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6.IN SEARCH OF A "FIFTH DIMENSION"

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ABSTRACT
The work Les Jeux et les Hommes (1958) by Roger Caillois [1] may help us to get a firmer grip on the actual nature of digital games. Caillois identified four dimensions of games and playing: agôn (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (simulation), and ilinx (vertigo). In light of the new culture of digital games, this paper argues the need for adding another dimension to Caillois four dimensions. This fifth dimension will be labelled repens or sequentially embedded surprise and it will enable us to describe, analyse, and understand the structure and complexities of the more recent digital games more profoundly.

KEYWORDS
Theory on games and playing, Roger Caillois, dimensions and characteristics of computer games, repens

INTRODUCTION

For the last two years I have been studying computer games from all kinds of different angles. One of the major focus points of my past research however, has been traditional theory on games and playing, like the one by Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*, 1938) [3], Roger Caillois (*Les Jeux et les Hommes*, 1958) [1], and Brian Sutton-Smith (e.g. *The Ambiguity of Play*, 1997) [7]. The central question throughout the studying of these theories has been if and how these theories can help us in getting a better and firmer grip on the phenomenon of the digital game. It became clear that these theories are helpful in the sense that they provide – be it a limited – vocabulary, a certain way to speak and write about games. These traditional theories are furthermore helpful in the sense that we can pinpoint certain vital differences between non-digital games and digital games. For example, it has been a long held belief that games and playing stand outside the course of normal, productive life[1] We have witnessed, however, that with the invention and up rise of computer games, games and playing as such have acquired a central place in our present-day life, culture, work, production, economy et cetera. In using the 'non-digital' notions on games and playing outlined by, for example, Huizinga and Caillois, we can locate certain differences between non-digital and digital games. These differences manifest themselves on the one hand on the level of the games played and the way these games are played and on the other hand on the level of how games and playing are received and perceived. For example, the fact that the notion of games and playing as something taking place outside the course of normal life

[1] The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, for example, stated that play is "a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life ... It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space ..." (Huizinga, as quoted in Caillois, p. 4) [2]. Building on Huizinga's definition of play, Caillois gives six characteristics that define the activity of play: The second and fourth characteristics of play are especially relevant here: "Separate: circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance; ... Unproductive: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game; ..." (Caillois, p. 9-10) [2].

is changing, indicates that games and playing as such have changed and are still changing but it also indicates that how people think about games and playing has changed and is indeed still changing.

In this paper I will focus on the work by Roger Caillois. Caillois' classification of games into four different dimensions – competition, chance, vertigo, and simulation – is very helpful and useful, even in relation to digital games. But it seems that something is missing, a vital element or term that can account for that which makes digital games so different from traditional games. In collaboration with my colleagues Jo Wachelder and Johan van de Walle I have come up with a "fifth dimension" that will be necessary in order to make Caillois' classification suitable for analyzing digital games. This "fifth dimension" should explain and give account of the fact that in a digital game the player is not only subject to competition, chance, vertigo, and simulation, but also to discovery, narrative, and progression. I have chosen the Latin word *repens* – sequentially embedded surprise – as the name for this fifth dimension.

LES JEUX ET LES HOMMES: FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF GAMES AND PLAYING

From the outset, Caillois indicates that it is a difficult task to find a way in which the countless number of games can be classified: "The multitude and infinite variety of games at first causes one to despair of discovering a principle of classification capable of subsuming them under a small number of well-defined categories. Games also possess so many different characteristics that many approaches are possible" (1961, p. 12) [2]. After examining different possible classifications, Caillois settles for a system based on "a division into four main rubrics, depending upon whether, in the games under consideration, the role of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo is dominant. I call these *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*, respectively" (ibid.).

The first dimension, *competition*, encompasses all competitive games, like football, billiards, or chess 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" (p. 14). *Chance*, secondly, includes games like roulette or the lottery that are "based on a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary" (p. 17). *Mimicry* refers to games of which the "common element … is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another" (p. 19-20), for example, when playing a pirate or Hamlet. *Vertigo*, finally, stands for games in which one seeks the destruction of order and stability, in which one attempts "to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind." In all cases, Caillois writes, "it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with a sovereign brusqueness" (p. 23), as in turning around until one falls to the ground dizzily.

