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Susanne Eichner

Agency and Media Reception

Experiencing Video Games, Film, and Television

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Susanne Eichner
Berlin, November 2013

Contents

1 Introduction

The great moments of your life won't necessarily be the things you do – they'll also be the things that happen to you. I'm not saying you can't take action to affect the outcome of your life. You have to take action. And you will. But never forget that on any day you can step out the front door and your whole life can change forever (Ted Mosby in How I Met Your Mother).[1]

In their account of agency Foss, Waters, and Armada (2007) employ the example of Lola and Manni (*Run Lola Run*, Tom Tykwer, 1998) to illustrate how agency operates. When Lola makes three runs in the film trying to rescue Manni, the outcome of her three choices vary dramatically each time:

> In the first run, Lola adopts an agentic orientation of victim, in which she interprets her structural conditions as obstacles and engages in the act of mortification. She and Manni obtain the money they need, but Lola is killed. In the second run, Lola assumes an agentic orientation of supplicant, viewing her structural conditions as bequests bestowed on her by structural power and using petitioning as a primary option for securing those bequests. Lola acquires the money, but Manni dies. In the third run, both Lola and Manni choose agentic orientations of director, assuming that they can direct structural conditions, themselves, and their fate. Structural conditions become resources as they employ innovative responses to secure money and life for both of them (ibid: 219).

Lola and Manni made it. They successfully directed the course of their lives. "Lola enacts agency in the first and second runs, then, just as much as she does in the third – her agentic choices are simply different" (ibid: 225). The example illustrates that agency is a structural part of acting in our lives. It relies on dispositions we maintain and on structures we face. It is inherent in Bourdieu's *habitus* (Bourdieu 2009) and in Giddens' *stratification model* (Giddens 1984). Agency describes the way we, as individuals, aim to perceive ourselves as empowered subjects. While acting in this world we are not only restricted by circumstances, by limited economic, cultural and/or personal resources, by societal and political structures, and by our physical body, our aims may also collide with and be restricted by the aims of other individuals, organisations, institutions, and governmental systems. Exercising our own agency might deprive others of agency, and vice versa. Mische and Emirbayer therefore describe agency as "*toward* something, by means of which actors enter into relationship with surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events" (Mische/

1 *How I Met Your Mother* (Bays Carter, Thomas Craig, CBS, since 2005), season 4, episode 22: "Right Place, Right Time".

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Emirbayer 1998: 973; emphasis in the original). Agency is therefore not restricted to personal or individual agency. Following Foucault's notion of power relations, the structural dimensions of agency become apparent: discourses are created through knowledge, and those who control knowledge are thus in control of power (Foucault 1998: 100 f.). Agency depends on dispositions and resources, and is neither fixed nor stable; individual agency in a society is accordingly not equally distributed nor does everyone have the same capacity for agency.

This work is not about the agency we perform in the 'real' world, nor about the agency of fictional characters in fictional worlds. *It is about the agency we experience in the process of media reception.* Agency, as indicated above, is a fundamental aspect of human action. In the tradition of communication studies, media communication is analysed according to social action and interaction theory (cf. for example Blumer 1969; Renckstorf/McQuail 1996). Media use is considered a specific form of social action and communication. Media addresses an audience with symbolic material. Media reception is a process of meaning making through interaction with the symbolic material presented. When media communication is conceptualized as social action, and agency is considered an integral part of human action, how does agency play a role in the process of media reception and media appropriation?

One answer can be found in game studies. The experience of agency as a way of performing power through text has been discussed since Murray's 1997 book *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. According to Murray, "agency is the satisfying power to take meaningful actions and see the results of our decisions and choices" (Murray 1997: 126). Since then, agency has repeatedly been elaborated as one of the core pleasures of playing video games, and the quality distinguishing video games from other media. Games, so the assumption goes, require their players to perform actions, unfolding only through player action, thereby generating the game-specific experience of agency. As a concept informing understanding of this particular form of media experience, agency provides a persuasive alternative to the ideologically overloaded concept of interactivity. While video games are based on an interactive, computer-based system of coded rules, the feature-based trait of interactivity simply constitutes a predisposition allowing recipient-based experiences of agency to come into play. The video game appears to be a media device ideally suited to generating experiences of agency, since it enables players to make inputs with direct and 'watchable' results: by simply pressing a button in the first-person shooter *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Treyarch, Ideaworks, 2010), a gun is fired, the screen shows the result of this action as a big explosion, and the player experiences the power of agency within the video game environment.

However, as convincing as notions of video game agency seem to be, its media-exclusiveness cannot withstand deeper investigation. Agency, a central focus of sociology and pragmatism, understood as the general and fundamental capability of humans to act in the world (cf. Ahearn 2001; Giddens 1984; Mische/Emirbayer

1998), is a capacious concept that reaches far beyond the realm of video game experiences. Emerging articulations of a general media agency, incorporating rereadings of fundational works of pragmatism and social action theory, and reconsiderations of media and communication approaches, have been fruitful. Once we begin to look for agency, it appears to be a ubiquitous notion, though often disguised with other concepts, terminologies, and disciplines. Agency is inherent in media literacy, in our competency to evaluate and to make use of media adequately, and in our growing encyclopaedia of media related knowledge. Agency is at stake when recipients oppose the implied meaning of a text and take on a negotiated or oppositional position (Hall 1980). Jenkins' concepts of *participatory culture* and *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins 1992, 2006) describe phenomena that induce feelings of agency. Certain forms of cognitive activity, such as *passive control* or *mind-game,* as described by Elsaesser (2009a), Bordwell (2002) or Wuss (2009), I will argue, stage forms of media agency. Beyond media use, the empowerment of people is central to questions of the rights to participate and collaborate in societal and political decisions. And it is a central concern in the formation of our identities: when we, as children, develop our sense of self, we do this by perceiving ourselves as agentic beings, as agents of our own actions. When we negotiate, test, and stabilize our various identities in later life, agency is part of this process. Competence, power, authority and expertise are core concepts in psychology, human resource development, educational science, and social sciences. In short – agency and its aligned concepts affect us in every part of our lifeworld.

Game studies have elaborated on agency as a mode of media experience – but there is no evidence and no reason to restrict agency to the experience of video games. While agency as a mode of experiencing video games is generally recognized, this receptive engagement is particularly afforded to the nature of the computer-technology based medium of video games, due to its ability to audiovisually react to players' inputs. Yet, when taking into consideration that 1) in times of media convergence, a certain media text is no longer confined to one medium and 2) that we obviously find agency-facilitating aspects such as play or interactivity throughout the different media (cf. Anderson 1996; Stephenson 1967), I therefore want to argue that agency, as a special form of media involvement, is potentially present in all media reception. Bearing in mind that video games have their own media-specific peculiarities, several observations from film, television, and game studies indicate that the sense of agency facilitated by certain textual strategies occurs throughout all media reception. While video games might be especially good at it, this recipient-based mode of reception is not restricted to any medium in particular: the case of a cineaste, who acquires expertise on film genres and film history which is applied in discussions with friends, in writing an online film critique, or in participating a film quiz night, indicates agentic moments in the course of film reception and appropriation. We feel empowered when zapping away from a disliked

program on the television set, yet the opposite feeling emerges when a DVD's programming doesn't allow us to proceed to the main menu. Films and television also enable a sense of power and agency within the textuality of a program or movie: when realizing well before the key scene of the *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999) that Dr. Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) is a ghost, when guessing along with the players in *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* (by David Briggs, Mike Whitehill, Steven Knight, 1998), and when participating in discussions of the meaning of those ubiquitous numbers in *Lost* (by J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffrey Lieber, ABC, 2004–2010), a satisfactory sense emerges: a sense of power, of control, of influence and of making a difference – a sense that I will conceptualize as agency in the present work.

The approaches to agency touched on above are in need of a unifying framework. Often developed in isolation from each other, treatments of agency throughout film, game, television, communication and computer studies – as well as in sociology, psychology and philosophy – provide pieces and fragments that, when properly assembled, add up to a more comprehensive picture of agency as a mode of media experience. The core issue inspiring my research can be summed up in the following question:

If agency can indeed be conceptualized as a specific form of media experience, which impact and forms of significance maintains agency during the process of media reception and appropriation?

When staging agency as one possible mode of experiencing media, a systematic understanding of media experience in general, as well as of other possible modes of media experience, is called for. For example, the rather broad idea of media experience has been conceptually punctuated in terms of reception and appropriation (e.g. Mikos 2001a), as reception modalities (e.g. Suckfüll 2004), or as involvement (e.g. Donnerstag 1996). In the present work, the terminology of media *involvement* endeavours to encompass all processes and activities that come to pass during the phase of concrete reception. This evokes a second question:

Considering agency a specific mode of media involvement which emerges throughout different media, how does agency relate to, and integrate within, an overall form of media involvement?

When elaborating agency as one possible mode of media involvement, it is necessary to conceptualize media involvement in general. How can agency be conceptualized in the process of reception and as a mode of media involvement? What are the predispositions for any modality of media involvement? How is agency related to other modes of media involvement? Monika Suckfüll has emphasized the twofold character of modalities that refer simultaneously to the disposition of the recipients *and* to mediality and textuality. While emphasizing the recipient as the critical factor of this model of media involvement, at the same time textual structures (including dramaturgical organisation, aesthetics, and mode of address) come into focus as aspects that trigger and induce the recipient-based experience, the particular mode of textual understanding and experience.

Thus, the aim of the present work is to identify the concrete textual qualities, the specific points of agency that facilitate the emergence and the mode of agency in different media texts.

This grounds agency as a theoretical concept in the field of media studies and media reception, proposing a tool kit with which to identify 'agency-points' with a surplus value for the process of media reception, and thus also offers an interesting projection useful for media producers and creative professionals. On the basis of this work, it will be possible to evaluate media products in relation to their 'agency appeal'.

As outlined above, my approach gathers well elaborated findings and models from social action theory, psychology, film theory, television studies and game studies, and attempts to amalgamate the findings concerning agency into a comprehensive model of agency as a mode of media involvement, and to validate the resulting implications with the help of exemplary analyses. Requiring a broad literary review of various disciplines, this project aims to stage a genuinely interdisciplinary research procedure, with all the advantages and impediments this implies. The present work is structured into three parts. Chapters 2 to 4 provide an extensive review of sociological understandings of agency, action-oriented media theory, and the literature of video game agency, and related concepts and theories relevant to these discourses. The second part of this work elucidates my model of *first and second order involvement* (chapter 5) which is developed on the basis of present approaches to media experience, outlining the different levels and points of agency (chapter 6). The third part consists of example analyses of video games, a reality show, a television series, and two films that will specify the different textual strategies at work which facilitate and amplify the mode of agency across the different media:

The chapter *Agency Interdisciplinary* (chapter 2) delivers a rapprochement of agency as a sociological category. As an inherent aspect of early social action theory, and referring back to Alfred Schütz, Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, the significance of agency is delineated according to *praxeological approaches* (e.g. Bourdieu 1997; Giddens 1984), which have gained new relevance in contemporary sociology and philosophy through the work of Mische and Emirbaier (1998), Ahearn (2001), Hornsby (2004), and others. The relevance of agency to contemporary media and cultural studies is specifically traced through cultural studies approaches grounded in pragmatism and ideas of identity formation and symbolic interactionism.

Agency has recently experienced a revival in the context of technoscience. Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as elaborated by Latour (2007), dislocated agency from exclusively human action, (re)integrating it into an equitable network of humans and machines. While the consequences of ANT, which promotes a radical symmetry of humans and machines, will not be pursued, related 'socionic' approaches do provide interesting contributions to this study – for instance the concept of *attributed agency* (Werle 2002), and Gell's anthropological appropriation of agency through

his relational agent/patient model (Gell 1998). A final theoretical perspective incorporated into my argument is provided by psychological accounts of human agency. The question of subjective self-consciousness of one's own agency, as well as different levels of agency, come into focus and are analyzed in greater detail.

All consulted disciplines and approaches broach the issue of intentionality, of processuality and of consciousness in one form or another. Most salient to this work is the question of intentionality, which, for some scholars, constitutes the definitive quality of agency (e.g. Pacherie 2007), while others emphasize contingency, or the *could have acted differently* (Giddens 1984). Recalling my epigraph from Ted Mosby, which quotes the narrating character in *How I Met Your Mother*, the non-intentional dimension of agency is emphasized, illustrating the variety of possible manifestations of agency.

With the sociological, psychological, and techno-scientific basics of agency carved out, in chapter three the two concepts *Interactivity and Play* are elaborated, relative to the distinct concept of agency. In a simple line of argument, interactivity and media agency appear as analogical concepts, enabling media recipients to interact with a text. However, by means of communication approaches (e.g. Görtz 1995; Heeter 1989; Jensen 1998; Rafaeli 1988; Rogers 1986), interactivity is defined as a concept that is mainly concerned with questions of mediality (and concomitant aspects such as selectivity or vividness) in a departure from recipient-based models of agency. Considered more useful for the purpose of this work is the somewhat related concept of *perceived interactivity*, as elaborated by Downes and McMillan (2000) and by Kiousis (2002).

In a second step, play is conceptualised as a specific form of social action. Interactivity and play have long been thought of as depended categories, thus obviating explicit questions about how play is actually connected to other media. By contrast, following Huizinga (1938/2001), Caillois (1958/2001), and Ohler and Nieding (2001), play is defined as a specific form of social action. In this context, the assumptions of Stephenson (1967), Hallenberger and Foltin (1990), Anderson (1996), or Wuss (2009), provide a convincing account of play as a constituent feature of pleasurable media communication in general. Play as form of social action and interactivity as a technology-based feature of media are thus conceived as distinct, agency-facilitating phenomena.

After having settled on the most fruitful approaches to agency from across several disciplines, and having considered some basic concepts that relate to media agency, in chapter four, *From Media Use to Doing Media*, the cornerstones of action-oriented media theory is reassessed and analyzed with respect to media agency. Media use and social action in media and communication theory is reconsidered, following in part the work of Renckstorf and MacQuail (1996), Meyen (2004), and Charlton and Neumann (1988) and processes of meaning making inherent to media reception are (re)contextualized within a broader sociological purview which links

media communication to the social context of the audience. A special emphasize is placed on work emerging from cultural studies which has developed praxeological approaches to agency (cf. Barker 2000) and a thematic of empowerment of people (cf. Fiske 1997), providing perspectives especially compatible with radical conceptions of the active audience.

In three subordinate chapters the specificities of film, television, and video games are fleshed out against the backdrop of agency. Following cognitive film psychology, neoformalism, and reception aesthetics, the fundamentals of perceiving and processing media material cognitively and emotionally are covered. In relation to film viewing, the concepts of *passive control* (Wuss, 2009) and of *mind-game* are identified as useful analytic concepts for clarifying agency. Examination of elements of various television formats, such as quiz shows (e.g. *Millionaire*), the textual integration of the audience in recent reality shows (e.g. *I'm a Celebrity*), narrative formats such as *Tatort Plus* (ARD, 2013), and forms of transmedia storytelling (e.g. *Lost*) reveal modes of audience participation beyond typical viewer engagement which empower media recipients with an increased sense of agency. Finally, the experience of gameplay in video games – with their ability to induce feelings of agency as outlined by Murray (1997) and further developed by many scholars subsequently (e.g. Jørgensen 2003; Mateas 2004; Schott 2008; Tanenbaum/Tanenbaum 2009, 2010) – is recounted and evaluated with regard to my argument.

All the reviewed approaches add to my understanding of agency as a mode of media involvement, which is elaborated in chapter five, *Agency as a Mode of Involvement*. Relative to, but distinct from, other modes of involvement such as presence, immersion, character alignment, ludic involvement, excitement, participation, inspiration, or habitual, agency is described as a mode of second order involvement induced by specific textual strategies. This affords a more nuanced elaboration of the concept of involvement. Drawing on Suckfüll (2004), Odin (2002), Calleja (2011), and others, a model of first and second order involvement is advanced, providing an elucidation of how modes of involvement emerge during media reception, and how they are stabilized or rejected according to the specific textuality of the media.

In chapter 6, *Levels and Points of Agency*, the aspects of agency outlined from different disciplines will be compiled into a manageable model. Borrowed from Bandura (2001) and integrated by Schott (2008) agency is conceptualised as operating on different levels: on the level of *personal agency* (consisting of mastering narrative, mastering choice, mastering action, and mastering space), on the level of *creative agency*, and on the level of *collective agency*.

Finally, the analysis chapter – *Textuality and Agency – Exemplary Analyses* (chapter 7) – provides in-depth analyses of two video games, a reality show, a television series, and two films, providing insights on the textual strategies of different media texts. Certain structural aspects and aesthetic elements are identified which affect both the emergence and sense of agency.

In *The Quality of Agency in the Media* (chapter 8), the central findings regarding agency in different media texts are presented. My initial question is recapitulated through an evaluation of the model of agency proposed. This chapter also serves as a projection for more practical applications of this model, particularly in the fields of story development, dramaturgy and creative producing.

2 Agency interdisciplinary

2.1 Agency, Pragmatism, and Action Theory

2.1.1 Sociological Principles

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines Agency as the "capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power"[2]. Agency thus is conceived as the capacity of an agent to act in our world. Tracing the concept of agency back to its sociological roots is simultaneously straightforward – since it is an omnipresent concept – and difficult to grasp. A significant reason for this arises from the different traditions and branches of research found in Germany and the US,[3] and their differing usage of overlapping terminology. In the German academic discourse agency is, until recently, a little used term, usually equated with 'action' (*Handlung*), such as the very rarely used terms *Handlungsbefähigung* (the ability to act) or *Handlungsermächtigung* (the empowerment to act).

Max Weber's concept of action, distinguished from human reactive behaviour, can be considered seminal to further conceptualizations of human and social action developed in sociology. According to Weber, action is "the human behaviour when and to the extend that the agent or agents see it as subjectively meaningful" (Weber quoted in Schimank 2010: 29). In social action the "subjective meaning takes account of the behaviours of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (ibid: 38), in a meaningful rational means-to-ends deliberation. Social actions are further distinguished into four major types: *zweckrationale* (instrumental/rational), *wertrationale* (value-oriented), affective and traditional social action. While it is one of Weber's merits to make allowance for other than rational actions, the focus remains on the intentional actions of the motivated actor. This is not unproblematic, since many actions in everyday life might occur without being rational and intentional, while still being more than reactive behaviour. One has to accept Hans Joas' statement that, although Weber's four types of action can be considered as a "gradual abandonment of rationalization (…), the ideal remains, then, an action that rationalizes ends, values, and consequences of action" (Joas 1990: 175). The question of inten-

2 Merriam Webster Encyclopaedia: http://www.merriam-webster.com (7.03.2013)

3 In the course of this work I will focus on German, American and some French traditions of sociological theorizing.

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tionality is an interesting one and will be discussed in more detail in relation to human agency in the course of this work. Regardless of the question of intentionality, with his model of action and social action, Weber laid the foundation for the German *Handlungstheorie* (action theory) sometimes also labelled *Interaktionstheorie* (interaction theory), which, broadly defined, refers to all sociological theories concerned with human actions. More recently, the term *Handlungstheorie* is sometimes replaced by *Akteurstheorie* (cf. Gabriel 2004), offering a closer correspondence with the American terminology of agency. Other sociological concepts, such as the technoscientific *Actor-Network Theory* with its popular representatives Bruno Latour, Michel Callon or John Law, or the socio-economical *Principal-Agent Theory,* have their origins in classic *Handlungs-* or *Akteurstheorien.* While the former tries to integrate objects and artefacts into the action model, the latter theory relies on the *Rational Choice*[4] tradition as it has been appropriated by scholars of economics and politic science. As outlined above, in German action-oriented approaches agency is generally implicit, yet explicitly mentioned only by few scholars.

The American sociological approaches to action are originally linked to Talcott Parsons, who is widely considered to be the founder of modern action theory. Parsons' theory of social action is based on his concept of society: action is a process in the actor-situation system where the individual 'actor' seeks goals. An action becomes social "when the situation of an actor is another actor" (Jung 1984: 217). Parsons' approach, based upon Weber's action model, is an attempt to embed individual social action in the structure of society. Parsons' contextualization of individual action within social structure can be considered paradigmatic of sociology's engagement with questions about how social structure and human action determine, influence and regulate one another. Most influential in the domain of the social sciences and the action-oriented branch of sociology was the perspective of *Pragmatism,* as elaborated for instance by Charles Sanders Pierce, John Dewey or Georg Herbert Mead. At the core of pragmatism is the 'pragmatist maxim', asserting that theoretical hypotheses and practices rely on each other. Thus, human practices are the sources of theory, while theory depends on these practices; there is no theorizing without practice. Mead, who claimed that the individual mind exists only in relation to other individuals and thoughts with shared meanings, laid the cornerstone for Herbert Blumer's *symbolic interactionism* (cf. Mead 1973: 244 ff.). Chapter 2.1.4 will elucidate on how this approach is crucial to understanding the dynamic relationship between media and recipient.

4 *Rational Choice* theory assumes that complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of basic individual actions. It constructs the individual as motivated by wants or goals, expressed as preferences, so as to make choices in a way that maximizes their advantage while minimizing cost. *Rational Choice* thus recurs on early sociological concepts of the *homo oeconomicus.* The American sociologist James Samuel Coleman is credited as an essential contributor to the formulation of this approach.

According to Margaret Archer (1988), the "problem of structure and agency has rightly come to be seen as the basic issue in modern social theory" (ibid: xi). Indeed, a division of sociology into two big branches is often invoked, characterizing one tradition of sociology as engaged in the explanation of society's structure, and the other as interested in human action or agency (e.g. Archer 1988, Reckwitz 2004). In this view, there is a dualistic perspective in the sociological approach between, "Voluntarism versus Determinism", "Subjectivism versus Objectivism", and "the micro- versus the macroscopic in sociology" (Archer 1988: xi). From today's point of view, the structure/agency debate seems to be oversimplifying. While there are indeed scholars that can be integrated into either the structural macro-perspective (e.g. Emil Durkheim, Talcott Parsons), or the action-oriented micro-perspective (e.g. Max Weber), many approaches aim to offer a perspective integrating both aspects. A more useful distinction is provided by Andreas Reckwitz (2004), who identifies three major paradigmatic shifts in sociological action theory, namely a development progressing from the *homo oeconomicus* to the *homo sociologicus*; a development from the *homo sociologicus* towards the *homo significans* (or *homo symbolicum*); and a development from the *homo significans* towards *praxeologic approaches* (cf. ibid: 306 ff.).

As with all theory, these sociological models did not evolve in an intellectual vacuum. In fact, the normative paradigm arises from the very ideas of Enlightenment thinkers such as René Descartes, David Hume, John Locke and Immanuel Kant, whose philosophical work staged a paradigmatic shift from rationalism and the *homo oeconomicus,* opening the way toward notions of a *homo sociologicus*. The enlightened, utilitarian individual, with his/her own interests in mind, is no longer the cornerstone of action resulting in social order. Instead, collective, intersubjective actions are based on a normative system that *requires* social order. This does not necessarily imply a rejection of the idea of means-end rationality. But the individual is no longer viewed in terms of isolated actions, instead she is always considered as acting within a broader social order. Exemplary of this normative paradigm is Emil Durkheim's approach implicating a social system as prerequisite for (social) action.

The second paradigmatic shift can be ascribed to the increasing importance of interpretive approaches. While the normative paradigm formulates actions and social order by means of normative rules, interpretive approaches are unified via their recourse to the sociology of knowledge. They thus form an interpretive paradigm with the individual actor in her lifeworld at the centre of the approach: "the cognitive knowledge resources, conceptualized optionally as cultural codes, frames of reference, collective representations, horizons of meaning of differentiating systems (…) attribute meaning to the objects of the world" (Reckwitz 2004: 312). Reckwitz includes ethno-methodological approaches (e.g. Harold Garfinkel), social phenomenological approaches (e.g. Erving Goffman, Alfred Schütz), social hermeneutics (e.g. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Charles Taylor), structuralisms

(e.g. Claude Levi-Strauss), as well as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes within a broad, interpretive, culture-oriented sociological approach. According to interpretive models, social order and social rules are not normative but rather cognitively created – they aim to explain how meaning is symbolically constructed. Notably, Alfred Schütz' work marks a significant point in sociology, focussing first on the everyday knowledge, the "universe of meaning", of the acting agents (Schütz 1971: 11).[5] The advantage of this model of the *homo symbolicus*, in contrast with the *homo sociologicus,* can be seen in its ability to explain collective agency and cognitive structures: only on the basis of knowledge structures can agents transform the "uncertainties of the world into meaningful certainty" (ibid: 316), organizing their environment into a comprehensible symbolic universe on a day-to-day, routinized basis.

The third paradigm shift that Reckwitz (2004) indicates refers to a branch of culture-oriented action theories that have been advanced by Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Hans Joas and Michel de Certeau (ibid: 317). In reference to Bourdieu's terminology, they can be labelled as *praxeolocical approaches*. At the core of these approaches lies the concept of social practices – routinized body performances – in interplay with meaningful comprehension. In contrast to former action theories, praxeologic approaches define action not as selectively separated units, but as a process occurring in time and space. Temporality and repetition are thus important aspects of praxeological social interpretation. Each social practice then consists of a body performance – on a very basic level a practice is a skilful movement of the body: Bourdieu's "connaissance par corps", Taylor's "embodied agency" and Joas' "constitution of body schemas" all inherit this focus on corporeality. Perhaps most important, the structuredness of the social lies in the routinization of social practices:

> Their [social practices'] seemingly self-evident – as a matter of fact heavily presuppositional, since fostered by know-how – repetitive and uniform action was marginalized in Weber's typology of action as 'traditional action' and thus linked to non-meaningful behaviour. Admittedly, this seems to be the real fundament of structuredness of the social world (Reckwitz 2004: 324).[6]

This very brief historical survey of sociology has introduced some basic conceptions of the acting individual in a social world. These paradigmatic shifts outline a development from the enlightened rational and intentional actor, towards conceptions of social action understood as a process of meaning making, incorporating practices that involve mind and body. With these essential principles in mind, the concept and differentiation of action and agency will be approached.

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5 The approach of the *sociology of knowledge* has been elaborated in by Berger and Luckmann (*The Social Construction of Reality*; first published in 1966) as well as by Schütz and Luckmann (*The Structures of the Life-World*, first published in 1973).

6 Translation by S.E.

2.1.2 Theorizing Agency

In 2006, Biesta and Tedder state that:

> Agency is not only a central concept in modern educational theory and practice, but is also a key notion and issue in contemporary social theory, particularly in sociology, economics and political science. The question in social theory is first and foremost about the *empirical conditions of agency*, i.e., the question how and when agency is possible, and about ways in which the phenomenon of agency can be conceptualized and theorised. (…) Within sociology 'the term agency is usually juxtaposed to structure and is often no more than a synonym for action, emphasizing implicitly the undermining nature of human action, as opposed to the alleged determinism of structural theories' (Marshall quoted in Biesta and Tedder 2006: 5; emphasis in the original).

My aim here is to work out a specific and application-oriented definition of agency that avoids the fallacy of equating agency with action.

The paradigm changes in sociology described in the previous chapter have affected the notion of agency. *Homo oeconomicus* is based on the Enlightenment idea of an individual equipped with free will and with the ability to make rational choices. John Locke articulated a conviction that humans are able to form the circumstances of their lives by themselves, an idea to which Jean-Jacques Rousseau adjoined the moral will and Immanuel Kant added the categorical imperative (cf. Mische/Emirbayer 1998: 964 ff.). The Kantian conception of free will versus necessity served as a fundamental basis for normative approaches of agency as employed by Talcott Parsons. However, only the second paradigm shift (as outlined above) towards interpretative approaches enabled a disengagement of the conception of agency from specific (structural) situations and (subjective) intentions. Instead of merely intentional, agency could now also be regarded as *influential*:

> Alfred Schutz [sic] insist that action [is] not to be perceived as the pursuit of preestablished ends, abstracted from concrete situations, but rather that ends and means develop coterminously within contexts that are themselves ever changing and thus always subject to reevaluation and reconstruction on the part of the reflective intelligence (ibid: 967).

