

Proposal for the Locative Media Summer Conference

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Location-based games and appropriation of places

Computer games seem to be deeply spatial. Spatial terms and metaphors are more than often used to describe a wide range of phenomena in them: computer games take place in the *virtual world* or in *cyberspace*, game *maps* are used for orientation in the games, especially when a player has to *navigate* through *labyrinths* to explore the *game world*. Fuller and Jenkins (1995) describe the Nintendo games as *spatial stories* and Aarseth (1998) calls spatiality the defining element of computer games.

Not only digital games are supposed to be spatial. Spatiality seems to be one of the defining elements in all games. Johan Huizinga (1955) states that a game creates a "magic circle", a special place separated from the "real" world where the play activities can take place. This means that a distinction is drawn between game and non-game and that games have borders. Salen and Zimmerman (2003) consider borders as one of the most interesting feature in games because they have to be constantly in the mind of the player who has to know what is belonging to the game and what is not.

Thus, it can be argued, the basic spatial practice of (digital) games is the metaphorical or material division of the whole game space in an in-game space and an out-game space. The out-game space is usually neglected. The space that matters is the in-game space, where the fictional game activities take place.

The activities, which take place in the in-game space can be considered as activities of space-appropriation. To achieve the game's goals a player not only has to know how to find her way through the virtual world, but also has to deal intensely with the particularities of the virtual places, with which she usually gets very familiar. Thus, players of *Silent Hill III* (Konami 2003) might know the shopping centre in Silent Hill much better than their shopping centre next door.

Location based games do not set up material borders or virtual shopping centre, but use the shopping centre next door as playing field. In the paper I will study location-based games in respect to how they deal with real world places. Do they offer the players the opportunity to get familiar with the places they have to visit in the game? In which way – are the games a (funny) kind of sight-seeing-tour suitable for the experience oriented society (*Erlebnisgesellschaft*) described by Schulze (1992), or do they offer ways for the appropriation of the game-places? Are there attempts to get a step further and let the players change real places and probably produce new ones?

Since location based games are location based, I will not be able to play many games myself, but will use their descriptions on the Internet as reference for the survey. Additionally I am planning to contact players of location-based games and will at play as much games as possible myself.

References:

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