These four categories or dimensions of playing, however, are not solely found as individual phenomena; they can and often will be found in combination with each other, argues Caillois. [2] Caillois divides the six

[2] Contrary to Lars Konzack's reading of Caillois's book in his article "Computer Game Criticism" (2002) [5], there are only a limited number of combinations possible. Although Konzack claims that "any of these game genres may be mixed and combined with each other" (2002, p. 96), Caillois suggests that some combinations are improbable or even impossible.

possible pairs into three classes, he writes that: "The four fundamental attitudes in theory can be coupled in six and only six ways" (p.71). The first class consists of the two so-called *forbidden relationships*, vertigo and competition and simulation and chance, by which Caillois means that these are rare or even impossible combinations. Concerning vertigo and competition he writes: "it is clear that vertigo cannot be associated with regulated rivalry, which immediately dilutes it. ... Rules and vertigo are decidedly incompatible" (p. 72-73). About the combination of simulation and chance he writes: "It makes no sense to try to deceive chance. Just as the principle of *agôn* is abruptly destroyed by vertigo, *alea* is similarly destroyed [by chance] and there is no longer any game, properly speaking" (p. 73). The second class of combinations, called *contingent combinations*, consists of the two pairs chance and vertigo and competition and simulation. The first pair is exemplified by Caillois in the following words: "it is indeed common knowledge that a special kind of vertigo seizes both lucky and unlucky players. They are no longer aware of fatigue and are scarcely conscious of what is going on around them. They are entranced by the question of where the ball will stop or what card will turn up" (p. 73). To illustrate the second contingent pair, Caillois refers to sports events in which competition and simulation seamlessly merge, for each competition is also a spectacle, the unfolding of which is based on identical rules (p. 74). Lastly, there are two *fundamental combinations*, competition and chance and simulation and vertigo, which will occur most frequently. The first pair is based on the "exact symmetry between the natures of *agôn* and *alea*: parallel and complementary. Both require absolute equity, an equality of mathematical chances of almost absolute precision" (p. 74). This combination can be found in games like dominoes, backgammon, and most card games. These games start from chance after which players try to deal with what blind luck has assigned to them as skilfully as possible (p. 18). The second *fundamental combination* is more or less the opposite of the first fundamental combination. While competitive and chance games presuppose rules in order to exist, *mimicry* and *ilinx* "presume a world without rules in which the player constantly improvises, trusting in a guiding fantasy or a supreme inspiration, neither of which is subject to regulation" (p. 75).

Besides being grouped in pairs of two, the four different game dimensions can also be placed along a line between two extremes. On the one end Caillois situates *paidia* (a turbulent way of playing, like in vertigo or simulation) and on the other *ludus* (a more calculated, rule-based way of playing, like in competition or chance):

> At one extreme an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant. It manifests a kind of uncontrolled fantasy that can be designated by the term *paidia*. At the opposite extreme, this frolicsome and impulsive exuberance is almost entirely absorbed or disciplined by a complementary, and in some respects inverse, tendency to its anarchic and capricious nature: there is a growing tendency to bind it with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions, to oppose it still more by ceaselessly practicing the most embarrassing chicanery upon it, in order to make it more uncertain of attaining its desired effect. This latter principle is completely impractical, even though it requires an ever-greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. I call this second component *ludus*. (p. 13)

But *ludus* and *paidia* are not just opposites. *Ludus* should be regarded as complementary to and a refinement of *paidia* (p. 29). Caillois regards the shift from *paidia* to *ludus* as a shift in time, as a history of development: when children get older they refine

their games in such a way that they change from carefree gaiety to rule-based conventions.

THE NEED FOR A 'FIFTH DIMENSION'

Despite the usefulness of Caillois's theory with regard to our understanding of (digital) games and playing, it is clear that the four dimensions of competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo do not fully describe or account for the nature of digital games. The views of Caillois on games and playing are quite helpful in the sense that he provides a vocabulary, a certain way of speaking and writing about games, but, understandably, a vital dimension that accounts for the particular dynamic of these new games is missing in his theory. Specifically, elements or characteristics of digital games associated with a sense of unexpectedness cannot be grouped under the dimension of *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, or *ilinx*. In order to make this classification suitable for analysing digital games, another category is needed that will be labelled *repens*, the Latin word for surprise, for a sudden and unexpected event. *Repens* can be defined as a sequentially embedded event that surprises us and that takes us one step further into the game, or that teaches us something more about the game.