The imputation of intentionality, however, has not yet been overcome, as Reckwitz (2004) seems to indicate. Economistic approaches relying on a sociological purview such as those found in rational choice theory, and theories of intention as elucidated by Michael Bratman (e.g. Bratman 1999), who formulated the Belief-Desire-Intention model (a way of explaining future-oriented intentions), are based on a notion of intentionality as the most crucial aspect for understanding human social action and agency. In response to such intention-based approaches, Hornsby emphasizes the false assumption that intentionality is the basis of agency. Assuming subjects to be always "keeping track" of their actions proves to be illusionary. Intentionality requires a "higher-order reflexive" state of mind, that is by no means employed in all every day (social) actions (Hornsby 2004: 3, 9). Hornsby suggests conceiving agency as either positive or negative performance, thus including inten-

tional actions as well as non-intentional, spontaneous or avoiding forms of action. The debate on intentionality brings to light the undertheorizing of the process of agency itself: it is a "black box" (Mische/Emirbayer 1998: 969) that is only very rarely touched upon. It remains a "greatly underspecified, often misused, much fetishized [concept] these days by social scientists" (Comaroff/Comaroff in Ahearn 2001: 112). As such, it is for instance still unsettled whether agency is specifically human, or if animals can have agency, or if even machines are capable of agency, as Bruno Latour (2007) promotes. Following Ahearn (2001), agency is neither necessarily intentional, oppositional nor absent, but refers to, "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (ibid: 130). Thus agency is distinct from action. *While action is defined as the actual process of acting, agency refers to the general ability to perform these actions.* This ontological difference introduces interesting and continuing consequences. Firstly, it emphasizes the actor and her relation to her actions, and secondly, it refers to the socio-political impact of agency, the capacity of humans to change the social order. The main aim of this sociological conception of agency is accordingly the exploration of those mechanisms that allow agents to perform with agency which impacts the social structure; or, to put it in Ahearn's words, "how any habitus or structure can produce actions that fundamentally change it" (ibid: 119). Agency entails the potential to trigger processes of transformation. This agentive ability is generally inherent in humanity, but varies culturally and in terms of genre, class, education, generation or ethnicity. It is something that can be improved on, but the extend to which an agent is able to deploy agency is constrained by their resources. Agency "gives people knowledge of different schemas and access to different kinds and amounts and hence different possibilities for transformative action" (Sewell 1992: 21). Sewell's notion of knowledge resources indicates the processuality of agency, which is also emphasized by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). They regard agency as a temporal process that has three components: past, future and presence. Agency is defined as:

> (…) the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (ibid: 970).

Alfred Schütz's earlier treatment of action introduced a similar diachronic scheme to describe how agents formulate and orient themselves via social action. An agent anticipates the future condition that would result from her actions:

> What was empty in the project has or has not been fulfilled. Nothing remains unsettled, nothing undecided. To be sure, I remember the open anticipations involved in projecting the act and even the protentions accompanying my living in the ongoing process of my acting. But now, in retrospection, I remember them in terms of my past anticipations, which have or have not come true. Only the performed act, therefore, and never the acting in progress can turn out as a success or failure (Schütz 1945: 539).

Accordingly, iteration (habit), projectivity (imagination) and practical evaluation (judgement) are constitutive elements of human agency. Iteration refers to the learning effect and historical embeddedness of agency. "Past experiences condition present actions" as Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 975) put it. The recurrence of knowledge – either in forms of mental concepts, embodied practices or social organizations – as Sewell (1992) suggested, is fundamentally necessary for any occurrence of agency. However, agency is not merely employing the same schema over and over again. Projectivity refers to the "creative character" of agency (Joas 1996: 15), entailing "the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts" (Sewell 1992: 19), making agents "inventors of new possibilities" (Mische/Emirbayer 1998: 984) through various creative tactics, such as anticipatory identification or experimental enactment (cf. ibid: 989 ff.). Practical evaluation, finally, refers to the real life circumstances with which an agent contextualizes social experiences, which might be ambiguous and even contradictory. Practical evaluation requires an agent to recognize a given situation adequately in order to decide on appropriate actions, and to execute those actions accordingly. The cognitive dimension of agency clarifies an agent's general ability to perform with agency, and is therefore not to be understood simply in terms of possessing agentive abilities, but as the ability to acquire them; cognitive agency refers to the process of "achieving agency" (Biesta/Tedder 2006: 18). Rather than an attribute possessed, agency is something which evolves in "transaction with a particular situation" (ibid: 19). *With regard to media reception, this signifies that certain specific textual characteristics might allow for more agency than others.*

So far, agency has been conceptualized as a core element of social action theory. The paradigm shifts, as outlined by Reckwitz, were the premise to acknowledge the significance of agency. Agency then is defined as *the general ability to perform actions*, while actions are the actual processes of acting. Furthermore, agency does not 'just happen' but is a *creative capacity that depends on individual and socio-cultural resources that can be amplified and improved on*. Its *transformative power* is due to the *processuality* of agency. The question of intentionality is still a contested topic in different fields of academic research. Even in Schütz's early work in this field, he had suggested abandoning *intentionality* in favour of *influence*. In any case, intentional actions are just one possibility out of many positive or negative modes of performance; *intentionality thus proves to be a possible, but not a necessary aspect of agency.*

To sustain a more in-depth view on the mechanism of agency, the following chapter will employ approaches that provide a detailed insight in the relationship of human agency and societal structure. Furthermore, the concepts employed can be subsumed under what I have labelled *praxeologic approaches*. It is assumed that a nuanced appreciation of socioculturally mediated agency will also allow for a deeper understanding of agency in the process of media reception, which is at the core of this work.

2.1.3 Practice and Agency

In the following chapter I outline the sociological approaches that seem to be most fruitful for an elaboration of mediated agency. Following Reckwitz (2004), I suggest that the 'praxeological' approach has proven to be the most effective. Firstly, praxeological models are fundamental to current, generally accepted conceptions of the 'active audience', making them a cornerstone of media reception theory in general. Secondly, due to the focus on power shared by these theories, they will provide an ideal starting point from which to develop a new conception of media agency.

Significant contributions to agency can be found in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, in Giddens' *stratification model*, in Hans Joas' notion of the *creativity of actions*, in the concept of *performance*, and in Foucault's *power/knowledge and discourses* relations.

2.1.3.1 Agents, Power, and Creativity

In his elaboration of habitus, Bourdieu formulates a theory of practice which he labels *praxeology* (Bourdieu, 2009). His aim is to uncover the underlying mechanisms at work in constituting and reproducing the social world and social life. Practical sense and practical reason are considered formative principles for the social structuring of reality, and provide the basis for individual and collective agency (cf. Gabriel 2004: 170). Rejecting both phenomenological approaches (as subjectivist and unscientific), and objectivism (as detached from practical knowledge), Bourdieu strives for an integration of social actors as integral parts of the social world.[7] The connection between the social world and individual practice is the habitus. It is a set of dispositions that generates perception, thought and evaluation:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (…) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations (…) The practices produced by the habitus [are] the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations (Bourdieu 2009: 72).

The habitus is a 'structured structure', constituted by transposable dispositions (perception, thought, and evaluation) of a certain social position (a social practice), along with schemata (or representations) of these dispositions, generate practices, which in turn (re)produce social structures (structuring practice). Thus, the habitus adjusts practice to structure, ensuring the practical (re)production of structure. This model also holds implications for the agent, since, according to Bourdieu, the habitus, and not the agent herself, is determined by social structures. The dispositions

7 Bourdieu critiques phenomenological approaches for reducing social relationships to communication, and interaction to symbolic transaction, thus neglecting or belittling the impact of structuration.

and schemata of the habitus thus constitute a "generating principle of all forms of practice" (Bourdieu 1997: 283)[8] such that an agent's habitus functions as her "modus operandi" (ibid. 281). Furthermore, dispositions can either reproduce or transform "culturally constructed meanings and values", and thus the social world (Ahearn 2001: 118). Prommer (2012) states accurately that, more than manner and appearance, the habitus is the "individual internalized patterns of values, attitudes, opinions and beliefs, which makes humans social beings. Habitus is a system of dispositions, which is effective in everyday thought, perception and assessment practice" (ibid: 21).[9] The practical sense in its threefold form of habitus, structure, and practice overcomes the dualism of structure and agency.

There is another side to habitus that has not been mentioned yet. The concept of habitus includes body and corporeality. Since social practices are anchored in the human body, social structures can only exist by means of bodily actions and agents. The agents have literally incorporated specific dispositions – in their movement, attitude and sensibilities – thus enabling inferences as to their social position and mode of behaviour (cf. Fröhlich 1994: 38 f.). It is important to recognize that dispositions of practice (i.e. habitus) are prereflexive and do not come into consciousness. Consequently, praxeology incorporates the idea of an agent who is non-intentional:

> The actions of social actors in practice theory are not guided by rationality or intentionality, but by the practical requirements. The social actors develop a practical sense towards these requirements, which enables them to participate in forms of practice (Ebrecht and Hillebrandt 2002: 8).[10]

The fundamentally agentive nature of the habitus model, then, lies in its capacity – productively and creatively – to produce practices that are not directly determined by a social structure (though they are pragmatically mediated through habitus). At the same time, the creativity is restricted by the flip side of Bourdieu's approach, the influence of structure on the habitus.

> Of the infinite thoughts, meanings, and practices that the habitus can produce at any given historical moment, there is only a minimal probability that any will ever be thought or practiced because individuals are predisposed to think and act in a manner that reproduces the existing system of inequalities (Ahearn 2001: 118).

Habitus thus has the tendency to produce conservative practices, conforming to a seemingly 'natural' social world. However, the habitus is inherently alterable, since it adjusts to every new situation – whether in terms of conjoint affirmation or in

8 Translation by S.E.

9 Translation by S.E.

10 Original cit.: Die Handlungen der sozialen Akteure werden in der Praxistheorie nicht durch Rationalität oder Intentionalität angeleitet, sondern durch die Anforderungen der Praxis. Zu diesen Anforderungen entwickeln die sozialen Akteure einen praktischen Sinn, der es ihnen ermöglicht, an Praxisformen zu partizipieren (Ebrecht and Hillebrandt 2002: 8).

terms of conflicting differences of incorporated structured structures within a particular field. Especially in situations of conflict or in times of crisis, the transformative power of habitus comes to the fore.

The prereflexive nature of habitus raises questions at this point about how the individual is able to perceive herself as an agent. How can the subject evaluate and change her practices when they are 'conditioned' by an inherently changeable habitus? This is indeed one of Bourdieu's weak points, since without self-consciousness, agency seems unlikely to occur. A solution to this problem is provided by Anthony Giddens. In formulating his structuration theory, Giddens (Giddens, 1984) aims to overcome the duality of structure and agency. Social structures are conceived as rules and resources, enabling and restricting agency at the same time: "in and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible" (ibid: 2). According to Giddens, agency is neither free will nor resistance, but is linked in a reciprocal way to structure (cf. Ahearn 2001: 117). No meaningful, intelligible action exists outside the social structures. Social structures, however, are not pre-existent to action. As human action unfolds over time as a "durée" (Giddens 1984: 3), actions and structure recursively condition each other and presuppose each other (cf. Sewell 1992: 4). Giddens conceives this reciprocal influence as consisting of *practical consciousness* (incorporated, pre-conscious practices), counterposed to *discursive consciousness* (abstractable, conscious practices). Hence, while social practices (re)produce social structure, they simultaneously retain the potential to introduce structural modification, transformation and social change.

At first glance, the Giddens' *structuration theory* may seem to resemble Bourdieu's notion of habitus. However, there are some significant differences between them. The most important is the different modes of subjectivity operationalized by the two treatments of agency. While Bourdieu maps a subject that cannot but act via her habitus, Giddens' subject is always (more or less) self-reflectively processing her own actions (through *discursive consciousness*), thus employing some degree of rationalism. Giddens calls this the *stratification model*: the "treating [of] the reflexive monitoring, rationalization and motivation of action as embedded sets of processes" (Giddens 1984: 3). Rationalization in this sense does not correspond precisely with intentionality (though it does include aspects of [sociological notions of] intentionality), but refers to the fact that agents maintain "a continuing 'theoretical understanding' of the grounds of their activity" (ibid: 5).

While Giddens' approach to agency does not exclude intentionality, he emphasizes a somewhat distinct capacity, which he identifies as the *could have acted differently* faculty, which is the "capability of doing those things in the first place" (ibid: 9).[11] By further distinguishing between intentional and unintentional actions,

11 Giddens' notion refers to the concept of *contingency* that has been employed in various contexts, by Niklas Luhmann (1984) as contradictory, fragmentary or ambivalent information, or according to Makropoulos (1997) the 'otherwise possible'.

and intentional and unintentional consequences, Giddens reveals a manifold of social agency: whereas an intended action might not necessarily lead to an intended consequence, an action with a low intentional goal might give rise to highly significant consequences. Giddens illustrates this with the example of a man who switches on a light in order to light the room; in consequence, a prowler is caught by surprise, runs off, is captured by the police and spends a year in prison (1984: 10). Switching on the light was a low intentional goal, close to an automatic action, that in the first instance resulted in the intended goal, namely to light the room. The second consequence, which had a highly significant consequence (especially for the hapless prowler), was completely unintended by the man in the first place. Not limited to individual actors, social institutions also generate unintentional consequences: while it is the intention of educational systems to educate and impart knowledge to children, an unintentional consequence of institutionalized comprehensive education is the (fortunate) removal of available schoolchildren from the labor market (cf. Giddens 1995: 21). The German trinomial education system, to take another example, is intended to equip all children for an equal range of hypothetical life possibilities, though dividing students according to vocational, trade and professional preparation has been faulted with fostering inherited social status instead.

According to Giddens, obtaining social agency and being "able to act" means "being able to intervene in the world" to influence or change current states of affairs (Giddens 1984: 14). Some agents have more possibilities for action than others, depending on social circumstances such as available communications technology, their acquired knowledge, social status and/or commodities and their gender, nationality or race. Agency, in other words, is differentially distributed across society according to power, since "action logically involves power in the sense of transformation capacity" (ibid: 15). Analyzing human agency necessarily requires examining the balance (or imbalance) of power between processes of social reproduction and of social transformation (cf. ibid: 22). Arrays of power are also a primary focus of Michael Foucault. In contrast to Bourdieu, who conceptualizes power relations between the different fields and different forms of capital, and to Giddens, who constructs his theory around powerful agents nevertheless restricted by structural parameters, Foucault detaches power from individual actors and structure, claiming that "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1998: 95). Power, in Foucault's sense, is a product of knowledge, since it is constituted through forms of knowledge derived from particular discourses. Power operates through social practices (including language), which create meanings that become fixed and regulated discursively. A discourse not only regulates what can be said accordingly, but also regulates who can speak, when, and where. Moreover, power in its relation to knowledge functions as "a form of power implicated in the production of subjectivity" (Barker 2000: 179).

Foucault has been criticized for his rather vague explanation of how power emerges (cf. Barker 2000: 81, Ahearn 2001: 116). For instance, he does not explain why particular discourses are taken up by some subjects and not by others, or how disciplinary discursive practices' formative power over subjectivity is, or can be, resisted. Many of these critiques imply a particular conception of power, assuming it to be a negative force that is imposed by hegemonic groups and institutions in order to subjugate social minorities. One has to admit, however, that Foucault's notion of power is neutral; while it is neither in the 'nature' of discourses to be repressive or resistant, they can be both:

> Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it (…). We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart (Foucault 1998: 100ff.).

In his later work Foucault offers an explanation of how subjects are "led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire" (Foucault quoted in Barker 2000: 81). Discourses construct subject positions, which enable relative forms of agency. Provided the adequate discourse, agency can be thus regarded as a discursive creation, constituting a productive (rather than exclusively repressive) disposition of power.

The productive aspects of power or agency are also of interest for the concept of creativity as employed by Hans Joas (1996). He uses term *creativity of action* to refer to the productive emergence of new actions. Joas aims to clarify what he calls George H. Mead's "rather hidden" attempts to formulate the idea of creative subjectivity (ibid: 177). According to Joas, action never comes out of nowhere, but occurs in particular situations, which in fact constitute the social action undertaken within them. The concept of creative action is another attempt to shift analysis away from theoretical paradigms premised on intentionality, toward operationalizations of situationality:

> This approach completely changes the meaning of intentionality, inasmuch as here action is no longer understood as the realization of ends set beforehand, in contrast to the theories of rational action and their transformation in the sociological theory of action. For the pragmatist, the setting of ends is not an act of consciousness that takes place outside the contexts of action. Rather the setting of an end can only be a result of reflection on resistances encountered by the variously oriented behaviour of a life form whose world is always ready schematized in a practical manner prior to all reflection (ibid: 177f.).

Joas distinguishes intentionality from the forms of subjective speculation or play, described by earlier pragmatists:

> For Mead and Dewey, the capacity of invention, that is creativity, has as its precondition the self-aware employment of and disposal over the form of action known as play, the conscious 'playing through' in imagination of alternative performances of action (ibid: 178).

Situations are meaningful by their very occurrence and as actions unfold accordingly, facilitated by agency. In Bourdieu's words, agents have to face "unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (Bourdieu 2009: 72) which they evaluate via their particular dispositions. Joas replaces dispositions with action routines, schemata, and scripts (see chapter 4.3) which help individuals to cope with upcoming situations (cf. Joas 1996: 2 ff.). While this approach shows some similarities with Bourdieu's habitus, it is more flexible and less socially constraining. Whenever a situation seems new, or presents a new component (in regard to media reception it might be a new format, a unknown genre or a new aesthetic style), actors adapt to the new situation through creative evaluation, allowing them to act accordingly (cf. Göttlich 2006; Joas 1996). Recurring evaluation of new situations in reference to past situations also serves to localize actions within the broader context of everyday life and everyday experiences (cf. Göttlich 2006: 46). *Creativity of action* for Joas is thus not concerned simply with acts of free creation, but with the flexible and creative handling of situations. Through this creative process, existing norms and values can be reinforced or resisted. This flexibility is characteristic of praxeological approaches to social action and agency.

Practice theories locate human agency in the broader social context. Agency is therefore always related to context, whether in terms of Bourdieu's *habitus* and the *practical sense* or through Giddens' more self-conscious *stratification model*, allowing for a *discursive consciousness*. The latter treatment of agency articulates a more independent and powerful subjective engagement with agency, since humans maintain a *continuing theoretical understanding of the ground of their activity*. As Giddens demonstrates, agency is not necessarily intentional, but agency does rely on what he calls the *could have acted differently* sensibility at its core. Nor is agency considered a fixed possession to be obtained (or not) by members of society, although agency is related to and determined by resources such as *knowledge resources*, a theme significantly developed by Foucault with his theoretical relation *power/knowledge*. Perceiving power and agency as interrelated concepts allows both to be considered without the ethical bias with which these ideas are often encumbered (e.g., as sources of oppression, coercion and/or liberation). The pragmatic conception of *creativity of action*, finally, introduces the notion of *radical contextualisation*, which is a re-framing of agency in terms of pragmatically meaningful situations rather than the intentions of actors, revealing their ability to adapt social actions based on past experience to new situations with creative agency.

2.1.3.2 Excursion: Performativity and Media Reception

The praxeological and creative apprehension of social action is premised on four basic principles: action is subjectively grounded in a self-reflective discursive consciousness, actions are socially embedded through their contextualized situationality, as well as through the corporality of the body engaged in action, while intentionality is rejected as a useful analytic component of social action. Göttlich has suggested that performativity (2006: 21) provides the functional, conceptual coherence relating social life and media experiences, constituting "the *practical mediatedness* of media reception and everyday life" (ibid: 123). Göttlich's work focuses on media forms that allow a high degree of participation *in* the media format, introducing agency to the wider study of media.

Performativity (or performance) has long been considered in terms of communicative agency. Performativity can refer to speech acts, as formulated by Austin's *How to do Things with Words* (1975), and to what Habermas calls "communicative action" (Habermas 1997). Illocutionary acts such as "it's a girl" are central to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1991). According to Goffman (1986a) we perform different social roles by changing our discursive frames, which enable us to play various identities, depending on the situation. Therefore we can be good friends, miserable gardeners, caring parents and unpleasant bosses all at the same time (cf. ibid: 14). Communicative speech acts have been the subject of literary theory (e.g. Iser 1993, 1994a, Genette 1994), and criticised by postmodernists for its consensual nature: the participants of speech acts (and other communicative actions) do not necessarily strive for agreement, since the imbalance of power relations disturbs the ideal speech act situation. If media reception is considered as a communicative act between the viewer and a particular media text, agency becomes part of this act as well.

According to Habermas (Habermas 1997: 34), it is possible to reduce propositions to their societal constituents in any given instance in which they are uttered, since every proposition, in the moment of interaction, references the lifeworld which enables its cognitive reception by addressees. Language therefore is a medium of communication by which actions are coordinated. Judith Butler (Butler 1991) takes this argument even further. Speech acts, according to her, not only employ societal constituents, but also reproduce them. Thus, the speech act "it's a girl" results in *becoming* a girl. Language, in this sense, is an instrument for creating social constructions such as gender. The individual subject acts and performs in a language constructed space wherein she aligns and takes on prefigured roles (role taking), which determine acts of identification (role making). Identities are constructed by performative acts that point towards the "staged, contingent construction of meaning" (ibid: 205).

An application of the performance model to media can be found in Fischer-Lichte (2007). She describes how "Untitled Events"[12] shift attention from role and character to the performance of actions in space, which she calls the *space of action*. With the general abandonment of the formal conventions of traditional theatre and stage arrangements, clear actor and spectator role relationships were lost. With the development of new forms of theatre and performance, new spaces of action emerged which broke down barriers between spectators and the creative actions of the actors, in terms of both the active construction of meaning and performance itself (ibid: 283). More radical re-arrangements, such as Baol's improvisational, theme-based 'Forum theatre,' recast spectators as co-actors. The consequence of this transformational process (from character to action) is the comprehension of performance as a mode of 'becoming of signs', as corporality, as perception, and as performance, the process of representation via body and voice with a physically present audience (cf. ibid: 299). Outside the space of theatre, however, acting individuals in everyday life do not perform strategic actions; everyday social actions can be more realistically considered as attempts to perform successfully within emerging interaction situations (cf. Pranz 2009: 61). By translocating the agentic internalizations of communicative acts (Habermas, Butler) brought under consideration by performing subjects (Goffman), and focusing on corporeality (Fischer-Lichte) in the scope of media reception and communication, we can begin to see how a special setting is constituted wherein actors are enabled to perform creative social actions through the process of media reception.

2.1.4 Identity and Symbolic Interactionism

2.1.4.1 Identity

The question remains, how individuals subjectively perceive their own capacity for pragmatic social agency. Observation and analysis of marco-social processes cannot adequately account for the subjective processes involved in identity building and social positioning. Mead's conception of the self, based on individual self-recognition of one's social "self" as an object of one's own actions, underlies our conception of social identity, which is grounded in a person's self-awareness of their own agency (cf. Mead 1973). Goffman's description of the "stigmatized self" can be seen as an example of the antithesis of identity formation in this sense, illustrating the effect that being robbed off agency has on the self (cf. Goffman 2007). This view of the self and of identities presupposes a postmodern notion of the social self. Individuals are no longer conceived as Kantian unified selves, as the self

12 The "Untitled Event" was a theatre performance initiated 1952 by John Cage.

is seen as a fragmented and versatile construct, allowing for multiple identities to be developed. Empirically, practice and agency have different implications and possibilities relative to each model of subjectivity/self. While the enlightened subject acts intentionally and in rational terms of self-interest, the sociological subject – while acting intentionally – leaves rational choice and self-interest behind in favour of norm-oriented acting. The postmodern fractured and decentred subject, then, performs multiple identities "according to how subjects are addressed or represented" (Barker 2000: 178) and is thus able to avail herself of various possibilities for agency, depending on the character of the identities available to her from her positioning in a particular situation.

Defining identity as "discursive constructions, which change their meanings according to time, place, and usage", Chris Barker accordingly asks:

> In particular, if subjects and identities are the product of discursive and disciplinary practices, if they are social and cultural "all the way down", how can we conceive of persons as able to act and engender change in the social order? Since subjects appear within these arguments to be "products" rather than "producers", how shall we account for the human agency required for a cultural politics of change (ibid: 179).

The idea of the powerful subject, either as the inhabitant of a social structure, or – in the case of media communication – as an active audience member, is central to the agency approach. It is also at the core of cultural studies methods. John Fiske (1997), drawing on Roland Barthes' *writerly* and *readerly* texts (Barthes, 1990), argues that it is the power of 'the people' that reframes cultural value. Stuart Hall (1980) accords audiences the capacity to deploy different reading (or viewing) strategies, namely *dominant*, *negotiated* and *oppositional* modes of media reception, conceding that recipients are not dominated by the media/producer coalition. However, following the outlined approach, acting subjects are determined by circumstances and habitus. Agency is thus "the socially constituted capacity to act" (Barker 2000: 182), neither according to free will nor completely determined by social structure, but by means of what Giddens called a *could have acted differently* faculty.

In this sense, agency is not dependent on set intentions but on emergent choices. It cannot be conceived as absolute, free agency, but as a contextual mode of action, which fortifies and advances the formations of our identities. Bourdieu, Giddens, Joas, and Foucault all focus on the complex relations and imbalances of power – essentially due to the fact that access to resources is not equally distributed among people, and is determined by many societal factors. However, as Barker crucially points out, *it is only via agency that we come to perceive ourselves as social subjects and are able to construct our identities.*

2.1.4.2 Symbolic Interactionism

The process of identity formation depends on interactions with other individuals. Most fruitful in the context of my focus on media experiences is the model of symbolic interactionism introduced by Herbert Blumer in 1937. Assuming that the world we inhabit is symbolic and that everything we perceive has symbolic meanings, objective observation alone proves to be insufficient as a method with which to access meaning. Only interpretation can provide access to the meaningful world. Following his teachers George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, Blumer formulates three premises to describe the interrelations between individuals and society:

> The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything that the human being may note in his world – physical objects, such as trees or chairs; other human beings, such as a mother or a store clerk; categories of human beings, such as friends and enemies, institutions, as a school or a government; guiding ideals, such as individual independence or honesty; activities of others such as their commands and requests; and such situations as an individual encounters in his daily life. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blumer 1969: 2).

Meaning, for Blumer, is a social product arising from the "process of interaction between people" (ibid: 4). Society, on the other hand, is formed by the symbolic interaction of people. Different social situations therefore frame processes of interaction differently, providing things with different meaning from situation to situation. Meaning thus does not inhere in objects, but is constructed by the interactional process of communication between two individuals in a situation. People take on roles according to the specific situation. Consistent with Mead's and Goffman's theories of role-taking and framing, these roles are not arbitrary, but are staged according to the more or less fixed social roles in our lives (such as boss, gardener, mother, friend, etc.), which operate as social schemata that help us reduce complexity and cope with interactive situations; for Blumer, role-playing is the "sine qua non" of communication and successful symbolic interaction (ibid: 10). By taking an 'outside view' of situations, we are abled to actively take on social roles, and "we form our objects of ourselves through such a process of role-taking" (ibid: 13).[13] As a result of this outside view, we see each other the way other people see

13 Mead explains this as follows: "If the given human individual is to develop a self in the fullest sense, it is not sufficient for him merely to take the attitudes of other human individuals toward himself and toward one another within the human social process, and to bring that social process as a whole into his individual experience merely in these terms: he must also, in the same way that he takes the attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another, take their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which, as members of an organized society or social group, they are all engaged; and he must then,

us. Yet, role taking is not limited to self-conception but is also essential to communication. Only when one imaginatively takes on the role of one's counterpart, thus reproducing her perspective, can meaning be ascribed. Krotz emphasizes on the importance of this circumstance:

> (…) the central importance of the imaginative role-taking and perspective of the other should be pointed out, wherein social and individual experience, and thereover development, are implicit. In as much as with my own imaginative role-taking of the other, who, in turn, tunes his communicative action on me, something else, hitherto only suggested, happens: I experience myself via the perspective of the other one. In conjunction with the inner discourse between the own and the assumed role, and as well via a linguistic distancing, humans develop an awareness of the situation and self-awareness.(Krotz 2008: 40f.).[14]

For Blumer this conception of the acting human being has far-ranging consequences. While former approaches conceptualized the human being as driven by "organic drives, need-dispositions, conscious motives, unconscious motives, emotions, attitudes, ideas, cultural prescriptions, norms, values, status demands, social roles, reference group affiliations, and institutional pressures" (Blumer 1969: 14), symbolic interactionism regards the acting human as "having to deal with what it notes":

> The capacity of the human being to make indications to himself gives a distinctive character to human action. It means that the human individual confronts a world that he must interpret in order to act instead of an environment to which he responds because of his organization. He has to cope with the situations in which he is called to act, ascertaining the meaning of the actions of others and mapping out his own line of action in the light of such interpretations. He has to construct and guide his action instead of merely releasing it in response to factors playing on him or operating through him. He may do a miserable job in constructing his action, but he has to construct it (ibid: 15).

Symbolic interactionism establishes a basis for a deeper understanding of media communication, since media texts constitute symbolic material that has to be interpreted through a communicative act of role-taking. Symbolic interactionism thus not only provides an understanding of the impact of media reception on the formation of identity, but has also informed models of parasocial interaction, as will be elucidates in chapter five.

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by generalizing these individual attitudes, of that organized society or group itself, as a whole, act toward different social projects which at any given time it is carrying out, or toward the various larger phases of the general social process which constitutes its life and of which these projects are specific manifestations" (Mead 1967: 154f.).

