makes an huge aporia evident: the seemingly unsolvable Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its ongoing spiral of escalating violence. Moreover, it takes the player into responsibility, by daring him to solve the puzzle: "Can YOU be a Peacemaker? Can YOU succeed, where everyone else failed?" In this game, however, the inner rhetoric is linked to an outer rhetoric, as it actually proposes a possible solution to the conflict. The picture of the combined puzzle pieces fulfills the function of a *propositio*, the putting ahead of the argumentation's goal. Agonal appeal and *propositio* merge into one, as the goal of play (to win) and the goal of the argumentation (to demonstrate how the conflict can be solved) are linked together. Shortly after the video, a window opens up and proposes an attractive mimicry offer. On Israeli side, it reads like this:

GOOD MORNING PRIME MINISTER

Welcome to your new role. As the Israeli Prime Minister you are responsible for balancing Israeli and Palestinian approval. You must see to the security and economic needs of your own people, as well as consider the quality of life and stability of the Palestinians.

Good luck!

The window has the look of an official state document, connoting power, while addressing the player as prime minister of Israel. On a second look the text is surprisingly incoherent, as it hints promising strategies. For example, the player is asked to balance "Israeli and Palestinian approval", which are the names of the two most important scores of the game. The illusion is full of holes, but that doesn't matter, as mimicry is always given in the full consciousness of 'as if'. The player knows that he's not really addressed as prime minister and can therefore cope with the doubled nature of the text. The text is a collection of hints how to play, as well as a mimicry offer to fancy oneself as a mighty statesman. The picture next to it is quickly replaced by another video, showing pictures of soldiers with flags, a parade, an empty chair behind a writing desk next to the Israeli flag, and journalists taking pictures.

The empty chair in the room of the statesman is the perfect mimicry offer. The prime minister himself is not shown, just his place in the midst of attention. The player is asked to project himself into the chair and to take place as the mighty leader of the Israeli nation. The offer is extremely attractive, as the position is associated with military and political power, as well as importance, as the journalists attest.

First, Peacemaker courts for the attention of the player by confronting him with the enormous aporia of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, promising a tense experience, and then it flatters him by offering the role as all-important prime minister. This effective inner rhetoric is the precondition for any further argumentation, as the player has to be persuaded to play in order to be persuaded about anything else. The pattern repeats itself at several instances during the game, when he is recurrently addressed as prime minister, flattered

by state-like imagery, but also confronted with photographs of escalating violence.

Mimicry, however, is of further importance for any outer rhetoric. Bogost (2006 & 2007) and Frasca (2001) describe games as simulations; and it's not accidental that Caillois calls mimicry simulation too. For Bogost, a game persuades by its procedurality; that is to say by a rhetoric based on its systemic structure. Peacemaker is a good example for procedural rhetoric, as it regulates play in such a way that the player has to conclude that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be solved by diplomatic and economic measures (cp. Schrape 2009). The asymmetric systemic structure leaves the player no choice, than to choose this very measures, if he wants to win. As the game's goal is linked to the goal of its argumentation, he therefore has to follow it. Juuls expert player, however, would never draw this conclusion, as he would understand the game only as formal system to optimize for high scores. In pure agon, simulation is impossible, but in order to follow the game's argumentation, it's necessary to understand it as such. This understanding is based on the illusion that the game actually represents reality. In a simulation something has to be represented, otherwise it can't be a simulation. A formal system, however, is bereft of any extensional meaning or reference (cp. Frege 1994 [1892]). In order to motivate references to reality, a game therefore has to motivate a doing-as-if through the design of its interface.

Mimicry, therefore, is of doubled importance. First, most players have to understand the game as something specific, concrete and familiar in order to be able to interact with it. This is the reason for conventionalized interface metaphors and generic narrative structures. The mimetic surface guides the player's understanding, but it can never determine it. Some players will look behind the curtain and dispose their illusory play in order to perform pure agon with the system. This, however, is a secondary process of abstraction. The player tears away the imaginary flesh from the bare bones of the system, until nothing is left than a formal structure. Such a player might win the game, but he looses a whole dimension of play. While in most computer games the coherence of play is secured by systemic regulation and mimicry is not mandatory to enable it, many nevertheless motivate both kinds of play by agonal appeals and mimicry offers. As important parts of their inner rhetoric, these patterns court for the attention and motivation of the player, and strive to convince him to play. Games with an agenda beyond entertainment are depending on mimicry even more, as they can only perform an effective argumentation, if they are understood as simulations. Simulation, however, presupposes mimicry, as the player has to make himself believe that the game is more than just a formal system. A pure procedural rhetoric is utterly impossible.

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