At this point it is important to underline the possible confusion between Caillois' *chance* and the here-introduced *repens*. Although they might, at first glance, look alike, these two characteristics are not one and the same. Chance is a game characteristic that will manifest itself mainly in lottery and chance games that depend only on 'being lucky'. Therefore chance as such is a game characteristic that is not that often found in digital games, contrary to competition and simulation. Because every possible action and reaction is programmed, 'being lucky' is a relative category in relation to digital games. To give an example of how the dimension of chance might manifest itself in a digital games, we could look at turn-based-battles[3] as they are used in the Final *Fantasy series* (Squaresoft). In such a turn-based-battle you might get lucky when the opponents stand with their back to you ('back-attack') and you have the chance to hit them one time without them knowing and being able to defend themselves. These moments of chance are also build-in or programmed and in that respect they differ from throwing the dice, but the fact that they are randomly distributed throughout the game makes them into a chance element, you have to be lucky to get these 'back-attacks'. Contrary to chance, moments of *repens* are not randomly distributed. They are encountered at strategic moments and places in the game. In the *Lara Croft* series (Core Design), for example, the medical packages will usually be hard to find and/or hard to reach. It is not through chance that you will find one on your way, they are always there, at that place in the game, and you just have to find them. Repens are build-in moments and elements in the game that are specifically designed to guide the player, to make her or him learn something, do something, make progress. Luck has nothing to do with it, they are meant to be.

Repens, however, is not the first attempt at capturing the dimension that accounts for the specific characteristic of digital games. Before I elaborate on

[3] Turn-based-battles are battles where you stand opposite your enemy and take turns in hitting each other. When it is your opponent's turn to hit, all you can do is wait for the blow and see how severe the damage will be.

the meaning and implications of *repens*, I will briefly consider other attempts to define that which demarcates digital from non-digital games. Jesper Juul, for example, in his article "The Open and the Closed" (2002) [4], writes on "progression" as a defining characteristic of digital games. He contrasts progression, "the historically newer structure that entered the computer game through the adventure genre" (p. 324), with "emergence", a characteristic that we know from more traditional games and that refers to the elemental game structure of card and board games and most action and all strategy games. In a progression game, Juul suggests, the player must perform a predefined set of actions in order to complete it. A typical example of such a game is *Final Fantasy X*. The term "progression" is very useful since it implies the temporal aspect of digital games, the fact that one has to follow a specific trajectory.

Game designer Marc Leblanc puts together another useful cluster of terms in his taxonomy of game pleasures. LeBlanc (http://www.algorithmancy.org) [6] identifies eight different kinds of "fun": sensation (game as sense-pleasure), fantasy (game as make-believe), narrative (game as drama), challenge (game as obstacle course), fellowship (game as social framework), discovery (game as uncharted territory), expression (game as self-discovery), and masochism (game as submission).[4] If LeBlanc's categorisation starts from the different types of fun one can experience from playing games, the one of Caillois rests on the denotation of game characteristics that bring about specific psycho-physiological reactions in players. A comparison of Le Blanc's eight types of fun with Caillois's four dimensions is revealing in this respect. Certain types of games will give the player certain types of pleasures. For example, a simulation game (the third dimension outlined by Caillois) will – if at least the game is a good game – give the player the pleasure of fantasy. A competitive or chance game will give the player the pleasure of challenge, and a vertigo game the pleasure of masochism, of submitting oneself. This means that certain types of fun can and will be experienced when playing traditional, non-digital games: sensation, for instance, in nineteenth-century attraction games; fantasy and narrative in theatre; challenge in most board games; fellowship and expression in almost all games; masochism in role-playing games. One type of fun identified by LeBlanc, however, seems to be specifically related to digital games: the pleasure of discovery. Contemporary digital games seem to raise the discovery appeal of playing to unprecedented levels. Discovery therefore is a type of fun that is typical for digital games. It is, much like Juul's "progression", a term that points towards a specific characteristic of digital games. What both progression and discovery try to account for is the fact that in most contemporary digital games players have to follow a specifically plotted trajectory of obstacles in which they discover certain things that will account for their progression through the game.