14 Original cit.: "(…) zum Zweiten soll auf die zentrale Bedeutung der imaginativen Übernahme der Rolle und Perspektive des Anderen hingewiesen werden, in der soziale und individuelles Erleben und darüber auch Entwicklung angelegt sind. Denn bei meiner imaginativen Übernahme der Rolle des anderen, der sein kommunikatives Handeln ja ebenfalls auf mich abstimmt, geschieht noch etwas, bisher nur angedeutetes: Ich erlebe mich selbst in der Perspektive der Anderen. Zusammen mit dem inneren Diskurs zwischen der eigenen und der übernommenen Rolle ergibt sich so, dass der Mensch, wohl auch über eine sprachliche Distanzierung, ein Bewusstsein von der Situation und ein Selbstbewusstsein von sich entwickelt" (Krotz 2008: 40f.).

2.2 Object-related Agency

2.2.1 Technoscience: From ANT to Attribution

With the emergence of computer technology new fields and disciplines of science and research emerged. While computer science and information technology (IT) are interested in the functions and mechanisms of technology, Science, Technology & Society Studies (STS) – including Human-Computer Interaction Studies, Artificial Intelligence Studies and Technoscience Studies – engages questions concerning human-machine relationships.[15] Against the background of ongoing convergence processes, which impact (among many other factors) the technological aspects of media communication, engaging this burgeoning technoscientific literature is necessary.

In the developed world (and especially in MDC countries), people constantly use, play and interact with IT devices. In the morning we watch the news on our computer-technology based HbbTV. On the way to work we check e-mails on our smart phone, add some notes on the tablet PC, or look out for a new song for our *Spotify*-library. At work we use the computer to work and to interact via Intra- or Internet with colleagues, clients or customers. The SatNav directs us around traffic jams, and in the evening we watch our favourite TV-series provided by an online platform, while simultaneously spending some time in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, since 2004). The aircraft that we board is partly controlled by an autopilot. Our high-tech society relies on computation and automation. Setting aside computer-based technologies, we still face a world made of machines – the refrigerator, the radio, the car, industrial production in general – in the modern world we no longer primarily engage in face-to-face interactions and manual labour, instead we use machines in nearly every part of our lives: we communicate on the phone, via e-mail and 'chat' interfaces, and we seek distraction, information and entertainment increasingly mediated through electronic technology.

Actor-Network Theory

What then is the role of technology, and of objects in general, in the course of human action and interaction? Actor-Network Theory (ANT) elaborates a most radical position, formulated initially by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. The main aim of ANT is to explore the relations within a network (a heterogeneous group) consisting of many and (potentially) any participants (Latour 2007, 2011). The most basic premise of ANT posits a generalized symmetry between humans and objects. In ANT there is no presumption of who the agent is; instead, each

15 This list does not claim to be exhaustive. Other fields such as *Computer-mediated communication* (CMC) or the *Theory of Computation* could, among others, certainly be added.

situation is examined contextually in order to identify the actor(s). This presupposes, in the first place, that the role of the actor is indistinct, "it is never distinct who and what is acting, when we are acting, since no actor on stage is acting alone" (Latour 2007: 81).[16] Given a situation, where a balustrade is keeping a child from falling down the stairs, the balustrade can be considered to be playing a part in the situation. While this is a rather simple example, one can imagine more complex situations (such as driving a car), where agency is not fixed or limited to one participant within the network, but switches between car and driver:

> (…) the basic metaphysics of the actor-network is that we should think of science (and technology and society) as a field of human and nonhuman (material) agency. Human and nonhuman agents are associated with one another in networks, and evolve together within those networks (Pickering 1996: 11).

This radical symmetry is at first glance attractive, since it abandons the traditional human-centric approach; it thus is "post-humanist" (Pickering 1993: 561). In doing so, however, ANT also abandons all former conceptions of social action and agency. As outlined above, agency and identity are interdependent constructs. In performing agency, we perceive ourselves as agents and constantly construct and reconstruct, affirming and modulating, our identity/ies. While there are well-founded ethical as well as philosophical debates on the agency (and even self-awareness) of animals, the prospect of self-reflective, self-conscious objects – be it a chair or a complex programmed robot – seems far-fetched and unlikely. While some aspects of ANT, such as situationality, are compelling – though not new, as Joas' model of the *Creativity of Action* (1996) reveals – the principle of generalized symmetry is not convincing.

However, there are other technoscientific approaches that aim to include technology within a sociological perspective. When considering agency as a mode of reception across media boundaries, it might be helpful to consider these perspectives for further theorizing. Many actual media experiences do not consist of classic 'linear' viewing, but involve some kind of technology-based user interaction. Symbolic interactionism provides the basis for considering parasocial interaction by reconceptualising communication between human actors and the symbolic material of a media text. Some media situations, however, create the illusion of a direct interaction with a machine. Imagine a computer-generated character in an online video game who is able to react adequately to the actions and inputs of the player. How can this situation be conceptualized? For ANT, there is no difference between the described situation and, for instance, a game where two (human) players play against each other. Parasocial interaction suggests regarding the situations *as if* the computer-generated character were actually human. The problem ramifies the pre-

16 Translation by S.E.

sumption of a parasocial interaction which the recipient is fully aware of as the 'as if' of the situation. But in the constellation described, the player does not necessarily know if the game character is human or computer generated and neither is the computer-generated character a self-conscious counterpart.

Distributed Agency

Two proposed concepts attempt to cope with the outlined problematic: the concept of *distributed agency* (Rammert/Schulz-Schaeffer 2002; Rammert 2007, 2008) and the *acteur-fiction* (*Akteursfiktion*) model (Werle 2002). Behind the idea of distributed agency lies the concept of "action units", consisting not only of one agent but comprising "the many loci of agency" (Rammert 2008: 78). The example of an aircraft will again serve for clarification: if we assume the flight from A to B is an action unit, then who is the agent? Firstly the pilot, who is in charge of the airplane, but also the co-pilot (who steps in), the radio-operator, the flight-controller, the airline (who decided on the route and details of the flight), the passengers (who booked the flight), etc. (Rammert/Schulz-Schaeffer 2002: 42 ff.; Rammert 2008: 79). Additionally, there is a whole array of technical factors which are necessary for the action to take place at all. This illustration serves to exemplify that modern technology necessitates a shift away from a binary perspective of active people/passive objects towards a view of the:

> (…) relations of interactivity between two heterogeneous sources of activity (…), [where] actions are fragmented in many pieces and delegated to myriads of pro-active and cooperative agents on the back stage where they perform parts of the action by mimicking human agency and interpersonal interaction (Rammert 2008: 65).

Rammert and Schulz-Schaeffer explicitly distance themselves from ANT approaches and related techno-centric perspectives. But the question remains how high-tech technology can be integrated into action models developed well before the advent of multi-agent systems, intelligent co-operative information assistants, BDI-agents[17], or auto pilot systems, i.e., hybrid socio-technical constellations designed to "optimize the distribution of agency across driver, vehicle, electronics, programs and navigation systems" (Rammert/Schulz-Schaeffer 2002: 16 ff.).[18] Considering the great range and variation of distinct technologies, the authors suggest a graduated model of agency in place of human/machine dualism. Their broader

17 The listed devices are exemplary of the sophisticated software and hardware agents that actual computer technology is capable of, such as *Bots* or *Internet Robots* (software applications that run automated tasks on the internet), *IAs* (*Intelligent Agents*) (systems that are able to perceive their environment and independently take certain actions that are goal oriented, e.g. in the form of an automated online assistant) or BDI-Agents ("belief-desire-intention" software models, usually part of a multi-agent system, developed on the basis of Micheal Bratman's *Belief-Desire-Intention* model).

18 Translation by S.E.

concern is not how technology influences society or vice versa, but rather how human and non-human elements interact and evolve in these socio-technological constellations. Objects (and here especially highly developed 'intelligent' machines) are thus accorded some agency, though not necessarily at the level of human agency.

A similar view is taken by Andrew Pickering who conceptualizes artefact agency as *material agency* that is "*temporally emergent* in practice" (Pickering 1993: 564; emphasis in the original). Human intentions and goals are constantly transformed in practice,[19] through a "contingently formulated accommodation to temporally emergent resistance" enacted by objects (ibid: 580); this is the "mangle of practice", where "human and material agency are reciprocally and emergently intertwined in this struggle" (Pickering 1996: 21). With this in mind, action and agency have to be redefined. Arguing along lines similar to ANT, Pickering's model of distributed (and graduated) agency makes no a priori assumptions about the identity of agents, but looks at action *in media res*. Because single action units are not defined from the perspective of an agent (since the agent is not a priori distinct), actions are consequently not viewed as singular activities, but as action contexts (cf. Rammert/Schulz-Schaeffer 2002: 41 f.). How do different types of agents (humans, high-tech machines, objects) perform conjointly with different levels of agency?

Rammert explains:

> Human-technology relations change when technology are turned into more active agents and agencies. The instrumental relation that is typical for using tools in craft work and using machines like tools is fading for only stage-managed as an illusion. The push on the button, the foot on the break, and the click with the mouse trigger the activities between several agencies that more or less guide the machine, delegate the information finding to Google's search algorithms, or confront the user with unexpected offerings and assistance because the profiling programs have made the users into an object. The user of this type of advanced technologies is neither the master of the machine nor the slave of the technological system, neither the sovereign of his actions nor the victim of media's manipulation. A different concept is needed to decide the question of mastery or manipulation, case by case. The wider concept of inter-agency replaces the narrow one of instrumental use and of the perversion of means and goals (Rammert 2008: 74).

The first step to clarify on the graduality of agency is to provide a scale for the levels of agency of technical objects. According to Rammert, object-related agency ranges from *passive* (instruments moved completely from outside, e.g., a hammer), to *semi-active* (apparatus with one self-acting aspect, e.g., a record-player), to *re-active* (systems with feedback loops, e.g., a thermostat-controlled heating system), to *pro-active* (systems with self-activating programs, e.g., a personal digital assistant [PDA]), to *co-operative* (distributed and self-coordinating systems, e.g., mobile robots, smart homes) (ibid: 69). Agency then can only be ascribed to the last two levels – pro-

19 While people are conducting an action they might become aware that the intended goal cannot be reached. They thus might abandon the goal altogether, formulate a new or modified goal that can be achieved by the action, or change the action accordingly. The variety of possibilities is far too great as to be predictable.

active and co-operative – since here a flexible interaction can influence the 'behaviour' of the system. As we shall see, this approach shares many similarities with techno-centric graduated interactivity approaches (see chapter three).

So far, the model of distributed agency articulates a theory of *in situ* interactivity comprising the shared participation of humans and (highly developed) technological artefacts. Rammert adds a second layer, the scale of agency: he posits three levels of agency: *causality* (low-agency, instrumental actions), *contingency* (requiring the capacity to react in one way or the other and to choose between several options), and *intentionality* (rational and reflexive action) (ibid: 75). Each level ranges from low to high, allowing agency to be a much more flexible concept than an *either/or* construct. Returning to more complex examples, such as an aircraft or computer-generated video game character, the various loci of action with their different levels and ranges of agency can now be deconstructed layer by layer. The first level is the ability to make a difference, something machines are able to do, at least at a low level. The second level refers to the ability to react to changing conditions. A computer-generated character exemplifies how a machine can perform with agency at the level of contingency. The third level is the most presupposing of all levels, since it refers to intentionality and reflexivity. However, considering that interaction between humans involves the assumption of an *implied intentionality* (we think that our counterpart acts intentionally without being able to know it), we recognize that intentionality is an idealized, imaginary category. Within the concept of *distributed agency* human agency becomes negociable, thus being revealed as a historisized construct. Because agency, in this view, is attributed, technological agency becomes a plausible and compelling social category. Thus, it is not merely a question of identifying technological agency as such, but becomes a matter of determining "which technics in which action contexts and in which social conditions are defined and treated as (co-) agents and how this perspective and mode of action and its ramifications are implement themselves" (Rammert/Schulz-Schaeffer 2002: 56).

While the concept of *distributed agency* is much more sophisticated theoretically than ANT, it does not entirely overcome its shortcomings. *Distributed agency's* crucial contribution was its unmasking of intentionality as an attributed and speculative faculty. *Praxeology*, however, demonstrates that rather than intentionality, it is *influence* and *meaning making* which are at the heart of human agency. As long as machines are not empowered with the ability to make meaning, they cannot be considered as equal partners in agentic interaction.

Acteur-Fiction

Another important concept for my argument is the 'acteur-fiction' (*Akteursfiktion*) model elaborated by Raymund Werle (2002). Though Werle's approach to agency is otherwise unlike that of Rammert and Schulz-Schaeffer, he does develop the notion

of attribution further in significant ways. In line with 'humanist' models of social action, he defines action as intentional. Agency is thus a "strategic actor-competence" (ibid: 120). Being strategic means being able to choose from a range of possible actions which are purposive (goal oriented) and which anticipate the actions and reactions of other actors (ibid: 125). Werle's institutionalist perspective focuses on collaborative agency. Nevertheless, several interesting points are made concerning agency in general. There is evidence that people actually treat their technological devices as if they were conscious subjects: they talk to them, shout at them, or even feel disappointed by them sometimes – a phenomenon which applies especially to the use of personal computers. As with the mode of parasocial interaction (see chapter five) where recipients act *as if* the moderator is addressing them in a face-to-face conversation (while the moderator performs her role accordingly), users of technologically complex devices similarly interact parasocially with their machines. The machine – be it a car, a personal computer or Apple's *Siri* – is treated as a real interlocutor, while the users remain well aware of the fact that they are interacting with technology. This is the *acteur-fiction*, the *as if* of a parasocial interaction situation (cf. ibid: 128). Schulz-Schaeffer (1999) calls this the "Enactment-Perspective" (ibid: 410). It refers to the necessity that the social impacts of practice (of and with technological artefacts) have to be brought into effect. Not the artefact itself, but the practice enacted with it is a more fruitful focus for furthering our understanding of agency. Where ANT promotes a generalized symmetry (between humans and objects), acteur-fiction is interested in the social relevance practices display. Thus focus is shifted from the particular differences or similarities of humans and machines onto actor attribution:

> The more or less meritorious attempts to identify objective similarities between humans and machines, and at the same time confine the realm of genuine humaneness, thus justifying the actor similarity of technical artifacts remain insufficient if technology is to be endogenized as a variable in socio-theoretical models. What makes technical artifacts similar to individual or collective social actors is not the identity of action processes. *Rather actor traits– also intentionality – are attributed to technology* (Werle 2002: 133f.; emphasis in the original).[20]

With the concept of attribution, Werle strives to overcome the contradictions and weaknesses inherent to the ANT model, shortcomings that also emerge in attenuated form in theories of distributed agency. A machine simply has no consciousness and no sense of identity. It might exhibit some sort of intentionality and goal-orien-

20 Original cit.: "Die mehr oder weniger verdienstvollen Versuche, objektive Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Menschen und Maschinen zu identifizieren und gleichzeitig den Bereich genuiner Menschlichkeit einzuengen, um auf diese Weise die Akteurähnlichkeit technischer Artefakte plausible zu machen, bleiben unzureichend, wenn Technik als Variable in sozialtheoretischen Modellen endogenisiert werden soll. Was technische Artefakte individuellen oder kollektiven sozialen Akteuren ähnlich macht, ist nicht die Identität von Handlungsvollzügen. *Der Technik werden vielmehr Akteureigenschaften – auch Intentionalität – zugeschrieben*" (Werle 2002: 133f., emphasis in the original).

tation, however, as the works of Bourdieu and Giddens demonstrate, intentionality is not the most analytically salient aspect of agency. Only by processes of attribution (which in fact are also inherent to social interaction) can technological artefacts be treated as full-value partners in an action situation. Because artefacts are treated *as if* they actually were agents, agency is effectively attributed to them. "Thus, technology is no agent but can act as if it was one" (ibid: 134).

2.2.2 An Anthropological Perspective: Agent/Patient Relations

Gell's work (1998) approaches art and agency in the tradition of British social anthropology. He conducted fieldwork in Melanesia and tribal India focussing particularly on ritual art. Gell shares affinities with the theories introduced above through his concern with the formation of interactive nexuses (or networks) between these art works (objects) and their viewers. His focus is thereby not limited to the agency of the onlooker, and emphasizes the power of the artwork to exercise influence over viewers, and to perform with (secondary) social agency. His approach can thus be considered an anthropological version of the actor-network approach.

Gell's understanding of art is not based on aesthetics or visual communication – in fact he vehemently rejects ideas of semiotics (although much of his argumentation does align with them). Instead, art is viewed as a relation of actions and interactions; it is not understood in terms of signs, symbols and communication, but in terms of abduction:

> In place of symbolic communication, I place all the emphasis on agency, intention, causation, result, and transformation. I view art as a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it. The 'action'-centred approach to art is inherently more anthropological than the alternative semiotic approach because it is preoccupied with the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process, rather than with the interpretation of objects 'as if' they were texts (ibid: 6).

While the present work employs a distinct approach to art and cultural products in general, regarding them, in contrast to Gell, in terms of signs, meanings and communication, the point here is to examine more deeply Gell's understanding of the attribution of agency to art objects. According to Gell, art objects or works of art are equivalent to social agents. Furthermore, agency can be attributed to persons and objects which initiate causal consequences:

> Agency is attributable to those persons (and things …) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events. An agent is one who 'causes events to happen' in their vicinity. As a result of this exercise of agency, certain events transpire (not necessarily the specific events which were 'intended' by the agent). Whereas chains of physical/material cause-and-effect

> consist of 'happenings' which can be explained by physical laws which ultimately govern the universe as a whole, agents initiate 'actions' which are 'caused' by themselves, by their intentions, not by the physical law of the cosmos. An agent is the source, the origin, of causal events, independently of the state of the physical universe (ibid: 16).

These assumptions result in the conception of human agents as *primary agents* and art objects as *secondary agent* (which accords with Pickering's human and material agency distinction). Objects of art are not self-sufficient but form conjunctions with human associates (cf. ibid: 17). These conjunctions can be considered as social relationships. Like Latour, Gell identifies social situations where objects appear as agents – the breakdown of a car that is taken personally, or the doll which is cared for as if it were a living creature. And in line with Werle, he stipulates that the attribution of agency is only realised *ex post facto* (ibid: 20). We can only assume agency cognitively, that is, we interpret actions as intentional through hindsight. Thus, a doll is not a "self-sufficient agent", but "a mirror, vehicle, or channel of agency, and hence a source of such potent experiences of the 'co-presence' of an agent as to make no difference" (ibid: 20).

But how exactly does Gell construct cognitive transmission of agency to objects? Objects – here art objects – refer to a prototype, "either by representing it iconically (…) or by an indexical association" (Layton 2003: 452). In reference to semiology, art objects are defined as indexes (with icon as a subcategory of indexes).[21] Via abduction, agency can be transmitted to objects. Abduction is understood as

> (…) the grey area where semiotic inference (of meanings from signs) merges with *hypothetical inference* of a non-semiotic (or not conventionally semiotic) kind, such as Kepler's inference from the apparent motion of Mars in the night sky, that the planet travelled in an elliptical path (Gell 1998: 14; emphasis in the original).

Abduction indicates the formation of hypotheses on the basis of probabilities, which are given by certain icons, indexes, and signs. But via abduction, he argues:

> (…) that the *index itself is seen as the outcome, and/or the instrument of, social agency.* A "natural sign" like "smoke" is not seen as the outcome of any social agency, but as the outcome of a natural causal process, combustion, so, as an index of its non-social cause, it is of no interest to us. On the other hand, if smoke is seen as the index of fire-setting by human agents (burning swiddens, say) then the abduction of agency occurs and smoke becomes an artefactual index as well as a "natural sign" (ibid: 15f.; emphasis in the original).

21 Following Charles Sanders Pierce and his theory of semiotic, Gell identifies an index as a "natural sign" (smoke as index of fire, of the agency of the person who lit the fire). An icon has some of the characteristics of the thing it denotes (such as a picture of a dog). Symbols, in Piercean sense, are only arbitrary associated to the object it denotes and is established by convention; thus language consists mostly of symbolic signs.

In this approach, Werle's attribution thesis and Pickering's material agency meld. All three approaches employ a cognitively grounded model to explain how people are able to conceive objects as agents. While this position proves to be problematic, as the discussion of techoscientific approaches has shown, Gell adds another aspect of agency to the debate: according to him, being an agent implies that agency necessarily acts upon something or someone, a counterpart to the agent identified as the patient. The idea of a counterpart is only occasionally found in other approaches, for instance in Giddens' brief reference to "negative agency" (Giddens 1984: 9). In Gell's work, this transitive dimension is explored in greater depth and is conceptualized as the agent/patient relation. Being a relational concept, agency in this sense presupposes non-agency: "for any agent, there is a patient, and conversely, for any patient, there is an agent" (Gell 1998: 22). However, the positions are not fixed. Every patient is a possible agent and every agent a possible patient. And even further: patients are not necessarily entirely passive in that they can resist action – and this resistance must be overcome by agency.

As new technologies emerge and increasingly pervade our lifeworld and everyday lives, new concepts allowing fuller consideration and appreciation of the social role of technology have become necessary. Simply equating technology with humans, however, seems an inadequate solution. Likewise, the concept of distributed agency – although providing for more sophisticated analysis – has not proven entirely convincing. A simple but more compelling approach was provided by Werle's attribution approach to technologically mediated agency. As in face-to-face social situations, where individuals assume their counterparts to be conscious, focused and goal oriented, so too do some situations encourage similar forms of attributed agency to be socially granted to artificial objects. Finally, Gell emphasized an utterly neglected side of agency: the circumstance of being acted upon. Gell calls this the agent/patient relation. *When analysing different media situations, attribution and agent/patient relations will become relevant.*

2.3 The Psychology of Human Agency

Having elucidating agency/society relationships, power/agency relationships, identity/agency relationships and object/agency relationships above, this section will now turn to inner perspectives, focusing on the psychological processes of agency. What significance does agency hold for the performers themselves? How does it touch on aspects of the cognition, emotion and motivation of individual agents? And what empirical evidence is there for agency?

Agency is not only at the heart of sociology but also of psychology, since "the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality on one's life is the essence of humanness" (Bandura 2001: 1). In Metcalfe and Greene's view, agency is central

to humanness: "The idea that people are agents – that they are in control of themselves – is at the heart of our legal system, is focal for our definition of sanity, and is central for our understanding of ourselves as human beings" (Metcalfe/Greene 2007: 184). Analogous with object-related approaches, agency, in the field of psychology, is largely understood in terms of intentionality. Following Bratman and his notion of "planning agents" (1999: 1), Pacherie (2007) emphasizes intentions defined as the specifications of actions (which are classified according to their future-directed intentions, past-directed intentions and motor intentions), while Bandura (2001, 2006) stresses intentionality as one of the core properties of human agency, and Metcalfe and Greene point to the "fascination" we have with the notion that we, "intentionally make things happen by our own actions" (Metcalfe/Greene 2007: 195). This strong emphasis on intentionality is problematic from the perspective of the sociological approaches discussed above, which fault how focusing on intention critically reduces the conceptual scope of agency. In the context of traditional psychology, a tendency to defer to biologism becomes apparent. In order to dissociate arguments from biologically determinist perspectives (e.g., behaviourism), however, it seems that Bandura, with certain caveats, adopts the paradigm of intentionality as a distinguishing factor between behaviour and action. The strong emphasis on intentionality in the following section is therefore more of an exercise in theoretical differentiation than assimilation.

Most notably for the purpose of this paper is the work of Albert Bandura (e.g. 1993, 2001, 2006) and his conception of agency. Not only is this work compatible with sociological approaches – in fact he draws heavily on major sociological theories – but his socio-cognitive theory also provides a sophisticated and profound treatment of the psychological significance, manifestation and impact of agency. His conception of subjectivity embeds the individual in society, rejecting notions of the subject as a singular, satellite being. Following the interpretative school of sociology, he similarly rejects the duality of agency and structure: while people have the power to shape and build their worlds and to influence their environment, they also "in turn, organize and influence [other] people's lives" (Bandura 2006: 164). To be an agent in Banduras words is:

> (…) to intentionally make things happen by one's action. Agency embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place. The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times (Bandura 2001:2).

This agentic power, however, by no means suggest a free will or a form of absolute agency. The "free will is an expression absolutely devoid of sense", as Wegner puts it, and the conscious will is an illusion (Wegner 2002: 323). People have to adjust to social and environmental conditions and to the numerous wants and needs of other agents.

In order to be capable of agency, it is necessary to perceive oneself as an agentic subject who can act in "generative, creative, proactive, and reflective" and "not just reactive" ways (Bandura 2006: 167). Self-consciousness is the primary mode of agentive subjectification. Cognition, language and conscious thought processes constitute a higher-level subjective order, while neuronal processes form a second order system. The example of the car can again serve as illustration: while driving a car, the driver is (usually) aware of where to go, the surrounding traffic, and of some basic mechanical operations such as using the breaks or accelerating. She is not, however, aware of the underlying neuronal processes that enable her to actually perform the bodily action of pressing her foot on the break or moving her arms (ibid: 167). We do not have control of our neuronal processes in performing bodily acts, yet we do anticipate and reflect on the outcomes of our activities. This capability of self-reflection presumes a sense of one's own self. It is only when a child realises that she is capable of manipulating objects, and notices the difference between being manipulated and actively manipulate something else, that her agentic selfhood is developed and solidified. Selfhood then "embodies one's physical and psychological makeup, with a personal identity and agentic capability operating in concert" (ibid: 170). This development does not occur in an isolated space, but is influenced by family members, friends, peer-groups, neighbours, and the larger society. As parents react to the phases of a child's development by fostering an infants' agentic capability, so later in life interactions with others form identity and agentic continuity:

> As an agent, one creates identity connections over time (…) and construes oneself as a continuing person over different periods in one's life. Through their goals, aspirations, social commitments, and action plans, people project themselves into the future and shape courses their lives take. Personal identity is therefore rooted not only in phenomenological continuity, but also in agentic continuity (ibid: 170).

Bandura identifies four core properties of agency: *intentionality*, *forethought*, *self-reactiveness* and *self-reflectiveness* (Bandura 2001: 6 ff.). *Intentionality* refers to action plans and strategies, (of individuals or groups), *forethought* refers to the "temporal extension of agency" (e.g., anticipatory self-guidance, anticipated outcomes), *self-reactiveness* is the construction of appropriate courses of action, and execution of those actions, and *self-reflectiveness*, is the ability to monitor one's own thoughts and actions and reflect on them, which is considered the "most distinctly human core property of agency" (Bandura 2006: 164–5). The self-reflectiveness of agency is also conceptualized as perceived self-efficacy (e.g. Bandura 1993, 2001: 10 f.; Shields/Brawley 2006; Skinner/Chapman/Baltes 1988). All four categories sum up agency. However, it is perceived self-efficacy that is most central:

> Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions (…) Perceived self-efficacy occupies a

> pivotal role in the causal structure of social cognitive theory because efficacy beliefs affect adaption and change not only in their own right, but through their impact on other determinants (Bandura 2001: 10).

The agentic resources one obtains are constructed from external circumstances and from inner self-regulatory factors – how one has developed "competencies, self-regulatory-skills", the belief that one's own efficacy "can generate a wider array of options that expands the freedom of action, and are more successful in realizing desired futures, than those with less developed agentic resources" (Bandura 2006: 165). Self-efficacy as a core property of computer gameplay has been conceptualized by Klimmt (2006) and will be treated in more detail in chapter four.

Different factors for the formation of agency are employed by Pacherie (2007). According to her, agency is influenced and formed by two mental states: the awareness of action and the sense of agency. Awareness of action consists of the mechanism of action specification that can be divided into the formation of future-directed intentions (F-intentions), present-directed intentions (P-intentions) and motor intentions (M-intentions) (cf. ibid: 3). Regarding intentionality as not exclusively oriented towards the future allows the inclusion of intentions with non future-intended actions. When we cause appreciable results without planning or intending them, or when we cannot recall our prior intentions, we still might obtain the subjective feeling of agency. Following Pacherie, the second mental state that facilitates agency is the sense of agency. The sense of agency consists of proprioceptive awareness, awareness of intentions, of intentional binding, the sense of initiation and the sense of control. While the sense of control is a complex phenomenon that cannot be grasped easily,[22] it is the most crucial factor for the sense of agency. Pacherie comes to the conclusion that these various identified factors which play a role in the formation of agency indicate that the sense of agency is a *preconstruction phenomenon* and not a *post hoc phenomenon.*

The theoretical implications of agency call for empiric evidence. Agency, as the general capability to act is no externalized, objectifiable entity. It rather is a

22 Pacherie (2007) explains: "It seems rather that the sense of control can take different forms and varies along several dimensions and should be conceived as a compound of more basic, partly dissociable experiences. First, it should be noticed that talk of sense of control for an action can refer to two rather different kinds of experience. On the one hand, it may refer to the extent to which one feels in control of an action, where at one extreme everything happens exactly as expected and the agent feels in full control of his action and at the other everything goes astray and the agent feels completely powerless. On the other hand, by sense of control we may refer to the sense that one has to exert control to generate and maintain an appropriate action program despite perturbating factors. Normally control in this latter sense is felt as effortful: the more one has to exert control to attain one's goal, the more effortful the action feels" and she goes on: "The sense that one is in control is therefore often, I suggest, a compound of three more basic experiences: the sense of motor control, the sense of situational control and the sense of rational control. In all three cases, the degree to which one feels in control depends on a comparison between predicted and actual states, where the better the match the stronger the sense of control" (ibid: 19).

sense, an awareness, that manifests in various and different forms of actions. There is indeed some empirical evidence of the sense of agency that will be elucidated hereafter. The example of driving a car indicated that people are not aware of all action they conduct. Only the first-order system is accessible for the conscious. But actions and agency are distinct. While actions are the course of conducting an act, agency is the general ability to do so. The same applies to the awareness of actions and the sense of agency for our own actions. Not every action, though, implies agency and furthermore, people are not necessarily aware of their own agency when taking out actions (e.g. Bandura 1993: 134; Metcalfe/Greene 2007: 184 f.; Pacherie 2007: 12). Observing one's own agency presupposes that people are capable to conduct "metacognitive assessments" (Metcalfe/Greene 2007: 184) about their own agency. What seems obvious and self-evident is controversially debated, since people, as a fact, are commonly unaware of their metacognitive activities. This circumstance is supported by many studies that allude to the phenomenon of misattribution of agency. Feelings of agency thus can be amplified by preceding commands, agency can be (miss-) attributed to somebody else (e.g. 'alien hand syndrome') or the attribution of agency happens *post hoc*.[23] On the other hand, there are approaches that reject the idea of a pos-hoc attribution and argue for preconstruction-perspective on agency (e.g. Pacherie 2007).