REPENS: SEQUENTIALLY EMBEDDED SURPRISE

Repens encompasses both Juul's *progression* and LeBlanc's *discovery*. *Repens* points to a distinctive and crucial game characteristic that can be found in every contemporary digital game, but that has not yet been identified as such. *Repens* is the distinctive and binding element in the structure of the digital game as we

[4] This classification reminds us of the seven rhetorics outlined by Brian Sutton-Smith in his book *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997). Sutton-Smith describes and evaluates various studies on games and playing and divides them according to seven value systems, ideological rhetorics, or discourses, which embody the arguments made about a certain form of play. These seven rhetorics are: progress (to be understood in a developmental or evolutionary way and therefore not to be compared to Juul's progression), fate, power, identity (expression in LeBlanc's taxonomy), fantasy or imaginary (identical to fantasy in LeBlanc's taxonomy), self (fellowship in LeBlanc's taxonomy), and frivolity (narrative in LeBlanc's taxonomy). It seems, then, that a limited amount of terms is available for writing and thinking about games and playing. Many terms reoccur in efforts aimed at classifying games or analysing the fun of playing games; this is equally true of the predominant paradigm games theorists rely on.

know it today. It is this particular characteristic that sets the digital game apart from traditional games and allows us to understand what all the various types and genres of digital games have in common.

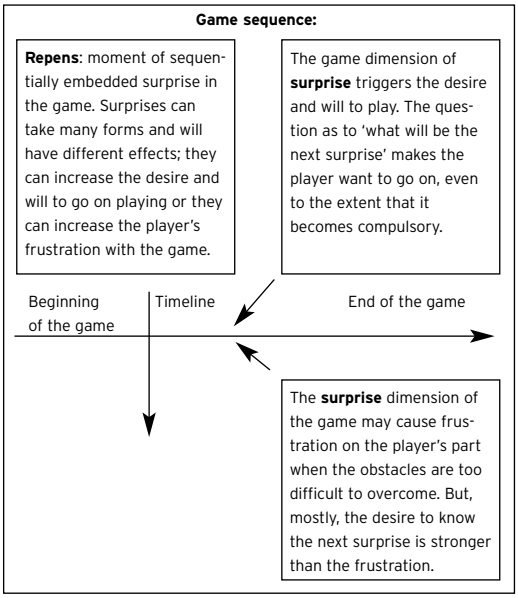
Specifically, *repens* refers to two major interconnected characteristics of the digital game. On the one hand it refers to surprise, to unexpectedness, to suddenness. A digital game is always geared towards holding the attention of the players by keeping them surprised (even though not all games will succeed in doing so in the same measure). This is something that a non-digital game cannot accomplish. For example, after having played *Monopoly* for a number of times, players know which cards they may draw and which streets will be the most profitable or the most easy to obtain and to keep. The game and the tactics needed to win *Monopoly* become more or less transparent after a while. The newness and the possible surprises subside. A good digital game, however, will continue to challenge players by built-in surprise elements, and this may even apply to experienced players of a particular game. *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Konami, 2001), for example, gives players the opportunity to play the game again in a different way, after they indicate that they completed the game once before. Or players can buy the extension pack with new features and options, so that their second play will differ from their first (*Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance*, Konami, 2003).

But what exactly is meant by "surprise"? Surprise is that which makes the game exciting, that which will drive the player to play on and on, to try again and again. It is a game's built-in surprise structure that channels players' desire and their will to play. As players we are eager to know what the next thing will be that the game has in store for us; we want to know what lies behind that door or what is hidden in that trunk; we want to know what will happen when we talk to one character or shoot some other. A game's surprises, in their most basic form, provide the player with a certain object (like a potion, a health package, or a new sword), with new opportunities, or they may open up the way to a new level of playing. But they can also challenge players by frustrating them. Surprises can, and often will, take the form of obstacles that players must overcome in order to move on in the game. When they do not succeed in overcoming a particular obstacle, they are likely to get frustrated with the game. The game's surprise structure is crucial here. In a shrewdly designed game, players' desire to know the next surprise will often be stronger than their frustration and it will keep them captivated. On the part of the game designers, the major challenge is to find a proper balance between catering to players' desire to play on and their frustration level. If certain obstacles are too difficult to overcome or if the game experience of prospective players is miscalculated, players may decide to abandon the game prematurely (or to use cheats and codes). It is precisely their craving for the never-ending parade of surprises that may trigger compulsive game behaviour, their inability to stop and not try again.