Effects of misattribution do play a major role in cases of schizophrenia or other forms of identity disorders, but, in a moderated form, they also apply to people without identity problems. But the difficulty of people pinning down their own agency makes it also difficult for empirical research to assess valid measures:

> One reason for the lack of research on the parameters that affect feelings of agency with normal people under conditions not contrived to provoke illusions may be the perception, among researchers, that the feeling that the 'I' is causing something to happen (…) is tricky to pin down (Metcalfe/Greene 2007: 186).

In other words, while people have little introspective appreciation of their own cognitive processes, they definitely have feelings of being *in* or *out of* control in certain situations in their lives. Wegner states that:

> Although the proper experiments have not yet been done to test this, it seems likely that people could discriminate the feeling of doing from other feelings, knowing by the sheer quality of the experience just what has happened. The experience of willing is more than a perception of something outside oneself, it is an experience of one's own mind and body in action (Wegner quoted in ibid: 186).

In search for empirical evidence Metcalfe and Greene conducted an experimental study that should clarify in the metacognitive ability such as judging the own agency and judging the own performance. The setting consisted of a simple computer

23 For further information on the *post hoc theory* see Wegner (2003).

game that allowed the players to collect objects with a movable box. Four variables were employed: turbulence (of the collectable objects), speed, magic (forcing better or worse results), and auditory feedback. In the setting, it was supposed that agency emerges via the correspondence of intentions and the actual result. The variables turbulence and speed indicated that people had generally a good sense of their own agency. Via magic and auditory feedback the environment was manipulated and distorted. Interestingly, the test persons still preserved their good sense of judgment, when the environment was distorted via magic, no matter if for the benefit or at expense of the probands. The variable magic caused at any case a decrease in control, but even if the result were excellent, people knew that it was not due to their own doing. Agency was generally perceived as something positive: people not only realize that they have power to act as agents but they also like being in control: "People like feeling in control and seek out instruments that afford this feeling" (ibid: 184).

So far, agency has been conceptualized as *personal agency* or *individual agency*. When individuals do not have direct control over the course of every day life, either due to their personal condition (e.g. being a child) or due to circumstances (e.g. maintaining no decisive position) they employ *proxy agency*, the socially mediated mode of agency (e.g. Shields/Brawley 2006). This can either occur institutionalized (approaching a political representative) or unregulated (asking somebody for help). More focus, however, has been laid on the mode of *collective agency*, since this form is considered to have political and social impact. By collective agency, it is assumed, people can change the course of politics, society and history. In performing collective activities such as actively joining the political petition platform *Campact*,[24] people compile their resources thus enhancing their power and impact. Successfully acting out collaborative actions then allow for a high sense of agency.

In media reception all modes of agency are conceivable. Most obviously, the control of a game character or the telephone vote for a candidate of a reality show affords the mode of personal agency. However, in converging and connected media environment also modes of collective of proxy agency might be conceivable.

2.4 Discussion

Recurring on sociological and psychological concepts when engaged with media studies is not at all a novelty. Indeed, many concepts in communication studies, television studies or film studies deduce from pragmatism and social action theory (see chapter four). The reason to strive after these classic models again is, however, substantiated: a second look on the origins of self-evident theories unveils that

24 https://www.campact.de.

agency always has been part of sociology and social action approaches. Positioning media communication as a form of social action is crucial to understand the basic mechanisms of media experiences.

The concept and elaboration of agency itself was, due to the lack of proper labeling in Germany, soon annexed by the terminology of action. Only owing to the great popularity of the concept of agency in the English-speaking world that traversed disciplines and finally entered Germany via the backdoors of *Akteurtheorie*, ritual studies, and ANT, the rehabilitation of agency dawns. Most fundamentally, agency is defined as *the general ability to perform actions* implying the *capability of could have acted differently*, while actions are the actual processes of acting. Agency in social life has furthermore been defined as a *creative capacity that depends on individual and socio-cultural resources that can be amplified and improved on and that is anchored and incorporated in the human body*. Following Giddens, agency presupposes a general *discursive consciousness*, which does not imply that we are always aware of our intentions and goals. In fact *intentionality* as constitutive factor of agency remains one of the big inconsistencies. The paradigmatic shift towards the *homo symbolicus* enhances on meaning making and influence instead of intentionality. In this sense, agency is not necessarily intentional, rather it is the *could have acted differently* which is at the core of agency. Nor is agency a fixed possession someone obtains. It is related and determined by resources such as *knowledge resources*. While *intentionality* thus remains a possible aspect of agency, *situationality, processuality, influence* and *meaning making* are marked as core aspects of agency and as the centre categories of the present work.

Among others, Mead and Goffmann provide a model as to understand *how we come to perceive ourselves as self-conscious agents, as being capable to act*. Through our conceptions of the self/s, we are bedight with various possibilities of agency depending on the character of identity one positions in a certain situation. Agency thus is not dependent on intentions but on *choices*. It is not conceptualized as *absolute* or *free agency* but as contextual mode of action that fortifies and advances the formations of our identities, a process that is embedded in the complex relation and imbalance of power and dependent on access to resources which are not equally distributed. *It is via agency we do perceive ourselves as subjects and come to construct our identities.*

These processes proceed in a world that is more and more characterized by a mediatisation in communication, information or entertainment. Among the many approaches that try to embrace the technologisation and mediatisation of society in regard to agency, the *theory of attribution* as outlined by Werle (2002), proves to be the most convincing. In this view, computers and any other artificial artefacts are not capable of agency, but we can act *as if they were.* Following the terminology of *parasocial interaction*, they can be considered to obtain *para-agency*. In this context, the relationality of agency has been emphasized by Gell (1998): when acting out agency, there is always somebody or something on whom/that agency is acted upon. This is referred to as the *agent/patient relation.*

Praxeologic approaches have indicated that agency does not primarily occur on a personal level, but is also a social, collective mode. The transformative powers of agency are mainly discussed with regards to its socio-political impact. Psychological approaches (e.g. Bandura 2006) have accordingly suggested differentiating between *personal/individual agency*, *proxy agency* and *collective agency*, thereby providing an important indicator for a differentiation of levels of agency in the process of media reception. Bandura (2001) emphasized thereby on the *role of self-efficacy* as central for agency, while Pacherie (2007) laid the focus on the *sense of control* as crucial aspect of agency. The feeling of effecting change and being in control is thus central for the perception of agency, but at the same time hard to grasp, since people are usually not aware of their metacognitive activities.

3 Interactivity and Play

At the core of this thesis is the question of agency as a specific form of media experience. As outlined at the outset, agency is considered as an alternative, more adequate approach that substitutes aspects of interactivity. That is not to say that interactivity is a dispensable factor, but as a concept it has been linked repeatedly to mediality, disregarding the user's activities. Moreover, interactivity is a term charged with ideologies, and often regarded as the panacea of modern media. It promises a surplus value to 'classic', 'linear' media such as film and television and is considered to turn traditional structures of media production, distribution, and use upside down. Video games are widely considered as paradigmatic interactive media, distinguished from 'traditional' media by interactivity, thus providing the positive pleasure of agency for their players. More often than not, however, the nature of interactivity and agency is not further explicated. Some authors have queried the supposedly distinguishing characteristics entirely (e.g. Manovich 2001; Mertens 2004; Newman 2001). Manovich rightly claims that "all classical, and even more so modern, art is 'interactive' in a number of ways" (ibid: 56), and that interactivity should not be equated with physical interaction. Yet, complicating the situation, characteristics of play, interactivity and agency are not always used selectively. The sentiment remains that play and interactivity somehow belong together, while film and media are narrative, non-interactive and linear media. In the following, the concepts of interactivity and play will be elaborated as socially embedded activities independently of each other, enabling a more differentiated perspective of their nature and their relations to different media forms.

3.1 Interaction and Interactivity

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines interactivity as (1) "mutually or reciprocally active" and (2) "involving the actions of a user; especially of relating to, or being a two-way electronic communication system (as a telephone, cable television, or a computer) that involves a user's order (as for information or merchandise) or response (as to a poll)",[25] thereby again highlighting the focus on the technical infrastructure of interactivity conceptions. The frequently quoted proposition of

25 Merriam Webster Encyclopaedia: http://www.merriam-webster.com (17.02.2013)

S. Eichner, *Agency and Media Reception,* Film, Fernsehen, Medienkultur,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-04673-6_3, © Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2014

Sheizaf Rafaeli (1988), that "interactivity is a widely used term with an intuitive appeal, but is an underdefined concept" (ibid: 110), still holds true today. Kiousis (2002) complains, "the academic usage of 'interactivity' is marginally inconsistent at best" (ibid: 371). At this point I want to recapture some of the more influential approaches to and models of interactivity and propose a user- and action-oriented model, that of agency in media reception. As the following chapters on film viewing, television use and game playing will demonstrate, agency is much more suitable to encompass audience activities than is interactivity. Nevertheless, some models of interactivity do indeed provide useful and elaborate concepts of how to understand certain media, media structures and interrelations between recipients and media. Relevant for the present study are three traditions of interactivity research. The first stems from sociological concepts of interaction, the second from communication and media studies, and the third from computer science.

In sociology, interaction refers to social action of at least two agents that is based on reciprocal and interrelated awareness. It is distinguished from general action insofar as the participating agents are continuously oriented towards each other; they are mutually interdependent (see chapter 2.1.1). According to Max Weber, "an action is 'social' if the acting individual takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber quoted in Jäckel 1995: 463).[26] Thus, interaction is a specific form of social action that needs the *presence* of another individual (ibid: 463). As elucidated in chapter 2.1.4 on symbolic interactionism, the processes of interaction between two people are based on symbolic material (such as language or signs) that is interpreted by the participants in the conversation. For a successful interaction process, it is necessary to employ the perspective of the other participant via role taking. Habermas (1997), who identifies *communicative action* as one form of social action that is characterized by the *aspiration of accordance* between two or more individuals, also emphasizes the reciprocal recognition: accordance does not equal approval, but each of the actors has to anticipate the other's wants and desires in order to establish a communicative act (cf. ibid: 387 ff.). Because the ongoing process of communication is a constant challenge for individuals, it is assumed that various forms of complexity reduction take place in order to manage everyday live and its communicative defiance. Chapter 4.3 introduces schemata and scripts as a way to master complex communication processes between films and spectators.

Media communication differs from personal interaction and communication. First, to put it simply, traditional mass communication media such as film and television do not allow the same fundamental reciprocity that face-to-face interaction provides. Second, media and mass media communication is less obligatory than face-to-face interaction. Dominick (in Jäckel 1995) exemplifies the gradual decrease

26 Translation by S.E.

of courtesy from face-to-face interaction via a telephone call to the point of watching television. While it is usually easy to switch off the TV at any time, it is exceptional to hang up the phone – usually in anger – on somebody, and it is socially unacceptable suddenly to leave your conversational partner on her own (even if there are situations which are less sanctioned than others) (cf. ibid: 466). With reference to the relationship between communication and interaction the differences between face-to-face interaction and mediated interaction can be generalized as follows: interaction presupposes communication while communication (and here especially media and mass media communication) does not necessarily need interaction to take place (cf. ibid: 467). Rafaeli's model of communication supports this view:

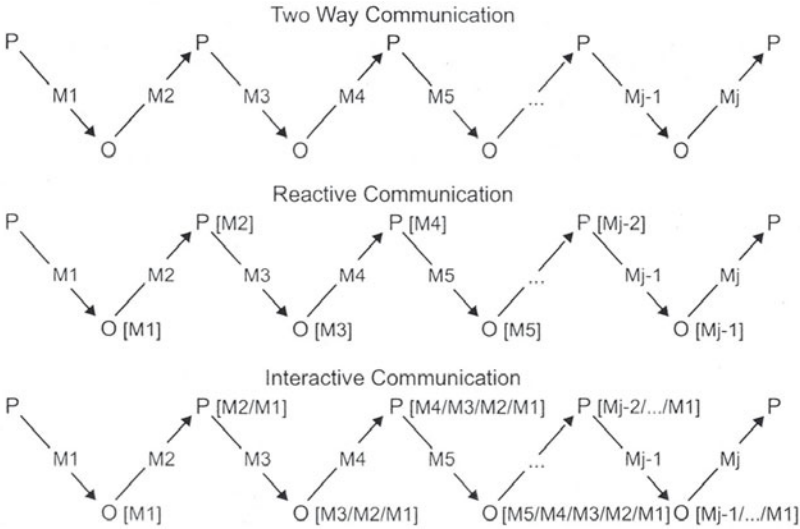

Figure 1: Communication model by Rafaeli (1988: 120)

Interaction here is conceptualized as a special mode of communication, "predicated on the issue of responsiveness" (Rafaeli 1988: 118). While at the first level (two-way communication) no interaction takes place in the communicative act (person P transmits a message M1 to person O who does not refer back to message M1, but sends out a new message M2 and so forth), the second level features reactive or quasi-interactive communication (the previous message M1 is addressed by message M2 without including te relationship of the communicative history). On level three interactive communication occurs: all previous messages relate to even earlier messages

P (M2/M1) or O (M5/M4/M3/M2/M1) and the positions of person P and O, respectively sender and receiver, are utterly disposable.

Following this sentiment, mass media communication only very rarely allows for interaction to take place. Obviously the terminology and concept of media interaction usually tries to grasp something else. Wolfgang Iser's 'gaps' (Iser 1994), the paradigm of the active audience (e.g. Fiske/Hartley 1988; Fiske 1995; Hall 1980) or Horton and Wohl's (1956) well known concept of parasocial interaction all construct an interactive situation without 'real' personal interaction. Text-recipient interaction, on this understanding does not, as a rule, refer to reciprocity but to meaning making. The miscellaneous ways of media communication are further explicated in chapter 4 (From Media Use to *Doing Media*). Adhering to the concept of face-to-face interaction as a matrix for media communication means that one does not consider the specificity of media communication in general. Strictly speaking, however, when the "immediate reciprocity of orientation" (Jäckel 1995: 471) in media communication is missing, it is not interaction in a sociological sense. Jäckel expounds:

> The notions of interactivity that are articulated [in media and communication studies; author's note] often bypass the sociological significance of interaction. For this reason alone it is of advantage in sociology not to employ the noun 'interactivity'; this already indicates a difference. But obviously interactivity means something else than what is described for instance with 'media use as social action' (ibid: 471 f.).[27]

In consideration of the aim of this work, the question arises if agency, as a mode of reception, requires direct reciprocity in order to occur. As argued, the concept of a direct feedback channel simulating human-to-human, face-to-face, interaction as the template or ideal of interaction proves to be inadequate and misleading. It neglects crucial aspects of *doing media* in terms of meaning making and lifeworld connection. Neither does it consider the convergent tendencies that allow recipients to participate in various ways and via various devices with media texts. Technically conditioned reciprocity alone does not offer a satisfying approach to interactivity in media communication. More adequate, in relation to media, reciprocity emerges out of the intentionality of media communication: the media text embodies the implied reader and reader formations while the recipients seek to understand the media text. This communicative act (Habermas 1997) establishes not only accordance but also interaction. This process of interaction between a media text and its audience empowers cognition, interpretation, and meaning making. Rightfully, Rafaeli states

27 Original cit.: "Die Vorstellungen von Interaktivität, die artikuliert werden [in der Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaft; Anmerkung der Autorin], gehen häufig weitgehend an der soziologischen Bedeutung von Interaktion vorbei. Schon von daher ist es von Vorteil, dass man in der Soziologie nicht das Substantiv 'Interaktivität' verwendet; das lässt bereits eine Differenz erahnen. Interaktivität meint aber ganz offensichtlich auch etwas anderes als das, was beispielsweise mit 'Mediennutzung als soziales Handeln' beschrieben wird" (Jäckel 1995: 471 f.).

"the conversational ideal is not a reliable concept across judges, cultures, or time" (Rafaeli 1988: 117).

Media and communication studies are interested in the way media and recipients interact and communicate with each other. It has been outlined in which ways media communication differs from interpersonal communication.[28] Media reception in general has been conceptualized as text-recipient communication. In computer science, on the other hand, interactivity is conceptualized as the communication between recipient and system (or machine). Computer science (as well as communication studies, in part) extends the model of human-to-human interaction towards human-to-machine interactivity or human-computer interaction (cf. Goertz 1995: 478; Jensen 1998: 190). This perspective inherits a focus on technology, regarding computer technology with its incorporated feedback channel as genuinely interactive. Firstly, interactivity here refers to a special form of media-audience communication – namely human-computer interaction. Yet, as has been frequently mentioned, technique-oriented approaches to interactivity might capture a certain potential of interactivity, but they do not tell us anything about the way this potential is actually used. There is no differentiation between the technical potential of a medium and its actual application (cf. Jensen 2008: 35). This is an important point since it not only hints towards media with no apparent technical feedback structure but also towards the myth of the "hyperactive audience" (ibid: 35): the conception of an audience eager to exploit the medium's interactive potential entirely as it is forwarded by media producers and utopian media theories. Secondly, as argued in chapter 2.2 on actor-network approaches, the equalization of personal interaction with human-to-machine interaction is tricky, since machines "lack the ability to recur on contextual everyday knowledge thus being unable to make meaning of the not-told, not explicitly mentioned" (Dinkla 1997: 15).[29] And thirdly, in the age of media convergence, there are no strict boundaries between media with or without feedback channel. The topic is fluent thus questioning the concept of interactivity as a whole. Accordingly, Johan Fornäs (1998) conceptualizes interactivity as gradual, present generally in all media, and as establishing interactivity in the interrelation of media and user/audience rather than as a characteristic of a medium itself:

> Every medium is to some extent technically and culturally "interactive", by inviting its users to an activity that includes an interaction both between the medium (both the machine hardware and the textual software) and its users and between those different individuals who are connected by the mediation in question. That interactivity consists of a series of choices – of commodities, channels, programmes, genres, texts, times, places and reception modes. It implies a co-production – of knowledge, meaning, experience, and even new cultural expression in those words, gestures or

28 Beyond the focus of this work is the related concept of computer-mediated communication (CMC) elucidated for example by Geser (1989), Walther (1996), Schultz (2001) and Prommer and Vowe (eds.) (1998).

29 Translation by S.E.

> songs that might spring from this media use. It also includes the shaping of specific intersubjective social relations – of interpretive communities and other interactions between different media users (ibid: 31).

There do already exist exhaustive and feasible surveys on approaches towards interactivity (e.g. Goertz 1995; Jäckel 1995; Jensen 1998; Neuberger 2007). For the purpose of this study, I will only briefly summarize technology-oriented approaches before digging deeper into content- and audience-oriented approaches to interactivity.

3.2 Summarizing Techno-centric Approaches to Interactivity

Görtz (1995) and Jensen (1998) both trace their concepts of interactivity back to Everett M. Rogers (1986) who conceptualized interactivity as a gradual model. Rogers emphasized the user-orientation of his approach: not the technical device, but the mode of usage is considered to define the grade of interactivity. Despite this claim Rogers model remains techno-centric and does not provide sufficient criteria to position media on an interactivity scale. Similar models are provided by Schrape (1995), and in a more sophisticated version by Steuer (1992). While Steuer's aim is to conceptualize presence in virtual environments, he develops a model that combines the factors of vividness and interactivity. Aligned with Rogers, Steuer claims that interactivity does not relate to technology but to content that nonetheless is determined by the underlying technological possibilities. It is "defined as the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time" (ibid: 84). However, his claim is not matched by the categories he identifies, all of which refer to the technological characteristics of the media. For Steuer the fictional Holodeck of *Star Trek* (1966–2005) together with William Gibson's 'Cyberspace' (*Neuromancer*, 1984) represent the highest degree of presence in combining a high level of vividness with a high level of interactivity. While this model is auspicious, it shares with the model of Rogers and Schrape the problem of ambiguity due to its classification principles. Heeter (1989), Görtz (1995), and Jensen (1998) also provide dimensional models of interactivity. Heeter defines six categories that are, however, not entirely selective.[30] Görtz develops a model with four categories that – while in many respects useful – again regard interpersonal face-to-face conversation as the ideal of interactivity.[31] Jensen

30 Carrie Heeter identifies six dimensions of interactivity: (1) selectivity, (2) the amount of effort users must exert to access information, (3) the degree to which a medium can react responsively to a user, (4) the potential to monitor system use, (5) the degree to which users can add information to the system that a mass, undifferentiated audience can access, (6) the degree to which a media system facilitates interpersonal communication between specific users (Heeter 1989: 222–225).

31 These are: (1) the degree of choices available, from 0 – no choices possible to 4 – video games, (2) the degree of modifications available, from 0 – no modifications possible to 3 – any modifica-

(1998) adds a "Cube of Interactivity"[32] that is based on an understanding of interactivity as "a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content or form of the mediated communication" (ibid: 201).

While the models presented might all be criticized for different reasons – such as the inaccuracy of categories (e.g. Rogers and Heeter), or the recourse to face-to-face interaction as the ideal of interactivity (e.g. Görtz), they all focus – despite their claim to audience-orientation – on the technical qualities of the different media. Jensen (2008) provides an interesting definition and differentiation: "interactivity is the potential of a technical medium or a communication situation that facilitates interactive communication, the process of interaction" (ibid: 43 f.).[33] Following this thought, interactivity is a technique-based characteristic only. It would be coincidentally implicit that the audience is rather untouched or unconnected from interactivity. While Jensen offers no satisfying way out of this contradiction, I want to suggest that this touches on the crucial issue of interactivity: it is only a satisfying concept in terms of media qualities. Bucher (2004) correspondingly differentiates between approaches that are recipient-oriented and those that are feature-oriented (referring to the technical platform). However, neither Jensen nor Bucher can provide a strategy capturing the significance of interactivity for the audience – the emotional consequences, the proposed possibilities that are recognized and worshipped, the influence on the meaning that is constructed, or if it influences the mode of experiencing a media text. In respect of these listed features, the techno-centric concepts of interactivity all fall short. I will therefore consider recipient-oriented approaches of interactivity for further discussion.

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tion possible such as adding content, (3) the quantitative size of possible choices and possible modifications, from 0 – no selection possible to 4 – endless possibilities (e.g. word processing program), (4) degree of linearity/non-linearity, from 0 – fully time-dependent to 4 – time-independent (e.g. hypertext) (Goertz 1995: 485–488). Later Görtz adds the category quantity of users with modification possibilities to include the possibility of call-in television (level 2) up to personalized internet services such as online route planners (level 3) (Goertz 2004).

32 Jensen's "Cube of Interactivity" consists of four dimensions: "(1) Transmissional interactivity, as a measure of the media's potential ability to let the user choose from a continuous stream of information in a one way media system without a return channel and therefore without a possibility for making requests (e.g. teletext, near-video-on-demand, be-your-own-editor, multi-channel systems, data-casting, multicasting) (2) Consultational interactivity – a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user choose, by request, from an existing selection of pre-produced information in a two-way media system with a return channel (video-on-demand, online information services, CD-ROM encyclopedias, FTP, WWW, Gopher, etc.) (3) Conversational interactivity – a measure of a medium's ability to let the user produce and input his/her own information in a two way media system, be it stored or in real time (video conferencing systems, news groups, e-mail, mailing lists, etc.) (4) Registrational interactivity – a measure of a medium's ability to register information from and thereby also adapt and/or respond to a given user's needs and actions, whether they be the user's explicit choice of communication method or the system's built-in ability to automatically 'sense' and adapt (surveillance systems, intelligent agents, intelligent guides or intelligent interfaces, etc.)" (cf. Jensen 1998: 201 ff.).

33 Translation by S.E.

3.3 Perceived Interactivity

It is interesting that the label *interactivity* is commonly used in correlation with feature-oriented approaches. This may well result from the origins of the terminology in computer science. Communication and media studies either recur on the paradigm of the active audience or refer to computer-mediated communication (CMC). While there are indeed many separate studies on interactivity, there is no broad consensus, sometimes not even an awareness of interactivity as a field of audience studies. Bucher (2004) suggests that a reduction of interactivity to just the recipient's perspective is deficient. Interactivity, in his view, is the combination of the context of use, offer (technique and content wise), and technology (ibid: 137). This inclusion of the technological possibilities, the textuality of a media text and the cognitive and emotional activities of the audience seem to be a promising approach. While general aspects of the active audience will be met in chapter 4, in the following those approaches of recipient-oriented interactivity will be deployed that seem most suitable for the development of the agency approach.

In the view of McMillan and Downes (2000), "the individual's control over the message seems to be a key determinate of interactivity" (ibid: 175). Thus it is not the medium's characteristic but the activity of the recipients that comes into focus. For these authors, interactivity is not marked by outer characteristics but by inner processes resulting in the concept of *perceived interactivity* (cf. Downes/McMillan 2000; McMillan 2002; McMillan/Hwang 2002; further developed by Guohua Wu 2005). Actual or 'real' interactivity is defined by "focusing on features of a medium, or capabilities of creating interactive content or messages, or potential for interaction in general" (Wu 2005: 30). The potential of traditional media such as newspaper, television or radio is thus considered to have low interactivity potential, since they are constructed as one-way media, while the internet or video games are considered to have high potential for interactivity, since they contain a feedback channel.

Wu explains:

> Nevertheless, actual interactivity can only provide the potential to allow for interaction (…). The degree to which "actual interactivity" is fulfilled depends largely on the perceiver. In other words, whether and to what extent, such higher potential for interaction in interactive media can be realized to benefit both interaction participants is largely determined by how interactions are perceived. Hence, perceived interactivity appears to play an important role in shaping actual interactivity's influence on interaction participants (ibid: 30).

By means of studying usage of websites, Wu identifies three dimensions by which the psychological state of perceived interactivity can be captured: (1) perceived control over navigation of the site, pace or rhythm of interaction, and the content being accessed, (2) the perceived responsiveness of the site-owner, navigation cues and signs, and persons online, and (3) the perceived personalization of the site with

regard to acting as if it were a person, acting as if it wants to know the site visitor and acting as if it understands the site visitor (ibid: 30 f.). The study showed that the perceived interactivity indeed mediated the effects of 'real' interactivity with regard to the manner towards the website. This concurrently implies that the actual interactivity becomes insignificant in relation to the attitude towards the website. The study thus provides empirical evidence for perceived interactivity as part of the whole phenomenon of interactivity.

So far, this work has followed the view that actual interactivity (the potential of the medium in general) must be distinguished from perceived interactivity (the psychological state of the recipient). However, Wu's three dimensions and the developed items are too specific to be applicable to video games or films.[34] His concern is enabling optimized online advertising and not to consider media reception in general. Still, the overall directions of his outcomes are useful and advantageous. In this view, it is not the medium-based interactivity that matters, but *the feeling of being able to interact*. Kiousis (2002) reasons that research on interactivity tends towards more perceiver-based models of interactivity, emphasizing the separation between technology and user. He suggests the consideration of the structure of technology, the communication context and the user perception. He summarizes:

> Interactivity can be defined as the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many), both synchronously and asynchronously, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third-order dependency). With regard to human users, it additionally refers to their ability to *perceive* the experience as a simulation of interpersonal communication and increase their awareness of telepresence (ibid: 372; emphasis in the original).

Perceived interactivity thus has many of the same implications as agency. The *feeling of being able to interact* matches the very basic idea of obtaining the *general ability to perform actions*, to matters of *control* and to *self-efficacy*. It concurrently alludes to the fact that interactive characteristics of a medium or a media text have to be separated from the perception of the recipient. Interactivity, in the sense in which it is often employed, thus does not refer to a mode or quality of reception. Perceived interactivity, on the other hand, will be considered an integral part of agency as a mode of reception.