On the other hand, *repens* refers to sequence, to succession, progression, chain, cycle, order, narrative, time and space. *Repens* is an unexpected action or event that takes place in a particular sequence. After all, an event never occurs in isolation; it is always embedded; it is always subject to a chain of cause and effect. Only when the player crosses a line or presses the right button, the surprise will manifest itself; the unexpected event only takes places when the right triggers are pulled. *Repens*, sequentially embedded surprise, refers in other words to the fact that two or more things follow each other in a certain order. For example, in the game *Final Fantasy X* players will only be able to reach place B if they have performed action A. Again, a proper balance is important here, because this characteristic of games can be annoying when

overused: players might feel as if they are filling out a form instead of playing a game.

Repens *can be represented in the following simplified fashion:*



As an analytical category, the notion of *repens* accounts for the fact that in a digital game players are not only subjected to processes associated with competition, chance, vertigo, and simulation, but also to elements tied to discovery, narrative, and progression. In most contemporary games, players have to go through a specifically plotted trajectory – of ditches and hedges and other obstacles – in which they discover certain things that will account for their progress through the game. In other words, they have to follow a certain, more or less pronounced sequence of events in order to advance in the game and go from, say, a more competitive element of the game to a more simulative one. Significantly, this suggests another important meaning of *repens*. It is a term that stands for (a) surprise and the desire and frustration generated by the surprises, and (b) sequence and the fact that in this sequence the player will move up and down between different genres of playing. *Repens*, therefore, is more than the preeminent feature that demarcates the difference between digital and non-digital games; it is also the quality that enables the combination of three or four of Caillois's game dimensions in one game. The various dimensions of games and the various genres of playing are combined into a sequence and the player is brought from one point to the next by strategically positioned surprises.

AN EXAMPLE

I will conclude this paper by giving some examples that will illustrate the usefulness of the fifth dimension *repens* in relation to describing, analysing, and understanding computer games. First of all I want to take a look at a particular mission from the James Bond game *The Operative. No one lives forever* (Monolith, 2002, played on an Apple pc). This mission, called *Misfortune in Morocco scene 1*, is the third mission of the game. The avatar is a James Bond girl on a secret mission against an evil organisation called H.A.R.M. In this particular mission you have to prevent H.A.R.M. from killing the nearly deaf and blind ambassador. You are standing in front of a window in a building facing the hotel where the ambassador is staying. He walks around, oblivious to the attempts to his life.

Image 1: Screenshot from No one lives forever. *You are pointing your gun at the H.A.R.M. members who are trying to kill the ambassador (the bulky figure on the far left of the balcony).*

At the beginning of this mission you can choose whether or not you want another agent to point the killers out for you. In other words, you can choose how

much *repens* you can or are willing to handle. If you feel insecure or if you want to finish the mission as fast as possible, you choose for the least possible *repens*, surprise. In doing that, you will be able to kill all the H.A.R.M. members before they can even start pointing their gun at the ambassador. If, however, you choose to do it all on your own, it might take a few try-outs before you succeed in saving the ambassadors life.

Image 2: Screenshot from No one lives forever. You can make your choice between the easy or the hard way.

However, it is only in this early stage of the game that an agent is willing/able to help you out and diminish the amount of *repens* in the game. Further

on in the game you will have to do it yourself, you will have to be prepared for H.A.R.M. members to be jumping on you from around every corner and pillar. The amount of *repens* in this type of game makes the game at once very exciting and frustrating. You feel the adrenaline rushing through your body every time you face an enemy and are fast enough to take him out before he takes you out. At the same time, every time you die because you where not fast enough, not prepared enough for the surprise, or every time your missions fails because you have been spotted by a security camera, you feel frus-

trated. Starting all over again and doing the same difficult things yet again might make you feel exasperated, frustrated. In my opinion, however, the drive to continue is in this particular game well balanced against this frustration and therefore you do not stop playing but try again and again. When you finally succeed, the feeling of victory is a reward for all the frustration you had to endure.

In addition to the dimension of *repens*, this game also embodies the dimension of competition (in the form of the battle between H.A.R.M. and the secret agents), simulation (in that the game has some elements of role-playing to it, some players will easily identify themselves with the female secret agent), and vertigo (if you like the game, you will surely be lost in it for hours. Since the game has so many surprises in store for the player, you are driven to go on playing and playing, curious what the next surprise will be...). Although Caillois states that games can only be a combination of two different game dimensions (competition and chance for example) it is clear that most contemporary digital games combine more than two of these game dimensions. Most games are a combination of competition (fighting battles), simulation (identification with the avatar), vertigo (getting lost inside the game world), and repens (locating the surprises and reaction correctly to them).