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34 Wu provides a nine-item scale to measure the perceived interactivity of websites: (1) I was in control of my navigation through this website, (2) I had some control over the content of this website that I wanted to see, (3) I was in total control over the pace of my visit to this website, (4) I could communicate with the company directly to ask further questions about the company or its products if I wanted to, (5) The site had the ability to respond to my specific questions quickly and efficiently, (6) I could communicate in real time with other customers who shared my interest in this product category, (7) I just had a personal conversation with a sociable, knowledgeable and warm representative from the company, (8) It seemed like the website was talking back to me while I clicked through the website, (9) I perceived the website to be sensitive to my nutritional information needs (Note: The scale ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) (Wu 2005: 38).

3.4 Social Action and Play

Neither in its traditional significance, nor in its modulated sense of perceived interactivity, was interactivity related exclusively to games. Interactivity thus does not premise play to occur. Yet it might well be the other way around, as Friess suggests (Friess 2011: 29). A closer look at the characteristics and specificities of play will clarify the subject.

Play is considered a fundamental aspect of video games, emphasizing characteristics such as rules, real time, and 'as if'. The concept of play has been employed by many scholars to differentiate the medium of video games in a fundamental way from the supposedly narrative media of film and television (e.g. Aarseth 1997; Juul 1999). In contrast to these stipulations, play has long been conceptualized as a characteristic of mass media communication in general (e.g. Stephenson 1967), as a crucial aspect of film experience (e.g. Grodal 1997, 2009; Ohler/Nieding 2001; Wuss 2007, 2009), and as a constituting element of television game shows and reality shows (e.g. Hallenberger/Foltin 1990; Holmes, 2008). Film viewing, television watching and game playing all employ modes of play, as chapter 4 will show. Yet, how is play conceptualized? Play refers to an activity, while game refers to the characteristics of a concrete manifestation of play. Caillios (1958/2001) and Scheuerl (1994) illustrated exhaustively that the differentiation between play and game can be found in many cultures (though not in the German language, for instance). This conventional differentiation also facilitates the theoretical differentiation of the two entities.[35] Theories on play can be found in many academic disciplines, for instance, philosophy (e.g. Kant 1798/1997; Schiller 1793/1997), linguistics (e.g. de Saussure 1967/2001; Wittgenstein 1960), post-structuralism (e.g. Derrida, 2009), literary theory (e.g. Iser 1993), pedagogy (e.g. Fritz 1995; Oerter 1999; Piaget 1993), cultural anthropology (e.g. Caillois 1958/2001; Huizinga 1938/2001), and many other disciplines. In the following, I want to map play as a special form of social action, which constitutes the *homo ludens*.[36]

"Play is older than culture," states Huizinga (1938/2001: 9) referring to the fundamental significance of play for humankind. Ohler and Nieding (1996, 2001)

35 A very useful and elaborated account on games and their phenomenology is provided by Roger Caillios (1958/2001): He classifies games into *agôn* (competition), with sport and contest games, where the "equality of chances is artificially created" (ibid: 14); *alea* (chance), with betting games and alike, where the "favour of destiny" (ibid: 15) is revealed; *mimicry* (simulation), with games of illusion, masquerades, theatre and spectacle in general, where "the pleasure lies in being or passing for another" (ibid: 21); and *ilinx* (vertigo), with dancing, riding, skiing or carnivals – in short, everything that is "based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise ludic mind" (ibid: 23). All forms of games can be either strongly restricted by rules (*ludus*), or be free, spontaneous play (*paidia*). *Ludus* thus is the culturally tamed form of *paidia*.

36 *Homo Ludens* is also the title of Huizinga's influential work on play (1938/2001).

have argued for the evolutionary significance of the 'as if' character of play behaviour. The possibility to practise and rehearse actions in the secure sphere of a game offers an evolutionary advantage: "the behaviour system 'play' was selected in evolution because of its potential to generate behaviour variants" (Ohler/Nieding 1996: 104). Paired with the cognitive abilities of humans, play behaviour is transformed into action: "the play module (…) can also operate on cognitive modules" (ibid: 105). Huizinga (1938/2001) and Caillois (1958/2001) both emphasize the focus on play as action, defining it as voluntary act that is confined temporally and spatially. Caillois states:

> There is also no doubt that play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement. A game which one would be forced to play would at once cease being play (…). In effect, play is essentially a separated occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally is engaged in with precise limits of time and space. There is space for play: as needs dictate, the space for hopscotch, the board for checkers or chess, the stadium, the racetrack, the list, the ring, the stage, the arena, etc. Nothing that takes place outside this ideal frontier is relevant. To leave the enclosure by mistake, accident, or necessity, to send the ball out of bounds, may disqualify or entail a penalty (ibid: 6).

As such, play is seemingly not the ordinary as the real life but the imaginary 'as if' condition. Particular rules define the boundaries of the play, to which the player consents. Hereby a realm outside the ordinary is constituted; actions performed within these borders are only 'pretend' and have no material consequences in 'reality'. Furthermore, play is non-productive and repetitive: "Iteration is one of play's most fundamental characteristics" (Huizinga 1938/2001: 18).

These assertive definitions of play do not define play as necessarily morally good or pleasant. There are several examples of games where players may be injured (e.g. sports) or games which frustrate the player to a high degree, leaving her in a bad or even vicious mood (e.g. when losing a game). Thus, the assumption that a game must be a success by definition proves to be wrong. Play is a dialogic, interactive phenomenon. When playing with others, play is constituted through a process of shared imagination, rules and codes, and aspects of the life-worlds of the participants are transposed onto the game. It is also wrong to assume that the realm of play has no connection to the realm of the 'ordinary', the 'real'. In play, the constitution of society is transformed and expressed in 'playful' language. Rather than as a space completely and essentially separated from 'objective reality', the realm of play can be seen as an intermediate space, a 'third realm', not in Schiller's sense but in the sense of what Winnicott calls a transitional phenomenon. According to Winnicott, "the intermediate space is a 'potential space' between the self of an intrapsychic reality, including the relationship of body and soul, and the non-self" of the "'objective' ascertainable dimension of reality" (Winnicott quoted in Adamowsky 2000: 28). To come to perceive the self as autonomous entity at once separated from and linked to the surrounding environment is a lifelong and arduous task.

Both inner and outer reality have to be detached from one another and a reciprocal connection maintained between them. The intermediate space provides the opportunity to imitate, to play with roles and identities. It facilitates a double perspective taking, a simultaneous sensation of real 'here-existence' and imaginary 'there-existence', a 'back and forth', an 'as if'. While playing, the player oscillates between the real and the imagined, between identification with the play-figure and detachment from it. It is only in the 'ideal' play-state that the separation between text and recipient completely disappears. The normal play-state is characterized by the vacillation between the curious self-consciousness in the specifically philosophical sense, a feeling of reflexive awareness and the loss of self.

It takes the recognition of individuals to recognize the realm or intermediate space as such. Anderson calls this the "play signal" that functions as a "metacommunicative message" (Anderson 1996: 121). This signal frames the action as play, as the pretended 'as if' action of a game (cf. Bateson 1985). Through the process of framing the 'let's pretend' actions of play sustain their significance and meaning. Like other social action, play is an activity that can be either successful or not. It might well be possible, that the metacommunicative signal is not properly recognized or that a player decides to leave the realm of 'as if' and to cross over to the 'real'. A pretended fight in a game between children could turn into a real fight. And the anger in the boardgame *Ludo* (*Mensch ärger dich nicht*) has more than once resulted in vicious anger acted out in the frame of the real.

Once a game is recognized and framed as play it opens up to an experimental field. It provides the chance to experiment with transformational processes, and to perform these transformations. There thus falls to play an important role in the process of socialization and identification. By the process of transformation, unsolvable conflicts and tensions are reshaped and transcended, acquiring a solvable *Gestalt*. Play becomes a ground on which to act out possible and pretended actions. It is the realm of the 'as if'. The intermediate space of play provides a space that is free of the tensions of everyday life. It thus provides a liberated sphere, facilitating a pleasurable tension, a realm for arousal and relaxation.

Sociological, anthropological and psychological theories on and approaches to play are frequently employed to conceptualize video game playing. Play is also referred to with regard to television (e.g. Hallenberger/Foltin 1990) or film viewing (e.g. Anderson 1996; Wuss 2009). William Stephenson (1967) argued that "play aspects may be the way a society develops its culture – the way it dreams, has its myths, and develops its loyalities" (ibid: 48). Thus play is an integral and constituting part of media communication and its pleasures. Play in the media affords a defined space in which to conduct 'as if' actions. The account of Caillios on the variety on the differentiated forms of game and play point to the flexibility and possible omnipresence of play. Aspects of play are inherent in the act of role-taking that is employed in processes of identification as well as in playing the first-person

shooter, for instance, in *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Treyarch, Ideaworks, 2010). Pen-and-paper role-playing games as well as free play or children's role plays indicate that play does not need the fixation of rules. To assume that only computer-generated interactive environments thus enable play would be a fallacy. Such a rule-simulating machine that furthermore audiovisualizes the results of coping with these rules does, however, provide a vivid and insistent manifestation of media play. *Media play then does not necessarily presume interactivity, but interactivity facilitates the manifestation of play in the media.*

3.5 Discussion

Interactivity has been the buzz word of new media for several decades. It has been the promise of a new and enhanced way of media reception, offering a surplus value, presumably being able to supersede 'old', 'linear', 'non-interactive' media such as film and television. Yet, we still go to the movies and we still switch on the television in the evening to sit back on the couch and relax. A closer view of interactivity has unveiled the diversity but also the difficulties of the concept. One of the recurring challenges is to overcome interaction, and the ideal of face-to-face interaction, in order to provide a useful model of media interactivity. Much research and theorizing is invested in the characteristics of the media, with aspects of selectivity, frequency, or the numbers of channels provided. By employing a recipient-oriented approach, as McMillan and Downes (2000) and Kiousis (2002) suggest, interactivity is distinguished in aspects of mediality and aspects of recipient activities. The processes of activity on the side of the recipients have been conceptualized as *perceived interactivity*. It refers to the *feeling of being able to interact*, a concept that is very much aligned with the concept of agency.

Play has been conceptualized as a *specific form of social action that is constituted by processes of framing*. Within the frame of play, the mode of 'let's pretend', of 'as if' dominates. Play offers its players the possibility to experiment with actions that have no direct link to everyday life. Players do not get lost in the game, however. Play affords a specific oscillation between inner and outer reality. It produces a *double perspective* that mediates between the imaginary and the real world. Play in its manifold *Gestalt* can refer to a game of mind, a role-playing game or a graphical video game – the manifestations of play are unlimited. What recently has become popular under the term *gamification* thus can be considered as an integral part of media communication in general. In this scenario, video games as computer-based rule-simulation machines allow their players, via an interactive interface design, to adopt a pre-given frame of play and to carry out pretended actions.

Neither interactivity, nor perceived interactivity equals play. Since play is, however – like all forms of media communication – a dialogic phenomenon, a form of interac-

tivity is at the basis of all media communication, either in terms of perceived interactivity, as described above, or in terms of symbolic interactionism. *Interactivity thus facilitates the manifestation of play in the media since it enables a specific form of participation in the media text* – something that any play and game affords. Yet, this observation does not imply an exclusive connection between interactivity, play and video games. Instead, different media provide different forms and degrees of an interactive texuality. These textual structures are not necessarily linked to the sense of perceived interactivity, although there might be relevant textual markers for perceived interactivity. Similarly, play is not restricted to a certain medium. As the following chapter will demonstrate, play will emerge in its various forms in any medium. Again, *certain medial premises and certain textual markers can be considered as more relevant than others for this specific mode of media-mediated social action to occur.*

The relation between interactivity, play, and agency can thus be defined in the following way: interactivity considered as feature-oriented interactivity represents a technical structure determining how the communication between user/recipients and media text is potentially organized. It defines the concrete way the feedback channel is structured within the communication paradigms of one-to-many, one-to-one, or many-to-many. Yet, as the outlined discussion of theoretical approaches could show, the specific form of technological feedback structure is not necessarily identical with the perceived interactivity. When perceived interactivity is met by the premise of making a difference, of having influence, the feeling of agency occurs. Textual structures, such as the felicitous combination of feature-oriented interactivity with a narrative or game organization that allows the recipients to perceive an influence on the text, the meaning, and the outcome, may thus facilitate agency.

Likewise, when the mode of play is employed it does not necessarily cause agency. Arvidsson and Sandvik (2007) described play as the primary mode of reception in games. Yet, a tightly determined agon-structured winning/losing situation does not necessarily enable the mode of agency, but a ludic mode. However, because play employs a fundamental dialogic structure it always adheres to the possibility of agency. Play as a specific form of social action that is inscribed in different media texts and that offers one of the core pleasures of popular media communication is thus a very strong trigger for the feeling of agency. It will therefore be subject to further analysis to consider how the different facets of play have an impact on the feeling of agency.

4 From Media Use to *Doing Media*

The conception of agency as a comprehensive mode of media reception poses a challenge for the approach of *doing media*. Agency, in this sense, is not necessarily linked to a certain medium or to a specific mediality. It is conceptualized as a mode of reception that represents a process of communication, interaction and meaning making between audience and text. This form of nonspecificality in terms of media necessitates an interdisciplinary perspective on media reception. The field of media and media use not only features numerous disciplines and traditions of research, but also media related specificities have resulted in numerous – sometimes dispersed – branches of research and scholarship. Many scholars have outlined and elucidated on the plurality and heterogeneity of disciplines, studies and theories (cf. Prommer 2012: 24). When recapitulating approaches of media reception and media communication in the following, an action-oriented perspective is employed that assembles – with no claim to and with no necessity for completeness – appropriate approaches from communication studies, media studies, television theory, film theory, interactivity approaches and game studies.

4.1 Media Use and Social Action in Media and Communication Theory

As pointed out above, media use is a manifold, sometimes controversial, field of research. From classical media effect studies with its stimulus-response model, via uses and gratifications to media appropriation and cultural studies, the field has been empirically and hermeneutically explored. Contiguous to standard works (e.g. McQuail 1997; Scannell 2011; Schenk 2002; Schweiger 2007), many new approaches offer extensive and expedient, sometimes interdisciplinary, perspectives (e.g. Gebhardt 2008; Mehling 2007; Prommer 2012). Recapitulating complementary approaches to prior conclusions (see chapter 2.1.1), communication and media theories provide significant contributions that aim to conceptualize media use as a specific form of social action or social communication. Most fundamentally, symbolic interactionism, as elaborated by Herbert Blumer, following from Mead and Dewey, forms a bridge between sociology and communication and media studies (see chapter 2.1.4). The approaches of Teichert (1972), Renckstorf and McQuail (1996) and many others draw on this model; the assumptions of Bourdieu (1997), Giddens (1984), or Habermas (1997) have been extensively reviewed and mined for

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concepts of media action and everyday life (e.g. Fiske 1995, 2009; Hasebrink/Krotz 1996; Keppler 2001; Mikos 1994, 2001, 2004; Prommer 2012; Silverstone 1994; Weiß 2001, 2000). Other significant contributions to media use can be found in, for instance, Hall (1980), Renckstorf and Wester (2001), Krotz (2005), and Meyen (2004).

Theorizing on media interaction requires an adequate vocabulary. Examination of the different ways in which media interaction is not only conceptualized but also labelled proves to be instructive. While Denis McQuail (1997) is talking about media use, other approaches to media interaction prefer the terms social action (e.g. Renckstorf/McQuail 1996) or media appropriation (e.g. Hepp 1998; Holly/Püschel 1993). In the following, I will use the more general expression *doing media* to indicate the different ways in which media interaction takes place, and to give acknowledgement to the agentic side of media interaction.

Media interaction or communication is not detached from people's everyday lives. Watching television, going to the movies, using the Internet or playing a game has become an integral part of lived life, structuring daily actions and routines. Media use is thereby socially integrated: when we delve into the bulky weekend edition of the newspaper on a Sunday morning, when we cuddle with our children in front of the television after an eventful day, when we meet friends to watch a movie on a Saturday night, or when we switch the phone to silent in order to watch the latest episode of our favourite television series without interruption. Yet, beyond the integration in our lives, media also leave their lanes, they don't disappear entirely when we switch off the TV. The latest episode of *The Voice of…* serves as topic for gossip, and concurrently as distinguishing practice towards other taste communities. Political decisions are carefully timed and placed with regard to their media resonance. And media experiences are consulted to elucidate or clarify one's own experiences – in short, media are not only cultural products that can be consumed, they also saturate the structuring structures of society. From the perspective of society, it is the mediatization of everyday life.[37]

To meet the multitude of different approaches, I will employ the classification model of Renckstorf and MacQuail (1996). It offers a useful model for identifying the paradigmatic roots and premises of many media approaches. It also follows the above stipulated aim that "mass media use must be conceptualized in terms of social action and, consequently, processes of mass communication must be studied from a social action perspective" (ibid: 6). In their concern to implement the social action perspective more profoundly in mass communication theory, the authors advocate conceiving media use with a social action approach:

> The focus is on human beings engaged in a multitude of interactional relations. People, as is postulated here, engage in activities on the basis of their own objectives, intentions and interests; they are linked via a diversity of interactions with others, and are capable of reflecting on their own ac-

37 For further explication of the mediatization model cf. Krotz (2007) and Hartmann and Hepp (2010).

> tions and interactions with others. They are aware of existing socio-cultural goals and at least sufficiently self-aware of subjective aims and personal interests; thus, they are not only capable of reflecting on (own) roles and (other's) expectations, they are also able to interact in a sense-making, meaningful way within social contexts. During the course of everyday life the individual comes in contact with a large number of material and immaterial events, persons, objects, considerations and questions. Individuals are able to act upon all of these objects in the environment, to which the mass media and their messages also belong (ibid: 17 f.).

In combining the epistemological and ontological positions of communication research, Renckstorf and MacQuail identify – with no claim to be exhaustive – three theoretical perspectives: the media-centred, the audience-centred and the culture-centred model of communication.[38] Based in large parts on Lasswell's effect analysis, behaviouristic oriented media-centred approaches engage mainly in questions of media effects such as the effects of media violence. On the other hand, audience-centred approaches are in the tradition of action theory, based on the transactional or interactional perspective. The culture-centred model "occupies the borderland between social science and the humanities" contextualizing the media impact within the social-cultural environment (McQuail 1997: 18).[39]

These three frames of reference (media, audience, culture) are then combined with two different concepts of action; the normative paradigm and the interpretative paradigm, as has been outlined in chapter 2.1.1, thus providing a differentiated classification model of contemporary mass communication. In this model, approaches such as the agenda-setting approach or the spiral of silence can be classified as media-centred models, conceptualizing media impact in terms of effects, while the uses and gratification and the *Dynamisch-transaktionale Ansatz* are audience-centred approaches that conceptualize media impact in terms of consequences. In the plane of socio-cultural goals, approaches such as cultivation analysis, the knowledge gap approach and the whole tradition of cultural studies as well as critical communication research that conceptualize media impact in terms of results are positioned (cf. Renckstorf/McQuail 1996: 14). While these distinctions work on the horizontal plane, the differentiation into the normative and interpretative paradigms also differentiates on the vertical plane. The evident shift from the normative towards the interpretative paradigm indicates the importance of social action theory in contemporary (mass) media approaches and emphasizes the theoretical position of the authors, that "the meaning-making activity of acting individuals stands central" (ibid: 18; see also Renckstorf/Wester 2001: 165 ff.).

38 In a later work, McQuail uses the labels "the behaviourist tradition: media effects and media use", "the structural tradition of audience measurement", and the "cultural tradition and reception analysis" (McQuail 1997: 16–18).

39 Elizabeth Prommer duly criticizes the equation of cultural studies with culture-oriented approaches on one level of classification. Arguably, these two approaches follow different premises and belong to different frames of reference. She also explicates that the *Dynamisch-transaktionale Ansatz* of Werner Früh can be attached neither to audience nor to media but rather to process (Prommer 2012: 26 f.).

This perspective is not entirely uncontested. While the focus on the active audience in correspondence with the interpretative paradigm was indeed the most crucial turn in communication and media studies, the lack of a broader contextualization of media reception has proved a shortcoming. Individuals, as outlined in chapter 2, are not isolated satellites but only exist as societal beings. Admittedly, Renckstorf and MacQuail consider the culture-oriented perspective in the classification model; however, they provide no consolidation of both perspectives. This can be found in early works such as Teichert (1972), who combines parasocial action with symbolic interactionism, in Rapp's *Doppelcharakter des Zuschauerhandelns* (double character of viewer's action) (1973),[40] in Kohli's *Vermittlungsprozess* (process of intervention) (1977),[41] and in approaches that employ a cultural perspective, such as Jensen and Rogge (1980), Bachmair's ethno-methodological perspective (Bachmair 1993), and in cultural studies approaches that represents the active, meaning making subject within the context of culture and society (e.g. Ang 1985; Fiske/Hartley 1988; Fiske 1995; Hall 1980; Morley 1994).

A similar approach is employed by Michael Meyen (2004), who differentiates between motivational approaches and context-related approaches (ibid: 15 ff.). Furthermore, he introduces a new focus: while in the tradition of communication studies motivational approaches are often reduced to uses and gratifications and its descendants, Meyen includes Williams Stephenson's concept of communication pleasure (Stephenson 1967), which employs anthropological game studies to elucidate on the pleasure concept, arousal theories such as mood management (Zillmann 1988), or flow (Csikszentmihalyi 2000), identity theories such as parasocial interaction (Horton/Wohl 1956), cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) or tronc commun approaches (Bosshart 1994). This perspective is fruitful, since it opens the way towards a more interdisciplinary view.

Meyen's second category accomplishes context-related approaches, that is to say, approaches that examine media use against the backdrop of concrete media content and the social context of the audience. Here, the significance of media use rather than the psychological function comes into focus. Significance and meaning making is also central to Neumann and Charlton's structure-oriented approach, *strukturanalytische Rezeptionsforschung* (Charlton/Neumann 1988). In contrast to Renckstorf and McQuail (1996), they emphasize the situational and cultural context

40 Rapp's double character of viewer's action conceptualizes the audience of mass media as relieved from the responsibility of acting: the viewer is at the same time at a distance from the happening on stage ("in-lusion") and participates via identification ("illusion"). But because she can reflect anytime on the issue of illusion, the viewer takes on an "over-perspective" where she can turn herself hopefully into the unexpected (Charlton/Neumann 1988: 11).

41 Kohli regards the process of reception as intervention: the recipient has to relate the provided patterns of meaning with her own meaning and orientation system. The process of intervention is gradual, high intervention enables the aggregation of media reality with the recipient's everyday life, low intervention does not allow a reflection of one's own everyday life via mass media communication.

of media reception without losing sight of the interactional perspective: "the structural premises of the act of reception are accessible via the 'action-guiding topics'" (ibid: 21).[42] As Ralph Weiß (2001) elaborates, 'action-guiding topics' can be thought of as resulting from the 'practical sense' of media reception. Action-guiding topics depend on the logic of practice, as employed by Bourdieu (1977/1997). Habitus generates the practical sense with which people internalize dispositions of the structuring society. People, however, do not form a universal habitus, but are determined by dispositions that generate perception, thought and evaluation (see chapter 2.1.3). It is the "internalization of objective structures of societal action conditions" (Weiß 2000: 49).[43] The practical sense conditions "thematic biases" (cf. Habermas 1990; Weiß 2000, 2001) that generate corresponding social identities. Identity, again, is formed and stabilized by agency. Habermas (1990) points out:

> [The self] has to take back his identity so to speak behind the lines of all the specific roles and norms, stabilizing it alone on the abstract ability to represent himself in arbitrary situations as the one who meets the requirements of persistence, even in the face of incompatible role expectations and during the passage of the biographical sequence of contradictory role systems. The self-identity of adults proves its ability by constructing new identities and at the same time integrating them with the transcended [identities], to organize oneself and one's own interactions in a distinctive life history (ibid: 95).[44]

Agency and identity are motivated by needs such as hunger which, together with the agentic organization, build an entity or 'topic' (I am hungry, therefore I have to find something to eat and actually eat it) as a dynamic entity (cf. Charlton/Neumann 1988: 23). These 'topics' can be small entities (such as hunger) but also more comprehensive topics, such as striving to be a good mother, being successful in one's job, or being politically engaged. Such action-leading topics affect the thematic bias during everyday life but also during media reception. They are thus the key to the media action, or meaningfully *doing media*, of the individual. In the analysis of media texts the action-orienting topics are a key to understanding the appeal of a specific film, television format or video game (Bachmair 1996; Mikos 2001: 89, 2008: 311 ff.).

42 Translation by S.E.

43 Translation by S.E.

44 Translation by S.E.: [Das Ich] muss seine Identität sozusagen hinter die Linien aller *besonderen* Rollen und Normen zurücknehmen und allein über die abstrakte Fähigkeit stabilisieren, sich in beliebigen Situationen als derjenige zu repräsentieren, der auch angesichts inkompatibler Rollenerwartungen und im Durchgang durch eine lebensgeschichtliche Folge widersprüchliche Rollensysteme den Forderungen nach Konsistenz genügen kann. Die Ich-Identität der Erwachsenen bewährt sich in der Fähigkeit, neue Identitäten aufzubauen und zugleich mit den überwundenen zu integrieren, um sich und seine Interaktionen in einer unverwechselbaren Lebensgeschichte zu organisieren (Habermas 1990: 95).

4.2 *Doing Media* and Cultural Studies

With the concept of media use as a form of social action, and the outline of the practical sense of media communication, the basis for *doing media* is provided. Until now, media communication has been outlined without the media but exclusively in terms of the active, socially embedded recipient. Yet, media texts are not human counterparts we can talk with, but they approach the recipient with their "textuality" (Fiske 1987/2009: 95) and their specific aesthetic patterns of appeal (*Appellstrukturen*; Mikos 2001: 177 ff.). Media texts consist of narrations, representations, simulations, and information – in short, of the whole array of symbolic material that is available. People respond to media texts cognitively, emotionally, habitually and ritually, and integrate them practically and habitually in their everyday life (Mikos 2008: 23 f.). In consideration of the materiality of media texts, Charlton and Neumann-Braun (1988) suggest a model of reception that consists of three levels: the actual phase of reception, the orientation of the media action within the situational and cultural context, and coping with life and identity work. The actual process of reception can be divided into; social embedment, thematic bias, strategic regulation of reception (e.g. involvement), and appropriation. In the phase of appropriation the content is assimilated to one's own life situation, it represents the phase of practical sense, the bridge between individual and society.

Mikos (2001b, 2008) employs a similar approach. In differentiating between reception and appropriation, the micro-dimension (text-recipient interaction), as well as the macro-dimension (socio-culturally embedded subject and practical sense of media content) is considered. The recipient interprets the text in the phase of reception, thus generating a new text, the *received text*. For Mikos, herein lies one of the fundamental qualities of the communicative situation between recipient and media text:

> Thus text and spectators have created the received text in conjunction. Via their actions they have initiated the communicative constellation, which was labeled as text-viewer relationship. Therewith the basis is created for both, text and audience, to become part of the social communication process. Via multiple receptions the text can now develop its reception and performance history, while the recipients incorporate the received texts in their everyday lives to become, on the one hand, part of their life-world knowledge and, on the other, become a component of the spectator's biography as reception experience (…). For the concrete process of reception is always involved in the discourse practice, or – more broadly – in the socio-cultural practice (Mikos, 2001b: 62).[45]

45 Original cit.: "Text und Zuschauer haben so gemeinsam den rezipierten Text geschaffen. Sie haben die kommunikative Konstellation, die als Text-Zuschauer-Verhältnis bezeichnet wurde, handelnd realisiert. Damit ist die Grundlage dafür geschaffen, dass beide, Text und Zuschauer, zum Bestandteil des gesellschaftlichen Kommunikationsprozesses werden können. Denn der Text kann nun über vielfältige Rezeptionen seine Rezeptions- und Wirkungsgeschichte entfalten, während die Zuschauer nun die rezipierten Texte in ihren Alltag tragen können, wo sie einerseits Bestandteil des lebensweltlichen Wissens und andererseits als Rezeptionserlebnis und –erfahrung Bestandteil der Bi-

By assigning life-world significance to a text, the recipients appropriate it to their everyday lives and worlds. Accordingly, Angela Keppler states:

> Reception encompasses not only the current perception of media messages but also and above all their communicative processing, and last but not least their impact on the social practice of the people, be they individuals or groups (Keppler 2001: 126).[46]

The process of assigning meaning was and is a major focus of cultural studies approaches. The general capability of a spectator to actively consign meaning to a text affords a fundamental polysemy. Mainstream media texts, as employed in the course of this work, are usually 'coined' by dominant cultural codes that represent the consensual dominant social and cultural order. As Mikos' *received text* reveals, encoding does not necessarily match decoding processes. That is to say, neither the meaning intended (by any kind of author, producer, institution, entrepreneur, etc.) nor the inscribed dominant culture can easily be handed down to the audience. As audience research attests, diverse audiences obviously 'read' media texts differently; they apply divergent meanings to it. This calls for the fundamental polysemy of texts (e.g. Barthes 1990; Eco 1998; Fiske 1987/2009; Jurga 2002; Mikos 1994; Morley 1980) that, however, should not be understood as arbitrary pluralism. The often cited encoding/decoding model designed by Stuart Hall (1980) not only provides us with a more profound understanding of the coding and interpreting processes of meaning making, but also introduces the concept of different reading strategies. These ideal-typical decoding strategies are well known as *dominant position*, *negotiated position*, and *oppositional position*. As many further studies could show, media texts approach their readers with a preferred position that consists not only of content but also of materiality, staging and representation. John Fiske (e.g. 1995, 1987/2009) has specified an elaborate concept of how people actually employ different reading strategies although the preferred position is inscribed into the text. Importantly, negotiated or oppositional strategies are not coined by negative struggle against the text. Rather, a text cannot uphold its favoured position once it is exposed to an audience; it is subject to the popular pleasures of assimilating and incorporating the text and its meaning into the everyday life. As Ien Ang has elaborated in *Watching Dallas* (1985), viewers of the television series *Dallas* (CBS, 1978–1992) extracted various forms of pleasures during watching and appropriating the series, while on the other hand sharing the common assessment of its supposed

ographie des Zuschauers werden können. Sie können dies auch deshalb, weil in der konkreten Interaktion zwischen Text und Zuschauer die Kontexte wirksam sind, die nicht nur Interpretationskontexte sind (…). Denn der konkrete Rezeptionsprozess ist immer eingebunden in die Diskurspraxis, oder – weiter gefasst – in die soziokulturelle Praxis" (Mikos 2001: 62).

46 Original cit.: "Rezeption umfasst nämlich nicht nur die aktuelle Aufnahme medialer Botschaften, sondern auch und vor allem deren kommunikative Weiterverarbeitung und damit nicht zuletzt ihre Auswirkungen auf die soziale Praxis der Menschen, seien dies einzelne oder Gruppen" (Keppler 2001: 126).

cultural inferiority. Popular texts are open to the people's power to 'read against the grain' (cf. Fiske 1997) they can be considered as "producerly texts" (ibid: 65). In a time of converging media platforms, transmedia narration, and multi-screen environments the postmodern subject not only uncontrollably assigns meaning to a text, but the texts themselves dissolve in and enlarge over media borders, they self-reflectively relate to one another, with an audience that no longer approaches one single text entity, but 'poaches', in the sense of Henry Jenkins (1992), in the textuality of the manifold offers. These activities exceed the conception of straightforward communication acts and activities; they form a social practice. The interrelation of cultural production and cultural consumption then is characterized by this disparity. The recipients as cultural consumers can only consume what is offered. However, the strategies of the 'power block' are not the only power at work. All the small everyday practices of the people influence the powerful, and within their ability of practice, and tactics also, the people maintain agency.

Doing media is thus a specific form of social action. It is a *practice* that is *embedded in everyday life* whereby people *assign meaning* to a concrete media text. Only via the connection to the life-world do media texts maintain significance for their recipients. The focus is thus shifted away from psychological needs and gratifications towards *significance and meaning making*. On this account media play a role in the *formation of identity*, and identity is formed and stabilized by agency. These assumptions presuppose the idea of an active, socially embedded audience, as frequently postulated by cultural studies. The active recipients assign meaning to *media texts that are not constrained entities but rather polysemic textualities*. While it is the power of the producer to provide media texts to the audience, it is the *power of the practices of the recipients to approve, to negotiate, or to take an opposite position towards any text*. The paradigmatic shift from the passive viewer to the active recipient was endorsed by pragmatism and social action theory. A second reading of the approaches and models unveil that agency already lies within. Cultural studies have emphasized agency with the notion of empowerment, with the repeated note on agency and not least Hall's model of different reading strategies. *Agency is both ubiquitous and nebulous – but undoubtedly crucial not only in social action but also in media action.*

4.3 Viewing Fictions: Cognitivism and Reception Studies

4.3.1 Basic Principles

With the fundamentals of a socio-culturally embedded media communication in mind, cognitive film psychology, neoformalism and reception aesthetics will shed more light on the reception activities employed when watching films and (fictional) television. Action-oriented communication approaches focus on the activities of the

recipients. While the viewers' activities with their "cognitive, emotional, social-communicative and routinized activities" (Mikos 2008: 35), their emotions, pleasures, prior knowledge and predispositions, are regarded as a structural part of the viewing situation, the focus is now shifted to the textual qualities that prestructure the viewers' experiences. The concrete staging of action, narration, plot structure, characters and figures, genre issues, intertextual references, and the aesthetics of the representation with camera movement, lighting, aspects of mise-en-scene, sound, music, visual and special effects and montage, thus come into view.

Neoformalism, as developed by Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger (e.g. Bordwell/Staiger/Thompson 1988; Bordwell/Thompson 1979/2012; Bordwell 1989) and later elaborated by Branigan (1992) and Carroll (1992), combines film theory, analysis and a history of style, based on a cognitivist psychological approach. Meanwhile many cognitivistic and neoformalistic approaches have advanced, e.g. Anderson (1996), Buckland (2000, 2009), Grodal (1999; 1997), Ohler (1996), Ohler and Nieding (1996, 2001a), Smith and Plantinga (eds.) (1999), Murray Smith (1995), Tan (1996), Wulff (2003), Wuss (1993, 2009) and others. However, Plantinga (2009) rightly alludes to the fact that the cognitive perspective has an even longer tradition, going back to the theories of Sergei Eijsenstein, Hugo Münsterberg or Joseph and Barbara Anderson (cf. ibid: 18).

The fundamental way, cognitive film theory argues, that people organize and structure information is the activation of schemata. Schemata form the preconditions on which basis we make sense of the world and of symbolic media material.[47] On the basis of these a priori factors Bordwell[48] employs the schema model:

47 It should be noted that Bordwell considers these a priori factors not as irrevocable, but as malleable by evolution.

48 Despite the allegation of being a "grey area" concerning the incorporation of a social action-based communication model (Hartmann/Wulff 2002: 202), Bordwell and Thompson clearly position the conception of the spectator-film relationship within action-oriented social theory approaches. Indeed, Bordwell repeatedly rejects projections of communication studies as pure sender-message models (e.g. Bordwell 2010: 2) and promotes cognitivism as a more appropriate, 'naturalistic' approach in the sense that "it starts from the assumption that we bring to film all our capacities to make sense of the world around us" (ibid: 8). Admittedly, references to a theoretical integration are only made along the way, constituting the cognitive approach "in the context of *social action*" (Bordwell 1989: 17), or outlining the idea of cognitive theory as positing the "level of mental activity as an irreducible one in explaining human social action" (Bordwell 1989b: 13), while conceiving "perceiving and thinking" as "goal-oriented processes" (Bordwell 1985: 31). In his 1989 article, "A Case for Cognitivism", Bordwell elaborates on his cognitive approach: "In general, cognitive theory wants to understand such human mental activities as recognition, comprehension, inference-making, interpretation, judgment, memory, and imagination (…). More specifically, the cognitive frame of reference posits the level of mental activity as an irreducible one in explaining human social action" (Bordwell 1989b: 13).

The 'naturalistic' explanation of the processes of film reception "that assume that we make sense of films in many of the same ways we make sense of the world" (Plantinga 2009: 22) is one of the unifying premises for cognitive film theory. While distancing himself from hermeneutic approaches

> The concept of "schema" runs back at least to Kant, who seems to have applied the term to both the knowledge structure itself (conceived, it would appear, primarily as an image) and the rule or procedure by which the mind produces and uses such structures (Bordwell 1989. 137).

To facilitate those processes of knowledge structures, schemata, in the sense of familiar patterns, are activated. Prior knowledge, prior experience and prior hypothesis building shape schemata. It is thus a learning process, where prior experiences are solidified and made accessible. Hypotheses are aligned with existing schemata which, in turn, affect and adjust the initial hypothesis.

In the course of film reception, schemata are activated by filmic cues, which are highly conventionalized hints. These cues can thus be seen as a line of conjuncture between the symbolic material of a medium and the levels of knowledge of the recipient:

> In watching a film, the perceiver identifies certain cues which prompt her to execute many inferential activities – ranging from the mandatory and very fast activity of perceiving apparent motion, through the more "cognitively penetrable" process of constructing, say, links between scenes, to the still more open process of ascribing abstract meanings to the film. In most cases, the spectator applies knowledge structures to cues which she identifies within the film (ibid: 3).

On the basis of cues we are able to make meaning of a film or any symbolic media material. Cues lead us to schemata, "organized clusters of knowledge" (Bordwell 1985: 31) that guide our hypothesis making. In due consideration, this inference making is an enduring process. While the narrative environment changes and progresses, new cues are provided and the hypotheses are adjusted, confirmed, or revised. Film viewing then consists of three activities: the *perceptual capacities* consis-

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Bordwell likewise emphasizes the commonality, namely the recourse on constructivism, "the commitment to *constructivist* explanations in terms of *mental representations* functioning in a context of social action" (Bordwell 1989b: 17; emphasis in the original). Following constructivist premises, he argues for the recognition of a priori factors such as the "innate mental structure that forms the basis for hypothesis-testing and revision in the course of experience" (ibid: 20). These inference processes can follow a "bottom-up" or a "top-down" principle (Bordwell 1985: 31). To simply recur on the Lacanian mirror phase without a concept of how a child can recognize or misrecognize its own mirror images proves naïve. Cognitive theory wants to comprehend the whole process that is involved in recognizing (or misrecognizing) one's own image, assuming that both bottom-up and top-down processes are needed for us to take meaningful actions. Lakoff's example of colour categories serves as an example to elucidate on the idea of inference making as bottom up process: According to him colour categorization needs three levels of determination; the neurophysical apparatus, the universal cognitive apparatus and "culturally-determined choices that apply to the input of the universal cognitive apparatus" (Lakoff quoted in Bordwell 1989b: 21). Since colour categories do not exist objectively (only wavelengths of light), it is a good example to show how constructivism functions. The neurophysical apparatus stages the prior factor of perception: it determines that wavelengths of light are translated into pure colours (red, green, blue, yellow, white, black). The cognitive apparatus constructs other colours such as brown and purple. Finally the culturally determined choices form colour categories that include a distinction of yellow and orange or precisely make no difference between them (cf. Lakoff quoted in Bordwell 1989b: 21). Top-down processes on the other hand are "based on assumptions, expectations and hypothesis" (Bordwell 1985: 31).

tent with our biological visual requirements form bottom-up processes of film viewing; our *prior knowledge and experience* that has formed schemata on which we can draw when watching a new film; and *the material and structure of the film itself* (ibid: 32 f.). The principle of schemata is important since it reduces the complexity not only of a film but also of the world. Schemata are embodied prototypes that store typical situations and result as consistent information formats. They are "outlasting structures and processes" that are meaningful (Ohler 1996: 206).

Films and media not only communicate via distinct cues with their audience, they also consist of gaps (*Leerstellen*, cf. Iser 1994b). Elliptic narration is one of the ways in which gaps become evident. Gaps can also be considered as ambivalent cues that are more open to interpretation. Stereotypical, elliptic forms of narration then broaden the scope of possible interpretation. In relying heavily on the prior schemata of the recipient the text is more open to the knowledge of the audience. In contrast to this, a film text that tells us every detail is less open to our own knowledge (cf. Mikos 2001: 245 f.). Genre implications, cues and gaps together form the pattern of appeal (*Appellstruktur*; ibid: 178) of a media text that addresses the implied reader. This pattern of appeal implies a mode of instruction for the audience. On the basis of the textuality reception activities are induced. Thus the mode of representation and narration becomes relevant:

> In this sense, all film and television texts are aesthetically structured – and this structure aims at the audience's activities. Aesthetics is meant here as a structural feature of the film and television texts, regardless of whether whatever type of author has consciously or unconsciously used aesthetic means. For the text-audience-interaction aesthetic is relevant only as a structural feature of the text. As such, it pre-structures attention and emotional and cognitive activities of the audience. In this sense, the aesthetics of a film or television show is always functional to the reception (ibid: 180).[49]

Ohler identifies three forms of knowledge that are relevant for film and television reception: general world knowledge, narrative knowledge, and knowledge of the modes of representation that form the "narrative form-content-correspondence matrix" (Ohler quoted in ibid: 103).[50] Media texts are open to these knowledge forms, the pattern of appeal activates the corresponding knowledge schemata. The process of making meaning is thus essentially an active process, embedded in the socio-cultural sphere of how we perceive, understand and make meaning of the world around us. The different knowledge forms also indicate that doing media is

49 Original cit.: "In diesem Sinne sind alle Film- und Fernsehtexte ästhetisch gestaltet – und diese Gestaltung zielt auf Aktivitäten der Zuschauer. Ästhetik ist hier als Strukturmerkmal der Film- und Fernsehtexte gemeint, unabhängig davon, ob ein wie auch immer gearteter Autor bewusst oder unbewusst ästhetische Mittel eingesetzt hat. Für die Text-Zuschauer-Interaktion ist lediglich Ästhetik als strukturelles Textmerkmal relevant. Als solches strukturiert sie Aufmerksamkeit sowie emotionale und kognitive Aktivitäten des Zuschauers vor. In diesem Sinne ist die Ästhetik eines Films oder einer Fernsehsendung immer funktional zur Rezeption" (Mikos 2001: 180).

50 Translation by S.E.

characterized by learning. The more films we watch, and the more our encyclopaedic resource of narrative and representational knowledge is extended, the better we are able to generate meaning, to estimate and evaluate media texts (cf. Eco 1998). This is commonly referred to as media literacy.

The emotional aspects of media reception have been postponed until now. This by no means implies an inferiority of emotions in comparison to cognition. Instead cognition and emotion go hand in hand. The intensive study of emotions in film, as accomplished by Murray Smith (1995), Smith and Plantinga (eds.) (1999), or Grodal (1997) to name but a few, has alluded to the importance of the emotional experience of film. Since its very beginnings, film has been considered as the privileged sphere of emotions. According to Greg Smith (2003), cues not only evoke cognitive activities but also emotional reactions. Emotional activities are essential for the process of reception and meaning making. While we recognize the symbolic material of media offers such as texts, narratives or games through cognitive activities, the emotions that arise from these cognitive activities are of crucial significance. The media situations are connected to our own experiences and emotions and evaluated accordingly. At the very basic level of emotional reception activities lies the limbic system that "'shades' the data with an emotional 'coloring' and produces an action response to the situation" (Smith 1999: 108). Smith describes the interplay between cognition and emotion as follows:

> The associative model begins with the parallel processing of cognition and emotion. Sensory data are sent to the cortex for conscious processing while the same data are sent to the emotional centre of the brain (the limbic system) to gain feeling tone. One process is primarily cognitive, the other primarily emotive, but both begin simultaneously. Once cognition and emotion are separately activated, the two processes begin to interact heavily. Neither cognition nor emotion requires the other as a prerequisite, but, once initiated, the processes are almost always yoked together, particularly in strong emotions. Thoughts become one of the inputs to the emotion system, and emotional signals are sent to the cortex for processing. In a model based on interconnection, the link between cognition and emotion becomes crucial, providing an explanation for the malleability of emotional expression and behaviour. Parallel processing of thought and feelings allows a person to react quickly to an emotion subsystem, but the interconnectivity permits us to inhibit or intensify feelings based on social situations (ibid: 109 f.).

Emotions thus arise from the interplay of cognition and affects (activities of the limbic system). Prior emotions are stored in schemata and scripts, allowing us to respond immediately to emotion cues that trigger emotional associations. Tan (1996: 47) and Grodal (1997: 97 f.) argue that the primary phase of affective arousal is evaluated and codified cognitively in a second phase to channel arousal into (socio-culturally specific) emotions. Tan and Frijda (1999) state:

> Emotions occur when a situation is relevant for an individual's concerns. They consist of an appraisal of the situation's significance and an action tendency. The emotional experience is the awareness of the situation's particular meaning in terms of relevance for a concern, reality and difficulty, and the felt action-tendency. The action tendency itself consists of an inclination to act in a

> particular way. For example, fear is appraisal of a threat of physical harm that cannot be countered, and the urge to run away, to protect oneself, to freeze (ibid: 51f.).

With this general functioning of emotions in mind, the authors differentiate media (here film) emotions into F-emotions (fictional), relating to the diegesis, and A-emotions (artefact), relating to filmic artefacts (ibid: 52). The conception of F-emotions assumes a preferential of emotions via character alignment. In contrast to Tan and Frijda, Greg Smith (1999: 105) and Wulff (2002: 2) elaborate on emotions that are not character induced, and less goal and action oriented. According to Greg Smith, media experiences create a primary set of orienting emotions that constitutes mood. Mood puts the recipient in a general expectation condition that makes us expect similar emotions as induced by the particular mood. Wulff calls this the *empathic field*, referring to "a symbolic context of social life, of the genre, of the specific course of action and of the specific dramaturgic conflict" (ibid: 1).[51] This view not only accounts for the rich media material and textuality that consists of more than character, but also allows for a more differentiated perspective on texts without 'deep characters' as can be found in many video games that are considered to allow only ego-emotions. With an emotion model in mind that accounts for character-induced empathy, on the one hand, and text-induced emotions (situation, plot, dramaturgy, set-design, audiovisual elements, etc.) on the other, a greater variety of emotional reactions and emotional cues can be observed and considered. The audiovisual composition, narration, plot, aesthetics, character composition or genres, evoke an emotional associative network that builds an affect structure that determines the undertone of a film (cf. Smith 2003). The cognitive schemata combine with the according emotional structure to form an affective-cognitive reference system (Ciompi 1999: 104).

4.3.2 Play and Film

In his work on the psychology of film reception, Peter Wuss (1993) conceptualizes film reception as play.[52] Referring to Klaus (1968) and Huizinga (1938/2001) he asserts that popular culture is essentially connected to play because it is a joyful and

51 Translation by S.E.

52 Wuss (2009) identifies seven levels of film engagement with play that he exemplifies as: (1) the way spectators engage in the film 'as if' it was a possible world; (2) the requirement to get into control of conflict situations via foresight, hypothesis building and cue guessing that leads to passive control/agency; (3) creating and regulating the spectator's emotion such as empathy that "is most likely also an oscillating effect that constantly mediates among different areas of meaning and thereby shifts among modes of 'feeling with', 'feeling for', and 'feeling as-if'" (ibid: 236); (4) the anticipation of functional pleasure the film characters experience in a play situation; (5) the potential of play to enable new ideas about the world; (6) the play with "rules of the artistic forms" (ibid: 239) that can be played with, compliance to or be aberrant; (7) the play with genre expectations (ibid: 233ff.).

pleasurable gamble with possible worlds thus appealing to fantasy and imagination (cf. Wuss 1993: 416). Play is regarded as an essential part of the film experience and of filmic strategies. Following Lotman (in Wuss 2009: 233), the "play effect" in filmic narration refers to the recipient's awareness that different meanings are always present, though not simultaneously, but oscillating. Ohler and Nieding (2001a) conclude similarly, considering the possibilities of play to generate manifold variations of possible action sequences (the creation of 'possible worlds'). The ability to create a probabilistic model of the world, and to perfect this internal representation model that is uncoupled from perception, is the inherent capacity of play. As elaborated in chapter 3.4, play then is a form of social action that allows for a flexible form of behaviour variations. In early childhood development play emerges as a mode of 'as if' behaviour. The child that is able to imagine a wooden brick to be a car, or a doll to be alive, shows the ability to decouple the mental representation from the actual perception. For Ohler and Nieding this is the core of play behaviour in the ontogenesis of humankind. The possibility of variations offers an advantage in evolution that remains relevant today.[53] Plantinga (2009) also emphasized the importance of play as a genuine intrinsic need. Indeed, there is evidence that the whole process of film reception – identifying cues, making inferences, adapting to new information, reevaluating the situation etc. – can be considered as cognitive play (ibid: 21; Anderson 1996: 116 ff.): "Spectators are motivated by curiosity, suspense, anticipation, and other narrative emotions; delight in discovery; and the pleasure of orienting themselves to the unfolding narrative events of a fictional world" (ibid: 22).

Probably the most extensive account of the pleasures that derive from the cognitive game situation can be found in the early work of William Stephenson (1967). According to him, the "*communication-pleasure* is of first importance" when considering theories of mass communication (ibid: 45). In his reconsideration of Freud's pleasure principle[54], Stephenson pleads for an abandonment of the idea of pleasure as a mood in favour of pleasure as an *attitude of the self towards the things around oneself* (cf. ibid: 56). "Communication-pleasure is enjoyment, contentment, serenity, delight, such as is characteristic of entertainment, art, drama, conversation, sociability, and the like. In attendance upon it is a certain enhancement of self-existence." (ibid: 194). Mass communication is thus a vehicle for communication-pleasure.

53 For an extensive elaboration of this approach, the *Verhaltensdiversifikations-Protokognitionstheorie* see Ohler (1994), Ohler and Nieding (2001b).

54 According to Freud two primary mental processes of humankind occur in a pre-conscious phase; the *pleasure-pain principle*, which is striving for pleasures to avoid pain, and the *reality principle*, that is to say, that fantasy cannot provide pleasure, but only reality. In a second, more conscious phase, *reality testing* (the consciousness and self take part), and *fantasy making* (e.g. through daydreaming) occur. On the basis of these principles the pleasures of e.g. reading a newspaper is explained (Stephenson 1967: 52f.).

Very similarly, Fiske draws on Roland Barthes' *plaisir* and *joussance* to emphasize communication pleasures that arise from media communication: "The words or images in the text are exchanged for pleasure, the commodity that the reader buys is not a sense of the world, but pleasure in the processes of representing and figuring that world" (Fiske 1987/2009: 226). The recipients playfully engage in the polysemy of a media text, thus constructing a meaningful text. While the rules of this game are structured by the text, by forms and content, it is the power of the recipient to actually play with these rules. Fiske elaborates on this:

> (…) s/he [the reader] voluntarily accepts the rules of the text in order to participate in the practice that those rules make possible and pleasurable; the practice is, of course, the production of meanings and identities. In a text, as in a game, the rules are there to construct a space within which freedom and control of self are possible. Games and texts construct ordered worlds within which the players/readers can experience the pleasures of both freedom and control: in particular, for our purposes, playing the text involves the freedom of making and controlling meanings (ibid: 230).

Fiske's focus thereby lies not on the general play with polysemy and meanings that is inherent in any text, but on the resistant and subversive empowerment of the recipients that is employed in escaping social control and social rules through the text play. Dominant discourses with dominating social norms can be subverted in controlling them. Viewers of a soap opera, who choose to identify with a certain character, fans of certain female pop singers assign power over patriarchal discourses on sexuality through the artist's performances, the playing with unintended probabilities of a complex serial, or the constructing of a personal situation in a video game, are all examples of performing control through play. Through play meanings and identities are tested and formed and even if the play itself follows the suggested rules, it nonetheless, hightenths self-esteem thus opening the possible realm for resistance and subversion (cf. ibid: 230 ff.).

Anderson (1996) stipulates that "watching a movie is not *like* play and it is not a metaphor for play; it *is* play" (ibid: 126; emphasis in the original). Most evident is the play character of film in the post-postmodern phase of mind-game movie (see chapter 4.3.4). For Leschke and Venus (2007) the recent popularity of play in movies is motivated by a changing media practice with the emergence of video games as viral driving force:

> The sensational career of computer games is not at least accountable for the centrality of forms of play that are integrated in the film after postmodernism. The massive charging of the existing canon provides a familiar repertoire of game forms for the dominant cinema audiences, whose socialization is characterized by rapid media development, thus responding to a media culture with noticeably modified reception practices. This integration of game forms is surprisingly broad: the film not only plays with itself, it quasi plays against itself. The shapeshifting of the feature film, in its quest for form-aesthetic renovation possibilities, is stretched to its pragmatic limits (ibid: 7).[55]

55 Original cit.: "Dass es im Film nach der Postmoderne vor allem um die Integration von Spielformen geht, dürfte nicht zuletzt der Aufsehen erregenden Karriere von Computerspielen geschuldet sein.

The intermedial interrelations between movies and video games reach far beyond intertextual references. For instance, they employ aesthetic convergence, narrative organization, aspects of audience interactivity and agency, and the modification of time and space. *eXistenz* (David Cronenberg, 1999), *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999), *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997) or *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) are all examples of the interlacing of the two media. Moreover, many postmodern films employ strategies of video games by generating courses of actions that are repeated in different versions. Like the repeated walk through the levels of a video game that differs each time slightly from the last running, films like *Run, Lola, Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998) construct explicit game-like situations in films that take up on the 'play effect' in the sense of Lotman.

4.3.3 Cognitive Control

However, the analogy of watching a film and playing a video game span beyond the outlined analogy. According to Bordwell (1985), film reception in general "encourages the spectator to execute story-constructing activities. The film presents cues, patterns, and gaps that shape the viewer's application of schemata and the testing of hypotheses" (ibid: 33). As Wuss (1993: 418 f.) argues, genre films in particular induce the sensation of acting out control on the life-world. This sensation of control is cued by certain film structures, such as a strong and mighty protagonist and a happy ending. With the filmic staged process of problem-solving the protagonist actively achieves a solution to his or her problems while the audience sets up hypotheses about the further narrative development. Popular entertainment movies cater exactly for these moments of control on both levels – the protagonist's control of action and the audience's control of forecast (ibid: 418 ff.). Classic genre films and classic Hollywood narration usually offer solutions for all the problems or conflicts staged. In the end, all story lines come to closure and ambiguities, misconceptions and equivocalness are resolved. While the protagonist performs agency in the story world, it is for the recipient to willingly play the game of trembling and tension if the story turns out the expected way (or not). Thus it is the paradox mode of passive control (*passive Handlungskompetenz*) (Wuss 2009: 165). It is the game of already knowing what to expect but actively and willingly putting oneself in

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Die massive Aufladung des vorhandenen Formenkanons bietet den dominanten Zielgruppen des Kinos, deren Sozialisation von rasanter Medienentwicklung gekennzeichnet ist, ein vertrautes Repertoire an Spielformen und reagiert damit auf eine Medienkultur mit merklich modifizierten Rezeptionspraktiken. Dabei geht eine Integration von Spielformen erstaunlich weit: Der Film spielt nicht nur mit sich selbst, er spielt quasi gegen sich selbst. Der Formwandel des Spielfilms geht in seiner Suche nach formästhetischen Renovierungsmöglichkeiten durchaus an seine pragmatischen Grenzen" (Leschke/Venus 2007: 7).

a position of not knowing, cue guessing, worrying and, finally, relief: "The viewer is not able to change the conflict situation actively, but he can gain passive control of the changes by a better cognitive evaluation of them, that is, by better prediction, foresight, and anticipation" (ibid: 165).

The conception of passive control in genre films thereby is gradual, since all dramatic conflicts in the arts are to some extent simplifications of real life in order to remain manageable. Yet, the genre film is especially good at it:

> Indeed, all dramatic work in arts provides a simplification of real problems, but the entertainment-oriented film carries this to the extremes with the filtering of life-world stimuli via genre. Most genres adhere to a particular milieu, stylized by the film. Thus the spectators can expect not only a relatively confined physical space of action but also a confined space of human relations (…) (Wuss 1993: 419).[56]

To meet this gradual model, Wuss conceptualizes a typology of narrative tension. According to this model, the viewer's hypothesis can either be "very strong", "moderately strong" or "extraordinarily weak" (Wuss 2009: 170).[57] Canonical stories, such as presented in classic Hollywood cinema or in classic genre films, lead to very strong hypotheses. The course of action, the whole way the story is told, is highly conventionalized. With reference to tension,

> (…) in the framework of genre-stereotypes with their formalised goals, it seems to be sufficient for the production of suspense if the action of the character has a goal that the spectator accepts as important without knowing or considering it to be worthy. The problem-solving can occur in the given searching space without changing the reference field during the play with the pragmatic information (ibid: 176 f.).

According to Wuss (ibid: 172), especially popular genres such as action movies and crime fiction make use of standardized forms of storytelling that allow for the play with information that leads to passive control.

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56 Original cit.: "Zwar bieten alle dramatischen Auseinandersetzungen der Kunst eine Vereinfachung realer Problemzustände, doch treibt der unterhaltungsorientierte Film dies auf die Spitze, indem die Genres die lebensweltlichen Reizangebote filtern. Die meisten Genres halten sich an ein bestimmtes Milieu, das sie jedoch ausstilisieren, so dass man als Zuschauer nicht nur mit einem relativ eingegrenzten physischen Handlungsraum rechnen kann, sondern stets auch mit enggefassten menschlichen Beziehungen (…)" (Wuss 1993: 419).

57 Wuss's explanations on the gradual model depend on his overall model of film structures and film reception, the PCS model. He identifies three modes of narration that correspond with three modes of the construction of invariants of the cognitive system of the spectators: the conception-based filmic structures that lead to a causal chain of narration, the perception-based filmic structures, that lead to topic lines, and the stereotype-based filmic structures, that lead to stereotypes of narration. This very conducive model allows a positive definition of narrative structures that cannot be grasped in a 'traditional' causal way. Instead of 'surplus meaning', 'excess' or 'open form', the model enables one to extract causal, associative and stereotype structures. While usually a filmic narration makes use of all three structures, one structure can dominate the others, the structures can stand in opposition, thus producing ambivalent meaning or add up to the same direction, thus fortifying the suggested meaning (cf. Wuss 1992, 1993, 2009).