Repens as it manifests itself in this particular mission takes the form of unexpected enemies popping out of 'nowhere'. Being able to deal with these surprises in the right way will bring you further into the game, will bring you to the next mission. But it is clear that that is only one form of *repens*. These sequentially embedded surprises do also manifest themselves in less threatening forms, for example in the form of a gun found, a medical kit, or important documents. The gun might enable you to kill your enemies from a balcony, rather than on the ground, without getting hurt yourself, the medical kit will save you when you get hurt, the documents will proof that H.A.R.M. is up to no good. These kinds of things are the typical props that will enable the player to make progress in the game, to upgrade its character, to know the things she or he needs to know in order to be able keep on playing.

However, locating *repens* in this type of narrative-laden games is fairly easy. It is harder to locate it in, say, a sport simulation game. Depending on the degree of realism that is strived at, you will be able to find surprises even in a sport simulation game. Needless to say, a game that wants to mirror golf in every detail will not hide secret things for the golf players along the course because that would undermine the realism of the simulation. But you might argue that even in these games some surprise is found in the unpredictability of the other golfers. Some sport simulations, however, do not strive for a hundred percent realistic simulation of the sport. Take for example the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series (Activision).

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (Activision, 2001, played on the Nintendo Gamecube) might be a sport simulation game but it can only be adequately described if one uses, next to Caillois's original four game dimensions, the dimension of sequentially embedded surprise. At the beginning of the game players can choose between the career mode, multi player, or free ride. When you have made your choice, you go to the skate shop where you can choose the skater that you want to ride and the location. Initially you can only choose the first location, the steel-melting factory. In order to be able to ride the other locations too, you will need to finish the career mode missions. Only then can you unlock the other locations. The surprise is very clear here: players know that there will be another location to ride, but they do not know how it will look and what opportunities it will give them. However, the things they must accomplish in order to unlock these other locations are rather complex, especially since players have a limited amount of time in which to do it. This is one of the most challenging, but also perhaps most frustrating things about the game: the fact that as a player you have to do a series of complex moves in a limited amount of time. The frustration arises from the fact that you will need to try and retry this series of moves until you finally succeed (or not). But the will, the drive to go on playing is stronger than this frustration since you want to know how the other locations look and what you will be able to do there. Besides the rather obvious surprises of the locked locations, there are also the in-level surprises (which remain, of course, only surprises until you have 'found'/encountered them) in the form of a melting pot in which players may fall at the first level, the location of certain treasures, the possibilities of new ways to earn points (a smash of the head to the other players, for example).

Besides the game dimension of sequential embedded surprise, *Tony Hawk* also features elements of competition (against time, against a second player, in order to beat the high score), simulation (players can identify with the skaters in the game; that they are modelled after real life pro-skaters may even enhance the identification level: players can be one of the skaters they admire), vertigo (players can definitely lose themselves, espe-

cially because they can do things they normally cannot do or be someone they admire. For the time being, it is nice to surrender your reality for the one the game presents you). The game dimension of chance is, as with most other computer games, hard to find in this sport simulation game.

CONCLUSION

The real achievement of defining and pinpointing this fifth dimension is that it provides us with an extended vocabulary that can be used when analyzing and describing computer games. When writing about a certain game we can now use, in addition to the characteristics of competition, simulation, vertigo, and chance, the characteristic of *repens*, of sequentially embedded surprise. This fifth characteristic is the core of the differences between non-digital and digital games, it is *the* defining characteristic of the contemporary digital games. It is due to the use of *repens* in computer games that they are so popular, that they are such fun to play. Because *repens* is the driving force behind our desire to keep on playing, the balance between surprise and frustration, between frustration and victory makes a game exciting, enticing, captivating. *Repens* is, in other words, a methodological tool that will refine and elucidate the describing and analyzing of computer games. It is also a term that will enable us to pinpoint more precisely why we like a certain game (if the amount of frustration caused by certain obstacle-generating-surprises is well balanced against the finding-helpful-things-surprises) or not (the surprises are too obvious, repetitive, unwelcome, too challenging, et cetera).

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