Less obvious, but most common, are stories driven by cause and effect. They enable moderately strong hypotheses. In Wuss' words it is the "conceptualised causal chain of the classical plot" (ibid: 171). At the centre of these kinds of stories is the goal-driven protagonist who has to overcome obstacles that are created by antagonistic forces. Here, the viewer is a "question-former" (Carroll 1996: 67) who interrogates the expected outcome. It is the double tension that is built, the tension of the protagonist to reach her goal and the tension of the viewer who anticipates the development of action.

Extraordinary weak are the hypotheses in stories with ambiguous goals. Ambiguity and associative moments are prominent in the topic lines of film structures. Here, hypotheses are not built upon causal chains and inference but on abduction. The recipient has to look "intuitively in the flow of events for invariant moments on the perceptual level" (Wuss 2009: 178). Topic lines – due to the lack of pragmatic information for the viewer as well as for the protagonist – remain uncertain about the course of events, passive control or agency cannot be achieved.

However, usually films employ a mixture of filmic structures, they are a combination of causal chains of narration, topic lines and stereotypes. By means of Antonioni's *The Passenger* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975), Wuss elucidates on this matter:[58] at first glance a typical Aristotelian drama, *The Passenger* quickly turns out to be dominated by topic lines. From the beginning, the topic "inability to communicate" is staged in various variations. Unsuccessful communication becomes conceptual and facilitates the comprehension of the film. While tied together by a causal chain of action, the cursory causality proves to be subordinated to the thematic topic line of the film:

> As the narrative state of the film's story moves from the level of the topic line to one of narrative stereotypes and passes quickly over the usual conceptualisation, it creates a form of tension that is deliberately heterogeneous by, on the one hand, following a principle of 'inner suspense' within the framework of tense behavioural observation, and, on the other, by submitting the artificially dynamized action to the norms and outwardly suspenseful plots of adventure stories. The analytic eye of the observer is transported, to a certain degree, at a faster rate through the events (ibid: 184).

The postmodern viewer not only interprets and classifies retrospectively, but also enters a game-like situation with the film, forms hypotheses and is rewarded with the feeling of passive control, when the expected outcome actually comes true. Stereotypical modes of storytelling and representation help to reduce the scope of

58 Wuss sums up the narrative structure of *The Passenger* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975) as follows: "Although the hero's enterprise has a goal the viewers are nevertheless kept in the dark for a long time about what the protagonist actually intends to do. In spite of this irritation situation the viewer will be confronted again and again with episodes following the same principle: The desired communication will be disturbed, is not accomplished, comes to nought. The semantic gesture of all these episodes express [the] selfsame: The protagonist's attempts to establish contact with the natives is doomed." (Wuss 2009: 184f.).

action and the scope of possible interaction in between the narrative construct. For Wuss these reduced spaces usually implies problem-solving in the initial conflicting situation. As in video games, where the scope of action for the player is more or less rigidly restricted by the programming code and the interactive dramaturgy, the reduced scope of action in films reduces the cognitive effort for the recipient. In this simplified fictional world model, the recipient can playfully and hypothetically act out conflicts and construct solutions: "Trough the apparent fictions of popular culture he learns to simplify conflicts playfully and to construct free spaces and solution strategies" (Wuss 1993: 420).[59] Ohler and Nieding (2001a), in this context, emphasize problem-solving activities: the recipient is in fact engaged in processes of problem-solving, yet can leave remedy to the film itself: "Viewers of suspense films always have the option of mental relaxation, a state in which they simply allow the problems inherent in the film to be solved by the film itself" (ibid: 145).

Also certain dramaturgical decisions such as the deployment of suspense strengthen aspects of passive control: suspense is a form of organizing information that helps the audience to form precise hypotheses and to transform them to control. The director Alfred Hitchcock, the master of suspense, provides numerous examples of suspense, such as the positioning of a car bomb in *Touch of Evil* or the identification of the villain in *Young and Innocent*. In both cases the audience possesses more information than the protagonists, therefore maintaining a knowledge advantage that enables them to make better prognoses. This game of suspense forms a collusion between filmmaker and audience, it is "play with the control of information", where the audience knows more than the protagonist but less than the production team (cf. ibid: 134). Experiencing film then is an oscillation between being in control and being out of control, a situation that is matched to a certain degree by the gamer's situation oscillating between an inner and an outer reality (cf. Eichner 2002: 57). The balance between providing information – to reduce uncertainty – and to increase uncertainty then is constitutive for film experience, it is a

> (…) fluctuating process that temporarily gives the spectator control of the experienced situation and the feeling of action readiness, but also the opposite – the feeling of having lost control off and on. There is always a change of tension and release, a continuously ongoing play with the viewer's competence for control. But in general, the viewer is motivated to exercise passive control regarding the course of action to anticipate the central decisions of the plot. The narrative tension depends on corresponding hypothesis. (Wuss 2009: 170).

Ohler and Nieding (2001a) point toward the dependency of viewer experience and audience knowledge. The two components form the "expectation horizon" (*Erwartungshorizont*) (ibid: 131) that leads to different ways of reading. That the strategy of information organization does not always lead to success should be self-evident:

59 Translation by S.E.

> When the strategy by which a plot unfolds becomes so conventionalized that the intended unpredictability is no longer guaranteed for viewers, when the strategic game with their knowledge structures no longer succeeds, then the suspense-inducing construction degenerates into a transparent shell without excitement (ibid: 133).

4.3.4 Narrative Complexity and Mind Games

Less complexity and greater predictability, so the reasoning, results in a sense of control, thus facilitating a sense of agency. But is the successful control of a situation the pre-condition for agency? Control might be one aspect of agency, but agency is not necessarily tied to success. Obtaining agency hints towards the possibility to act in any ways, not only in a successful way. Participation and activity seem to be most crucial for agency (see chapter 3). Recent decades have seen a tendency for complex stories that are often accompanied by a narrative twist. Advanced not least by technological development such as DVD and streaming television, narratives that invite repeated viewing have become popular. Elaesser's "mind-game movies" (2009a, 2009b), Bordwell's "forking-path narratives" (2002,) Branigan's "multiple draft", Panek's "puzzle films", Wilson's "twist films" (cf. Elsaesser 2009a: 19) or Jason Mittell's "narrative complexity" (Mittell 2006) all depict the same phenomenon. Films like *Cloud Atlas* (Tom Tykwer, Andrew and Lana Wachowski, 2012), *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010), *Shutter Island* (Martin Scorcese, 2010), or *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997), and television series such a *Twin Peaks* (ABC, Mark Frost, David Lynch, 1990–1991), *Sopranos* (HBO, David Chase, 1999–2007), or *Lost* (ABC, Jeffrey Lieber, J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, 2004–2010) are paradigmatic for a narrative organization that contains unforeseen elements, complex structuring and often ambiguities. It binds the spectator into a game of hypothesis building and mentally constructing various possibilities and probabilities. Instead of the accurate forecast in a genre film that facilitates passive control, complex and twisted narrations entangle the audience in a game-like situation of having made the right choice or guess; it plays a *mind game* with the audience.

Bordwell (2002) points to 'forking path narratives' or 'multiple draft narratives' such as *Run Lola, Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998), as linear, signposted, intersecting, cohesive, contrasting parallels as a time-based concept in the sense that it refers to films that represent parallel time strands. Branigan (2002) extends this notion beyond time matters and includes films such as *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999), *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven, 1990), or *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyalaman, 1999). Elsaesser (2009a, 2009b) identifies two basic forms of mind-game movies. The first refers to films that play with a character (e.g. *The Trueman Show* by Peter Weir, 1998), and the second refers to films that play with their audience in terms of knowledge and information organization. This offers surprise on both sides – on the side of the protagonist who is surprised to learn that she is mistaken about reality or has

been manipulated, and on the side of the recipient, where "surprise is so big as to overwhelm the rest of the viewing experience" (Eig 2003: 3). Jahn-Sudmann (2007) distinguishes between films that possess game-like features in terms of aesthetics and narration, and films that engage playfully with meaning (ibid: 155). While the former category includes economies of production (such as tie-ins in both directions or media franchises), modes of narrative organization (such as a turn-based structure, level-structure or competition[60]), the second category refers to intertextuality as *play*. The intertextual play is a form of popular pleasure that arises out of the possibility to play with the meaning of popular texts. John Fiske states that text play resembles game play, since the recipients

> (…) voluntarily accept the rules of the text in order to participate in the practice that those rules make possible and pleasurable; the practice is, of course, the productions of meanings and identities, in a text, as in a game, the rules are there to construct a space within which freedom and control of self are possible. Games and texts construct ordered worlds within which the players/readers can experience the pleasure of both freedom and control: in particular, for our purposes, playing the text involves the freedom of making and controlling meanings (Fiske 1987/2009: 229).

The film's game is to offer the recipient 'brain candy', providing a balance between challenge and excessive demands. The activities of the mind-game viewer thus extend beyond the activities of a 'normal viewer'. The recipient is willing to play with diverse possible meanings (cf. Jahn-Sudmann 2007: 169). Hence, while video games necessarily require gaming activities, the gaming interaction with a mind-game movie is based on voluntariness. This voluntariness results in the peculiar constitution of the postmodern (or post-postmodern) film that has been described as "double coding" of the filmic text: the double coding signifies two general viewing positions. One is the involved or "naïve" position, the other is the distanced or "connoisseur" position that requires a broader cine-knowledge (Seeßlen 1997: 138). A previous study by Mikos, Eichner, Prommer and Wedel (2007), conducted on the reception of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, solidified this argument. The audience segment without previous knowledge of the books in particular or the universe created by J.R.R. Tolkien in general focused more on the spectacle and the "overwhelming" effects of the films while still rating them as very good. The "literate" audience, on the other hand, showed a more distanced position, reflecting on parallels or differences to the books or to other filmic fantasy experiences in general (ibid: 238 ff.).

The textual strategies of mind-game movies are either time based or character based. While some scholars highlight the time aspect (e.g. Bordwell 2002, 2006; Jonson 2006; Thon 2009) others focus on the mental condition of the protagonist

60 Marcus Stiglegger even argues pessimistically that many mainstream Hollywood productions adopt a game-like dramaturgy that leads to a lengthy narrative flow, with too many arcs of suspense, too many explanatory dialog notes and too many action-oriented interludes (Stiglegger 2007: 114).

(e.g. Eig 2003; Elsaesser 2009a). *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) unifies both strategies with the protagonist Leonard Shelby suffering from amnesia, causing the plot structure of the film to run backwards. Paradigmatically, *Memento* thus:

> (…) address[es] not just the usual (genre) issue of adolescent identity-crisis, sexuality, gender, the oedipal family, and the dysfunctional community, but also epistemological problems (how do we know what we know) and ontological doubts (about other worlds, other minds) that are in the mainstream of the kinds of philosophical inquiry focused on human consciousness, the mind, the brain, multiple realities or possible world (Elsaesser 2009a: 15).

Memento, *Lost* and many other films and series deploy complex narratives and narrative twists that warrant them being rewatched over and over again. Unsolved puzzles and cues that grasp at nothing engage the audience far beyond the actual viewing situation. On fan sites and film blogs, fans engage in questions concerning misgivings, red herrings or the inner logic of the film. As Elsaesser narrates, Lars von Trier promoted to set out 'lookeys' in his film *The Boss of it All* (2006) that can be best defined as out of place objects with a unifying system. For the first viewer to spot the 'lookeys', von Trier offered a prize that could be won (cf. ibid: 38).

Mind-game movies seem to challenge the conventionalized film-spectator relation since the audience cannot trust narration and representation any longer. However, Bordwell (2006) convincingly argued for a narratological perspective on mind-game movies. The fascination of the broader audience and the commitment of the fans are not least due to the recurrent and innovative play with filmic (and televisual) conventions. Only by referring to the classic mode of film reception, in carefully displaying a pattern of appeal for the audience, is the increased play with hypotheses, inference and emotions conducted. Mind-game movies form a "viewing contract" with their audience (Mikos 2001: 209), relying either on subjective stories (as employed in *Memento*) or in network narratives (as employed in *Lost*):

> These puzzle films draw their strength from certain genres (mystery, horror, neo-noir) that feature self-conscious, ludic narration. We're expecting to be misled, and we must be ready to have our expectations drastically revised. We're guided through the games of gap making and gap filling by genre conventions, the redundancy built into mainstream storytelling principles, and our familiarity with adjacent traditions: short stories by H.P. Lovecraft, Saki, and O. Henry as progenitors of the twist tale, art films as arenas for subjective/objective ambiguity. As the zone of indeterminacy widens, however, our reliance on classical closure wanes, and we must call on more rarefied comprehension skills to play with the ambiguities the films offer (Bordwell 2006: 82).

And these skills and activities might be best described with Elsaessers' term of *performative agency* (Elsaesser 2009a: 40), adverting to the increasing necessity of the audience to guess along in a narrative and to engage – beyond the actual act of watching a film – in the mystery of the movie.

4.3.5 Summary

Cognitive film theory provides the basis on which to understand the cognitive processes involved in film viewing. On the basis of *schemata*, recipients organize *prior* (real life and media) *knowledge and experiences* in order to reduce complexity. Film viewing then is an *act of inference making and hypothesis building* that recurs on these organized knowledge structures. The textuality of a film (or media) text provides cues that represent a probable link to a schema. In the course of viewing the hypotheses are constantly tested and – if necessary – accommodated. Alongside the cues, genre implications and gaps form *patterns of appeal* that 'communicate' with the audience. In this sense, all film and media texts are open to the knowledge (and experiences) of their audience.

As important as cognitive activities are the *emotional activities* of the recipients, which go hand in hand with cognition. Emotions arise from the *interplay of cognition and affects*. Specific textual characteristics; plot dramaturgy, story, camera techniques (such as close-ups) etc. cue emotional reactions. Prior emotions are stored in schemata and scripts, allowing us to respond immediately to emotion cues that trigger emotional associations. In film theory there is a strong emphasis on *character induced emotions*, however, more recent concepts suggest also the *staged situation*, as inducing a *mood* (Smith 1999), an *empathic field* (Wulff 2002), or *artefact emotions* (Tan/Frijda, 1999; Tan 1996) thus indicating that media texts without 'deep' characters are also able to produce emotion beyond the so-called ego-emotions.

Furthermore, film has been conceptualized as *play*. The ability to create a probabilistic model of the world, and to perfect this internal representation model that is detached from perception, is the inherent capacity of play. The process of film reception as described above – identifying cues, making inferences, adapting to new information, re-evaluating the situation etc. – is a specific form of play, namely cognitive play. Accordingly, Anderson (1996) has proposed to conceive film viewing not as *like* play, but *as* play.

Play activities in film viewing become manifest in the sensation of control that is cued by certain film structures, which Wuss (1993) conceptualized as *passive control*. Hypothesis building represents a *story-constructing activity* whereby the recipient willingly plays the game of trembling and tension if the story turns out the expected way. Especially highly conventionalized modes of narration allow for a very strong passive control. In contrast to this, films and series that employ an opposite strategy, providing complex narrative and twisted plots, the *mind game movies* and 'quality TV' series with narrative complexity, allow the recipients to become involved in another game: rewarded by 'brain candy', the recipient is willing to play with diverse possible meanings – it is this play with filmic and narrative conventions that Elsaesser labels performative agency.

4.4 Watching Games: Show Formats and Interactive Television

Based on the theories and arguments presented above, a growing number of relevant studies have appeared concerned with television's textuality and aesthetics (e.g. Bleicher/Link/Vladislav 2010; Caldwell 1995; Casey/Casey/Calvert/French/Justin 2002; Creeber 2008; Fiske/Hartley 1988; Fiske 1987/2009; Livingstone 1990; Mikos 2001) with audience matters (e.g. Ang 1985; McQuail 1997; Mikos 1994; Morley 1980, 1994; Nightingale 1996; Schumacher 2000; Seiter 2001; Tulloch 1999; Vorderer 1992), with the role of television in people's lives (e.g. Mikos 2004; Silverstone 1994), with television appropriation (e.g. Hepp 1998; Holly/Püschel 1993), with television history (Bleicher 1993; Hickethier, 1993, 1998), with industry (Holt/Perren [eds.] 2009; Holt 2011), with genres of television (Gehrau, 2001; Mittell, 2004), with 'new' television (e.g. Evans 2011; Lotz 2007), with particular aspects and genres such as humour (e.g. Prommer 2012), soaps (e.g. Frey-Vor 1991; Geraghty 1992; Hobson 2003), reality TV (e.g. Hill 2007, 2008; Mikos/Feise/Herzog/Prommer/Veihl 2000), or serial TV (Blanchet/Köhler/Smid/Zutavern 2011; Jancovich/Lyons 2004; Leverette/Ott/Buckley 2008; McCabe/Akass, 2007; Eichner/Mikos/Winter [eds.] 2013), television has been conceptualized as a cultural forum (Newcomb/Hirsch 2000), as bardic television (Fiske/Hartley, 1988), as dispositive (Hickethier 1993) or as flow (Williams 1974), but to name a few.

The major difficulty in conceptualizing audience participation in television is doubtlessly the question of what television is at all. Henry Jenkins' (2006) remarks on convergence showed the subject in question. Not only is the text not any longer a unified entity, but also media boundaries blur and overlap (cf. Mikos/Eichner/Prommer/Wedel 2008). With due consideration, one can say that reception of audio-visual material on the internet and television differs only in terms of conventions and expectations. Audiences expect the Internet to provide content they search as self-determined, usually in front of a laptop or desktop computer, while 'classic' television is time-dependent and in the living room, aligned with unfolding its flow characteristic. However, apart from technological convergence (which has already been achieved), recent audience studies depict a change in audience attitude and behaviour. What the TiVo in team play with online platforms such as Hulu or appleTV accomplishes in the USA, online platforms such as myvideo, maxdome and the *Mediatheken* of public and private broadcast stations allow in Germany: the development of a time-independent viewing strategy, synchronous use of watching and reaching out for information (via second screen or Smart TV): watching a television series simultaneously, and participating – sometimes creatively – in a related online community (cf. Frees/van Eimeren 2011).

As the media merge and converge, so does media theory. Thinking of television only in terms of a time-dependent lean-back medium is inadequate. The same applies to the internet and its ostensible characteristics. The challenge is to integrate

appropriate approaches to a comprehensive model that accounts for the convergent environment and different audience practices. While there are many notable works on this issue (e.g. Evans 2011; Gripsrud 2010; Jenkins 2008; Lotz 2007; Spigel/ Olsson [eds.] 2004; Turner/Tay [eds.] 2009), here is not the place to provide an elaborate insight into television's current state and future at large. Rather this chapter concentrates on the possibilities of television – regardless of the underlying technological platform and regardless of the 'content provider' – to enable an agentic viewing experience.

Roughly, the field of interest can be divided into two strands; formats that call for audience participation – such as game shows, casting and reality shows, call-in shows (e.g. Boddy 2008; Hallenberger/Foltin 1990; Hallenberger 2008; Holmes 2008; Wulff 1994), and concepts of audience activity – such as interactivity, participation or engagement (e.g. Askwith 2007; Jenkins 1992, 2006, 2008; Müller 2011; Ry/Deery 2003; Ytreberg 2004; Ziegenhagen 2009). While some of the approaches stem from a broader context of audience participation studies, others stand in the tradition of communication studies (e.g. Newhagen 1994) or, more recently, combine findings from game studies with television studies (e.g. Evans 2011; Holmes 2008; Jenkins 2008; van Dijck 2009).

4.4.1 Play and Television

Without engaging in questions of television genre that have been copiously examined by Feuer (1992), Moran (1998, 2006), Lacey (2000), Neale (2000, 2008), Creeber (ed.) (2008), Holmes (2008) and others, this section focuses on quiz shows, game shows and reality shows. First investigated by Herta Herzog (1940) and later by MacQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972),[61] game and quiz shows have frequently been the target of television studies and audience questions. In the following, the terms game show and reality show are used for classic quiz formats and other television formats that stage a competition or a game. Quiz shows such as *Who Wants*

61 Herta Herzog (1940) examined the diversified appeal of the radio quiz programme *Professor Quiz* on the basis of eleven qualitative interviews. She identified four main types of appeal; the competitive appeal, the educational appeal, the self-rating appeal and the sporting appeal. In order to meet oversimplifying and cultural pessimistic approaches that consider television's popularity as inconsistent with quality and assumes television as a single commodity, McQuail et al. (1972) provide a typology of viewer gratification by examining a radio serial, a television serial, quiz programmes, news, and adventure serials, and conducted focus group-based audience research and standardized questionnaires (cf. ibid: 145). With a focus on quiz programmes, the authors confirmed Herzog's findings that quiz programmes have "a multiple appeal" (ibid: 147). In some accordance with Herzog, they identified the self-rating appeal, the provision of a basis for social interaction, excitement in terms of "sporting appeal" (ibid: 151), and the educational appeal, as the most significant appeals of quiz shows.

To Be a Millionaire (in the following called *Millionaire*) as well as *Idols* or *I'm a Celebrity … Get Me out of Here!* (in the following called *I'm a Celebrity*) thus fall into this category. They all present – either in a studio or in a restricted space such as a 'jungle camp' – a space where candidates compete in a game with hosts as guiding instances, commenting on the candidates and the game as well as addressing the television audience 'outside' the setting. In spite of this local separation, the audience is nevertheless constructed as part of the game, either on a low or on a high level. Where on the low end of the scale the audience can only 'guess along' with a quiz candidate, on the high end of the scale the spectators are an integral part of the game rules. For instance, the spectators in *I'm a Celebrity* first decide on which candidate has to compete in a challenge and later on who is going to be expelled from the show.

Game shows constitute game spaces on television. They thus represent play as a special form of interaction. The play-character is crucial for the constitution of the game show. This proposition has been pursued in some variations by Hallenberger and Foltin (1990), Friedrich (1991), Hügel and Müller (1993), Hallenberger (2008), Holmes (2008), and Armbruster and Mikos (2009).[62] Huizinga (1938/2001) and Caillois (1958/2001) both stress the focus on play as action, defining it as voluntary act that is confined temporally and spatially (see also chapter 3.4). It is a separate activity, restricted in time and space, which is uncertain in its result and unproductive for real life. It is an activity that is regulated by conventions and is fictitious, a 'second reality' (cf. Friedrich 1991: 50 f.). Holmes (2008) alludes to the limits of time and space that are constituted in game shows. Time is a determining factor when a contestant is asked by the quiz master to speed up with the answer. It also restricts the singular 'trial' in the reality show *I'm a Celebrity:* the particular candidate chosen to compete in challenges, the 'bushtucker trials' (*Dschungelprüfungen*), which are restricted by a strict time limit. In terms of space, game shows form confined space, similar to a "consecrated spot" (Huizinga 1938/2001: 18) whether it is a studio or the *Big Brother* house or the restricted jungle area in *I'm a Celebrity*.

There are, however, some peculiarities in a game situation staged as television show that have to be taken into consideration. The first aims at the often contested claim of phenomenologist approaches which considers play as separate from everyday life within which actions have no consequences for real life (cf. Huizinga 1938/2001, Caillois 1958/2001). Like others before him, Hallenberger (2008) also notices that play is indeed not entirely separated from everyday life since it bears impact on real life: players might act wrongly thus prompting social consequences outside the game realm (ibid: 259). Other forms of play and game foster this as-

62 In fact, some of the approaches extend the notion of play to television as a whole. Not only the particular game, but the whole practice of television is analogously conceptualized as play. According to Hallenberger and Foltin (1990), television in general thus represents a "playful process" (ibid: 30) with the central characteristics of the medium of television itself as play-like (ibid: 38 ff.).

sumption. Games are considered to have various forms of influence – in form of the lottery win that can change the actual way of life, the 'as if' situation that is again and again part of our aim and struggle to form, fix, and modulate our identity/ies, or the various forms of transfer processes that have been outlined by Fritz (2003) and Witting and Esser (2003).[63]

The second peculiarity concerns the situation of the role of the audience. While the game situation of game and quiz shows has been mapped out at length and in consensus (Hallenberger/Foltin, 1990; Hügel/Müller 1993), the television audience of game shows remains strangely underresearched, and is persistently treated secondary. What is striking here, however, is that the audience of a game show is "double-constituted" (Hallenberger/Foltin 1990: 64) as concurrently spectators and players. However, they unusually have no direct access to the game situation; rather the television format allows a number of 'entry points' for the audience that enable them to actively join the game. The question then, which is of concern, is how these entry points are staged and what is their impact on the viewing experience.

As a result of an audience study conducted in 2005, Monika Taddicken stressed the importance for the audience to take an active part in the game situation. Being able to "guess along" (Taddicken 2005: 28) while watching *Millionaire* was the most important motivation viewers identified. Friedrich (1991) employs a "subject positioning" view of the television audience in game shows. His concept of the panoptic viewer allows for a closer understanding of the intrinsic state of the recipient. In analogy to Foucault's prison metaphor, the television audience is conceived as an observer in the illusion of the superior gaze of a prison guard on a panopticum. Friedrich states that:

> The appeal of play in the media consists exactly in the shift of accentuation from active participation within a regulated activity of success of performance to its observation. Homo Ludens at the screen replaces the desire for active compliance of rules by the pleasure of watching their correct application, their validity and their scope; this implies the transformation of the actor to the tester, of the seen to the seer, of the player to the panoptist. The illusion of the panoptic gaze is the pleasurable occupation of all imaginable forms of external- and self-control, of knowing better, of

63 The transfer processes that Fritz (2003), and Witting and Esser (2003), could verify in a study they conducted with video game players are: *problem solving transfer* (game problems are an issue of thoughts and rethought after the game is finished), *cognitive transfer* (what is remembered and appropriated after finishing a game), *emotional transfer* (do in-game emotions reverberate after the game situation?), *ethic transfer* (do players adopt the ethical implications of a game or can they abstract from game and real life?), *instrumental action-oriented transfer* (are game actions applied in real life?), *associative transfer* (a form of 'déjà-vu' in real life), *fantasy-oriented transfer* (does the game stimulate fantasies?), *time-based transfer* (does the specific form of turn-modus and realtime-modus of video games reverberate in real life?), and *informational reality structuring transfer* (do people learn from a game?). While it is agreed that games do have an impact on life – they offer symbolic material to which players assign meaning – the presented categories are matters of questions. For example, there is no clear selectivity between cognitive transfer, fantasy-oriented transfer or instrumental reality-structuring transfer. Also the associative transfer is not clearly elaborated.

> wish projection, of ridicule, of regret, of considering patterns of behavior in the face of profit and loss, victory and defeat, of deviances, accidents and denormalization, as they may result from the agonal-aleatory structure of social relations between player actants (ibid: 55).[64]

The sentiment that is expressed here implies that the special situation that is staged allows a specific form of pleasure that is neither the pleasure of 'normal' viewing nor the pleasure of playing. Instead of the players' pleasure in controlling the actions, it is the spectators' pleasure to supposedly be in control of the happenings on screen, which is very similar to what has been conceptualized as passive control in film viewing (see chapter 4.3.3).

However, Friedrich's panoptical viewer is only participating parasocially with the situation. There are other mechanisms that establish the spectators in a more direct way as part of the game. Hallenberger and Foltin (1990) point to the fact that the spectator is not only the spectator at home, but is frequently invited to participate as candidate *in* the programme:

> Programs with game content in principle allow a more direct involvement of the audience than any other program types – when the game with the program adds to the game in the program the viewer becomes a teammate in two ways. He can – as with all other program offerings – realize receptive play but he can also actually become active as (co-)player. If he does, the consequences of his actions are real. So as to use examples that have been cited in other contexts, the sent in postcard of a spectator in a hit music show influences the real ranking of the songs submitted for election, his lottery ticket can even change reality when the ticked numbers are drawn (ibid: 64).[65]

But moreover, the spectators are bound in a multi-layered texture of playful participation: first, programmes with game content allow for a "distanced result-oriented tension" whether the show candidates will solve the problem and who is going to

64 Original cit.: "Der Reiz des Spiels im Medium besteht exakt in der Verschiebung des Akzentes von der aktiven Teilnahme an einer geregelten Tätigkeit des Gelingens von Leistung zu deren Beobachtung. Homo Ludens am Bildschirm ersetzt die Lust an der aktiven Einhaltung der Regeln durch die Lust der Beobachtung ihrer korrekten Anwendung, ihrer Gültigkeit und Tragweite; dies impliziert die Transformation des Handelnden zum Testenden, des Gesehenen zum Sehenden, des Spielers zum Panoptisten. Die Illusion des panoptischen Blicks bedeutet die lustvolle Besetzung aller nur erdenklichen Formen der Fremd- und Selbstkontrolle, des Besserwissens, der Wunschprojektion, des Verlachens, des Bedauerns, der Betrachtung von Verhaltensmustern angesichts von Gewinn und Verlust, Sieg und Niederlage, von Devianzen, Unfällen und Denormalisierung, wie sie sich aus der agonal-aleatorischen Struktur sozialer Beziehungen zwischen Spielakteuern ergeben können" (Friedrich 1991: 55).

65 Original cit.: "Sendungen mit Spiel-Inhalt erlauben prinzipiell eine direktere Einbeziehung des Zuschauers als alle anderen Programmsparten – wenn zum Spiel mit der Sendung das Spiel in der Sendung kommt, kann der Zuschauer auf zweierlei Weise Mit-Spieler werden. Er kann – wie bei allen anderen Programmangeboten – rezeptive Spiele realisieren, er kann aber auch tatsächlich als (Mit-)Spieler aktiv werden. Falls er dies tut, sind die Folgen seines Handelns real. Um auf Beispiele zurückzugreifen, die oben in anderem Zusammenhang angeführt worden sind, beeinflußt die von ihm zu einer Hitparadensendung eingeschickte Postkarte etwa die reale Rangfolge der zur Wahl gestellten Musiktitel, sein Lottoschein vermag sogar eine eigene Realität verändern, wenn die von ihm angekreuzten Zahlen gezogen wurden" (Hallenberger/Foltin 1990: 64).

win (ibid: 69). This includes Friedrich's panoptical viewer with all imaginable forms of self-control and controlling others. Second, the show invites the viewer to participate as 'fictitious candidate' in the game. Audience participation is constructed via recruitment of viewers as candidates or via encouraging the audience to 'play along'. "We are constantly told to 'Vote Now'" in reality shows, "to save our favourite contestant" (Holmes 2008: 143), with an audience that believes it has the power to "change the course of events" (ibid: 143). Thus, "audience participation becomes a central part of quiz show aesthetics" (ibid: 142). In *Millionaire*, the audience at home is invited to take guesses by themselves and to prove their knowledge. This is most evident when the quiz master turns towards the audience at home to ask them to call in and win 5000 Euros (in the German version of *Millionaire*) by responding correctly to the actual quiz question during the following commercial break. Thirdly and finally, some shows conceptualize the spectators as participants, as in *I'm a Celebrity*, where during the first part the audience decides on which candidate has to take the next challenge while in the latter part they nominate and deselect the candidates from the show.

In consideration of convergent tendencies, the participation of the audience is not restricted to the screen (and telephone). Audience participation takes place cross-medially, on the television screen, on the telephone, but also via the accompanying video games and/or websites. Viewers of *Millionaire* therefore could – depending on their country – lock into the broadcasted game, via interactive TV, thus not only 'guessing along' with the studio candidate but playing their own game simultaneously. While popular game and quiz shows are narrow-cast on the internet almost (or completely) independently of their televisual 'mother' shows, Holmes comes to question the terms of the viewer's activity:

> "Active" in television, media and cultural studies traditionally meant how the audience responded to the meanings of the text. The changing media environment (and the shift from viewer to user) has put pressure on the parameters of these debates, and this has in turn raised questions about whether "active" should be conflated with "interactive". After all, responding to the discourses in a text does not in itself have a direct relationship with shouting at your screen, playing on your mobile, or pressing "your red button now" to select an answer. This point resonates with broader scepticism about the amount of viewer 'power' actually offered by multi-platform/interactive TV (Holmes 2004b). But it may also reflect back on the specificity of the quiz show. The rules of a game are specifically intended to shape and limit the scope of participant action, and on a wider level, rules determine what "holds" in the temporary world of play (Huizinga 1970: 30). As such, there is a wider question as to how much scope, agency and flexibility we might expect "interactivity" to offer where the quiz show is concerned (ibid: 146f.).

Yet, interactivity does not guarantee agency and nor does a "classic" active reading positioning automatically exclude agency. As Hallenberger and Foltin (1990) argue, the anticipation of results (as the case of the result-oriented tension revealed) is also emergent in fiction films: when the viewer hopes for a certain outcome, and her prediction proves to be right, the recipient is "rewarded" (ibid: 108f.).

4.4.2 Interactive Television

Many game studies approaches draw a differentiating line between the ostensible active medium of video game and the supposedly passive media of film and television. Video games and the internet are regarded as genuinely interactive, while film and television are characterized as linear and non-interactive, due to their lack of a direct feedback channel. In this technologically-based scenario, film and television are one-to-many media while video games and internet are many-to-many (or one-to-one) media. Due to their underlying technological structure, film and television are thus considered as non-responding and non-interactive. In contrast to this false assumption, television aimed from its very beginnings to provide its audience with various possibilities of feedback channels. Without the claim of completeness a brief summary of the most popular German interactive television shows will exemplarily stand for the tradition of interactive television throughout.[66] While television is a medium of communication that demands various cognitive and emotional activities from the audience to be experienced and interpreted, 'interactivity' in early German television was reduced to switching the national broadcast channel ARD[67] on and off. This changed only slightly in 1963 when the second German television channel, ZDF, was launched and the audience could choose between the two programmes. And it was ZDF that was responsible for the first interactive and internationally successful television show, *Der Goldene Schuss* (1964–1970), which allowed the television audience to call in and direct a crossbow pinned to a camera via voice commands. In a first-person shooter typical point of view shot (through the camera holding the crossbow), the whole audience could vicariously participate in the interactive experience of the caller. The *Hugo Show* (Kabel 1, 1994–1997) also employed this basic concept in a more sophisticated way nearly 30 years later. Here the caller could direct the little troll Hugo with the key panel of the telephone through varying environments (cf. Schwarz 1995: 151). *Wünsch Dir Was* (ZDF, 1969–1972) can be considered as the predecessor of actual reality show formats. In this Austrian-German-Swiss co-production, three families from the three nationalities had to compete in various games for the title of best family. The audience could vote for their favourite family by flushing the toilet and/or switching on an electric device, with the utility companies measuring the water and electricity peak to ascertain the winner (Bleicher 1993: 263). This principle was simplified in 1979 with the introduction of Tele-Dialog technology (TED; more actual: Televoting) at the *Internationale Funkausstellung* (IFA) in Berlin, which enabled audience participation in all live

66 The outline refers to the FRG-programme formats only.

67 ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) was launched after World War II, in 1950, and was Germany's only television channel until the ZDF (Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen) launched in 1963. An exhaustive account of Germany's television history is provided by Knut Hickethier (1998).

formats. This principle of audience participation is actually employed in many reality show formats to enable the audience to vote for or against certain candidates (e.g. *I'm a Celebrity*, *Big Brother*, *Idols*, *The Voice*, *Popstars* and many others), or to present their opinion, often concurrently providing a profitable business for the broadcaster through telephone charges.

While interaction via Televoting technology is easy and cheap to handle, interactivity in fictional television seemed to be a more intractable enterprise. Germany's most famous – and probably most expensive – example is the interactive TV movie *Mörderische Entscheidung* (*Murderous Decision*) (1991, Oliver Hirschbiegel;). The audience could decide which perspective they wanted to follow: the female protagonist Mapi Galán (on ARD) or the male protagonist Nils Tavernier (on ZDF). The two plotlines developed in such a way, that the viewers could switch between the two channels without losing sight of the story. Although vigorously promoted in advance, the episode did not receive good ratings, which is, however, considered to be due to the overall plot and not to the interactive concept (Kirchmann 1994: 25).

Murderous Decision, while being reckoned as interesting experiment, proved to be too expensive, too elaborate and yet too linear to provide the audience with a surplus value. So, as soon as internet technology became available, innovative forms of audience participation were tested. Schwarz (1995) and Todtenhaupt (2001) recapitulate this early stage of multiplatform television, providing some interesting examples of this early and sometimes experimental phase of interactive formats. *Piazza Virtuale* (3Sat, 1994), *The YORB Project* (New York University, 1992) or *The terranet c@fe* are only some examples of a phase in television and internet history, where various concepts of interactive participation were tested and proved to be either a success or a flop. A successful recent example is provided by the popular German crime series *Tatort*, *Tatort plus*. Two interactive movies were produced since 2012 ("Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget", SWR 2012 and „Spiel auf Zeit", SWR 2013) were the audience can engage via Internet before and after the actual broadcasting of the crime series.

Nowadays, it is evident, that the dispositive television (cf. Hickethier 1993) has changed radically. Technology use and devices differ fundamentally from the age of broadcasting television, with the institutional, regulatory and industrial order changing accordingly. While formerly the big broadcasting channels controlled the content and internet platforms provided merely the infrastructure, the situation is now much more in flux. Hulu TV, Netflix or TubeAgency turn old structures upside down, questioning the dominance of the old media players.[68] IPTV, Smart TV,

68 Spiegel Online: http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/youtube-netzwerke-mediakraft-und-tubeagency-machen-internet-tv-a-886673.html, (13.03.2013): "YouTube-Netzwerke: Y-Tittys heimliche Strippenzieher", by Simon Broll.

Catch-up TV or HbbTV[69] are all manifestations of a development that also includes time-displaced viewing and multi- or second-screen usage (cf. Frees/van Eimeren 2011). While it has always been evident since the conception of Hall and Fiske's productive audience (Fiske 1987/2009; Hall 1980) that the 'couch potato' was never a passive one, also the 'linear' television dispositive proves to be as non-linear, time-displaced and feedback-able as any other computer-technology based device can be.

While the technological and infrastructural development by no means signify the end of "lean-back" use of television (cf. Stipp 2001: 371 ff.) the perception of non-interactive, linear television as opposed to interactive, non-linear 'new media' proves to be obsolete.

4.4.3 Audience Participation and Transmedia Storyworlds

According to Henry Jenkins,

> [a] transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole (Jenkins 2008: 97 f.).

Transmedia storytelling can be considered as a consistent development of convergent tendencies that include technological, cultural and practical as well as industrial aspects of convergence. Yet, transmedia storytelling does not only serve the audience but also the industry. Synergetic effects thus occur when Warner Bros. not only profits from the box office of a film but also from TV licensing, computer games, comic novels or web services that form a transmedia story. While Jenkins has been criticized for just describing "smart marketing" instead of "smart storytelling" (Antonucci in ibid: 106), at the core of Jenkins' concept is not the repetitive

69 IPT (Internet Protocol Television) enables television via broadband and typically offers additional channels (fee-based and/or free), an EPG and the possibility of a Timeshift function. According to the Nielson Company (2012), in 2012 10.4% of US households watched via IPTV, in Germany 3.3%. Smart TV (also hybrid TV or connected TV) are television sets that provide internet connection and an operating system. Since there is no standard yet, there are manifold systems with different Apps from the different fabricators. At the same time, the broadcasting channels try to keep their audience via HbbTV (Hybrid Broadcast Broadband TV) in the existing environment (as AOL did in the 1990s with regard to internet use). Catch-up TV, on the other hand, describes the possibility of time-displaced viewing via an online platform either of the channel itself (e.g. *Mediatheken* in Germany), video-on-demand portals such as iTunes, and Over the Top Television (OTT-TV) such as myvideo, Hulu or Netflix, Google Play and certain illegal platforms such as kinox.to.

moment, the "more of the same" of the usual franchise (such as cross-promotion, merchandizing, re-enactment of a film in a video game) but "new insights and new experiences" that add to the initial media experience (ibid: 107). The cultural techniques that minister to transmedia storytelling are collaborative authorship on the producer's side and collective intelligence on the recipient's side. Jenkins employs the example of *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999) to punctuate his argument. The directors looked for cult authors and designers to create the Matrix universe: "The Wachowsky brothers, for example, saw co-creation as a vehicle for expanding their potential global market, bringing in collaborators whose very presence evoked distinct forms of popular culture from other parts of the world" (ibid: 111).

Thus, transmedia storytelling in combination with collaborative authorship assures for a global and transmedial appeal that emerges when the narrative universe, the diegesis, is elaborately and skilfully crafted. Only a diegetic universe that is consistent and convincing allows the audience to effortlessly change and switch media without leaving the possible world. Storytelling thus is not the outline of a narrative path but the creation of "compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium" (ibid: 116). Transmedia storyworlds therefore need narrative and audiovisual motif-cues, which are recognized and form an "encyclopaedic capacity" (Murray quoted in Jenkins 2006: 118). The world that is built needs to be rich and self-contained in the sense that it follows an inner logic that allows for potentially countless stories to be told and numberless characters to inspirit the artificial world.

The recipient of such a transmedia story or the visitor of such a world thus does not only understand and interpret media text but follows the modus of additive comprehension. The premise for additive comprehension is the careful and artistic inter-weaving of the diverse storylines, accessory information, and background stories with regard to release dates, audience segments and preferences. The recipients of transmedia stories thus become textual poachers, travellers, who poach from text-segment to text-segment, striving to gain control over their meanings (Jenkins 1992: 24). Additive comprehension requires a participatory mode of reception, a close engagement with the diverse segments of the manifold media texts. As the example of *The Matrix* indicates, this is not an easy task since missing information or lack of logic might discourage audiences. As pointed out in the beginning, each media element needs to be self-contained in such a way that the audience can follow and enjoy the film, game or text without having access to the other media elements. However, non-players might not quite support the decision to displace the character of Morpheus in favour of Niobe in *Matrix Revolutions* (Wachowski Brothers, 2003). But game players have spent many hours playing Niobe's character in *Enter the Matrix* (Shiny Entertainment, 2003) thus having formed a stronger bond to her.

4.4.4 Summary

Transmedia storytelling has to be understood in terms of additional pleasure and additional opportunities and additional activities. When determined by economic decisions, popular texts seek a broad audience that is not necessarily eager to spend hours of online investigation in search of the next cue or jigsaw piece. But:

> The key point is that going in deep has to remain an option – something readers choose to do – and not the only way to derive pleasure from media franchises. (…) More and more consumers are enjoying participating in online knowledge cultures and discovering what it is like to expand one's comprehension by tapping the combined expertise of these grassroots communities. Yet, sometimes, we simply want to watch (Jenkins 1992: 134).

Game shows and interactive television has been identified as forms of television that are specific in terms of reception processes: *they do afford audience participation*. In game shows the television audience can participate on various levels – from guessing along, via TED or telephone voting, to playing along on the website. In shows such as *I'm a Celebrity* the audience is constituted as an integral part of the show's aesthetic and dramaturgical progression. Interactive technological infrastructure and computer-based technology allows for *direct feedback channels* corrupting the traditional division into linear, non-interactive media such as film and television, on the one hand, and non-linear, interactive media such as video games and internet on the other hand. Finally, in times of converging media the question arises as whether to connect a media text to a certain medium or to start from the mode of media reception. An *additive mode* requires a new understanding of media text deflecting from the mediality perspective. In this perspective, Stephenson's (1967) arguments, considering media communication in general as play, gains new relevance. In the end, it might not be the media and their mediality but the recipients and their mode of reception, who are empowered to define the constraints of a media text. The media text has long ago become the textuality of media (Fiske 1987/2009). Now it becomes the mode of reception.

4.5 Playing in Electronic Environments

4.5.1 Experiencing Video Games: an Action-oriented Approach

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines video games as "electronic games played by means of images on a video screen".[70] This implies a computer generated software with implemented game rules accessible for user interaction via an interface that generates feedback on a video device. While there is a long tradition of text-

70 Merriam Webster Encyclopaedia: http://www.merriam-webster.com/ (08.04.2013)

based games, current blockbuster or AAA video games[71] are usually graphical, with photorealism as the aspired ideal. The audiovisual representation of a game has thus gained increasingly in importance. Yet, the definition is not very selective. Hypertext or interactive drama, websites or interactive cinema all fall into this category. While many approaches have engaged in the question of how to define a video game (e.g. Aarseth 1997; Juul 1999; Salen/Zimmermann 2004) for the purpose of this work, a broad definition of video games proves to be appropriate. As a cross-media mode of reception, agency might emerge in all of the above listed forms of software-based, interactive media.

Despite the vast debate on whether a video game is to be understood in terms of narratology or in terms of ludology,[72] there is some consensus concerning the player and the player experience. To perceive and appropriate a video game, a sort of activity on the side of the player is necessary. This activity has been conceptualized as "interactivity" (e.g. Carr/Burn/Schott/Buckingham 2003; Friedmann 1995; Juul 1999; Klastrup 2003; Klimmt 2006; Knobloch 2000; Ryan 2008; Schlütz 2002), as "human-computer activity" (Laurel 1993), as "nontrivial effort" (Aarseth 1997), as "participation and activity" (Murray 1997), as "player effort" (Juul 2003), as "performance" (Jenkins 2005), or as "configurative practice" (Eskelinen 2001). To specify the peculiar aesthetic situation of interactivity in games, sometimes the term gameplay is used. Salen and Zimmermann (2004) define gameplay as "the formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its system through play" (ibid: 311). While gameplay is an important category for game designers who try to accomplish a rich and appealing gameplay for players, it also emphasizes the media-specific quality of experience of video games. Much academic effort has been conducted by game studies scholars in assembling video games as autonomous media with distinct characteristics from other media such as literature or film. However, game reception has been ceded in large part to communication studies, media psychology or cognitive film theory.

Game studies scholar Jesper Juul (1999) offers the following definition of video games: "The computer game is an activity taking place on the basis of formally

71 AAA-video games are Blockbuster video games in terms of budget, marketing, and hype.

72 The narratology/ludology debate has become known as the academic dispute between young game scholars (namely Celia Pearce, Jesper Juul or Markku Eskelinen) who aimed to establish video games and video game theory as a discipline in its own right by distancing themselves from narratologist models. While the moderate ludologist perspective emphasizes the importance and dominance of game structures and game rules (e.g. Aarseth 1997; Salen/Zimmermann 2004) the radical ludologist position rejects narratologist approaches from drama theory, literary theory or film theory entirely. This position is best reflected by Markku Eskelinen (2004) in his paper, "Towards Computer Game Studies", which has been fiercely criticized by semiologists and game studies scholar Julian Kücklich, who, in return, received a strongly-worded response. Eskellinen states: "It should be self-evident that we can't apply print narratology, hypertext theory, film or theatre and drama studies directly to computer games (…) I think we can safely say we can't find narrative situations within games." (ibid: 36–37).

defined rules and containing an evaluation of the efforts of the player. When playing a game, the rest of the world is ignored" (ibid: 19). The strong focus of Juul and many others on the game rules and the activities of the player are matched partly by communication models on video game use (e.g. Aarseth 2004; Pearce 2002a, 2002b; Salen/Zimmermann 2004). Daniela Schlütz (2002) offers an extensive account on playing games as communicative action, defining game reception as distinct from other forms of media reception by the quality of interactivity (ibid: 39). Both definitions are problematic since they first disdain the interactive potential of other forms of media (see chapter 4.3 and 4.4), and second either disregard or subordinate the level of representation as significant aspect of reception and appropriation of video games.

I want to suggest a model of video game reception that:

- accounts for the basics of media reception as a special form of mediated social action
- accounts for game rules that are implemented by a software system and form a simulation that can be explored via an interface and by according user (inter-) actions
- accounts for the levels of representation, genre, intertextual references, character staging and player positioning, audiovisual material, textual material, sound, dialogues, music – in short all symbolic material that is accessible for the player.

Thus, when Aarseth (1997) declares that video games represent "a unique aesthetic field of possibilities, which must be judged on its own terms" (ibid: 107), one should not mistakenly throw previous insights overboard. Playing video games means performing communicative action. Additional to the symbolic material as known from symbolic interactionism and accordingly film and television reception, another form of material may be added: the level of simulation. The simulation 'material' is the reification of implemented software rules that predetermine the possible environment and the possible actions within it. Since the programmed and visualized simulation stages a differentiation quality to many 'classic' media texts, it will therefore be elaborated at more length:

The computer is a simulation machine. Its great potential is the possibility to simulate – on the basis of algorithm – any feasible mechanisms. According to Frasca (2001), simulation is the computer's main potential. Since games are constituted on the basis of – fixed or fluent – rules, the computer is an ideal device for games: it can simulate *any* rules. Simulation is conceived as the ability to represent dynamic systems. Not only signs (symbolic material) but also rules of a certain behaviour are represented. To appropriate the text an experimental investigation of the rules is required. As Berthold Brecht (1966) stated, images alone are always

incomplete since they cannot express inner characteristics. This explains why games cannot be fully evaluated by means of the representational level. Frasca describes simulation as "act of modeling a system A by a less complex system B, which retains some of A's original behaviour" (Frasca 2001: 3). For example, one can imagine the game *SimCity* (Will Wright, Maxis, since 1989) that represents a simulation (B) of a town (A), whereby the simulation is always a simplified model. Considering the elucidation of mind-game movies and cognitive play in chapter 4.3, the analogy to the mind game is conveyed. In the end, the real achievement for a computer would be to simulate the human mind. The dynamic processes employed when cognitively playing along with the film's possibilities and probabilities to be cued to build some hypotheses (but not others) and to look for more evidence to assert to the conjecture or to adjust the initial hypothesis is indeed a dynamic process that is comparable to the dynamic processes of a computer generated simulation. There is, however, a difference: video games allow for a visualization of the dynamic processes of a simulation, while the diverse scenarios of cognitive play remain imaginary.

Following the abovementioned threefold model does not at all imply that the medium-specific characteristics are neglected (as Juul, Aarseth or Eskkelinen would claim). For clarification I quote from Brown and Krzywinska (2009) at length:

> Text-based objects and interfaces are found regularly within a game itself, which are co-present alongside a whole range of elements derived from other media (various types of television, CCTV, cinema, photography). Players are also required to "read" embedded and enigmatic audio and visual cues extremely attentively if they are to progress through a game and achieve a satisfying sense of agency. We would argue therefore that a game player's relationship to [a] game is even more intrinsically dialogic than the reader's relationship with the literary text or a film. A game requires constant inputs which demand a knowledge of its rules and patterns alongside repeated efforts at suspension of disbelief in order to generate engagement at the level of the imaginary, necessary to accrue some sense of "being" in the game world. Yet, games do tend to climax with a passive, highly cinematic and spectacular movie, allowing the players to sit back and view in relaxed, passive comfort the outcome of their efforts. It is also often the case in some games, the "Prince of Persia" series (Ubisoft 1989–) for example, the player is encouraged to chain together their character's actions to produce the type of fluid, seemingly effortless and forward moving movement found in mainstream action movies (failure and death leading to repetition and stasis which might be associated with anti-illusionist cinemas). Cinema is clearly aspired to in these ways, yet straddling multiple modes is intrinsic to playing contemporary digital games (ibid: 94).

With the outlined dispositions in mind, gameplay can therefore be conceptualized as follows: as a communicative act, embedded in the sociocultural scope of everyday life, games and players are interlaced in processes of cueing and inference making. These inference making processes are based on cognitive activities, the deployment of schemata and scripts, understood as "declarative knowledge" (Lindley/Nacke/Sennersten 2008: 1) or knowledge cluster (Bordwell 1985: 31). The schemata and scripts help us to organize the information flow – in the process of media reception as well as in everyday life – that inundates us every moment. The often employed 'restaurant script' (e.g. Lindley et al. 2008; Mikos 2001; Schank/Abel-

son 1977) serves as example: we know instantly that in a restaurant we can sit at a table where food and drinks are served that we have to pay for. We even can assign specific cultural meanings to a certain restaurant scene we witness – such as the couple that has a rendezvous or the couple that is going to split up. Gameplay schemata are cognitive structures that result in certain haptic actions. When the genre schemata 'jump 'n' run' is activated, we not only have an idea of the obstacles that are to be met, but also translate this knowledge into the according interface input (cf. Lindley et al. 2008: 2). The representational level of a video game guides our attention and presents cues for our cognitive inferences and our haptic forwarded exploration of the simulation. Gameplay also includes emotional involvement. On a very general level, emotions are induced by arousal, caused by stimuli. Only by context is arousal transformed into emotion (cf. Grodal 2000: 201). Grodal identifies different phases of the emotional game experience: "a cause, an arousal, a cognitive appreciation and a labeling, followed by some actions that remove the cause of arousal" (ibid: 201). The problem or the specificity arising from the involvement of haptic actions is the coordination of motor actions. An unskilled player might already have internalized procedural schemata but at the same time is not able to accomplish the according motor actions sufficiently. This might lead to a frustrating game experience. These observations have been given expression in the concepts of control, self-efficacy and flow that will be elucidated in the following section.

4.5.2 Self-Efficacy, Control, and Flow

Klimmt (2006) defines the ongoing perception of one's own direct-causal influence on a game as "self-efficacy experience" (ibid: 76). The feeling that arises out of the possibility to direct and affect a game has been conceptualized as control (e.g. Fritz 1997, 2003). The premise for control to emerge is flow, the balance between requirement and skills. Self-efficacy and control thus exhibit some interference with the model of agency as it is employed in the course of this work. Agency and self-efficacy and control are concerned with the perception of the recipient's causal effects on the world and the media text. The first concept to be considered, self-efficacy is, as agency, a psychological process induced by a peculiar characteristic of the media text. So what is the difference between self-efficacy and agency, between one's own direct-causal influence on a game text and "the satisfying power to take meaningful actions and see the results of our decisions and choices" (Murray 1997: 126). Bandura (1993), who elaborated some time earlier on the significance of self-efficacy, regarded it as the primary motivator for agency. Self-efficacy, in his sense, is only one aspect of agency, while agency is the primary factor in human evolution,

with agentic capabilities as "the hallmark of human nature" (Bandura 2006: 173). He states, that:

> People make causal contributions to their own functioning through mechanisms of personal agency, Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives (Bandura 1993: 118).

People can have a low or a high perception of efficacy that does not, however, mirror the factual grade of efficacy: "the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is their commitment to them" (ibid: 118). Bandura describes cognitive, motivational and affective processes involved in the process of perceived self-efficacy. Thus the conception of ability – the inherent view of capacity – directly and indirectly affects performances. This feedback stages an interesting aspect. It not only hints towards the fact that self-efficacy is something that is perceived, but also that the own perception of self-efficacy – and not one's own factual grade of agency – is generated on the basis of expectations and motivations. Agency thus is the capacity to change things. But self-efficacy is the concrete and individualized belief that one is capable of acting significantly in this world, with prior positive experiences leading to a higher degree of self-efficacy (and presumably to more agency) and prior negative experiences leading to a lower degree of self-efficacy (and presumably also to less agency). Klimmt (2006), who adapts the concept of self-efficacy to video games, conceptualizes the process at the level of input-output loops, as the haptic interaction between users via interface with the responding game system. For Klimmt this is a characteristic and fascinating trait of the medium of the video game, since normal social situations generally do not allow for such a direct and instantaneous response. In video games the player does not only experience the self-efficacy immediately but also knows that it is her doing that caused the effect (cf. ibid: 76). The causal response, the effect, is instantly recognizable after the user's input. The immediacy of the effects of self-efficacy in interplay with the "ratio between input and output" (Klimmt/Hartmann 2006: 138) (little user effort results in enormous effects, such as such as an explosion caused by a mouse click) is one of the pleasures of video gameplay. The difference then between agency and self-efficacy as outlined here can be summarized in its different ontological principles. In following Bandura, self-efficacy is a psychological motivator for agency. We experience the pleasures of acting effective in the world. Thus, self-efficacy is one aspect and one premise through which we can experience agency.

Furthermore, self-efficacy is connected to the experience of one's own body. Grodal and Gregerson (2009) accordingly distinguish between agency ownership and body ownership: "we may very well have an acute sense of body ownership and still have a distinct non-agentic feel if we believe that we lack the ability to influence

states around us" (ibid: 66), however, agency and body ownership are related in the way that the sense of agency has the tendency to increase body ownership. Klimmt, who applies the concept to video games, argues that any effect – even an unwanted or unsuccessful effect – serves our intrinsic motivation to effect change. Video games are furthermore ideal devices for self-efficacy because they allow for much result with only minor effort. This, however, does not take into consideration that even the most basic haptic input-output loop in the gameplay is linked to the broader context and to meaning making.

The focus of the relation between input and output in video games is the source of various pleasures of control. Control relates to several aspects of the gameplay, such as the choice of point of view, spatial orienteering and navigation, coordination of visual attention and haptic actions or the capabilities of one's own performance (cf. Grodal 2000: 202). Fritz (1997) regards the interplay of power and control in video games as constituent on more levels. Video games, in this view, are an antagonistic force that has to be mastered by the player. As such, games mirror the realms of everyday life where the subject constantly strives to gain some power over the course of his life, while at the same time experiencing impotence and weakness in the face of bigger structures, constraints and determinants (ibid: 183). Not for nothing do many popular games present mighty and superhuman heroes endowed with according weapons. In order to master a game, players have to exert several skills on the level of visual attention and haptic coordination, on the level of narrative knowledge and game rule (narrative and game schemata), and on the level of life attachment (the game and its action-guiding topics have to hold significance for the player). An example is the third-person action game, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (EA, 2003), in the level "The Path of the King": in order to approach the game and its requirements, the player has to employ a general idea of the course of events. Furthermore, the basic haptic skills in using the interface have to be developed. When entering the haunted caves under the White Mountains, audiovisual information cues the player to be aware of the Army of the Dead accordingly (by killing the skeletons and later the King of the Dead). Without a general narrative knowledge (that there is a solution at the end of the maze), the player might soon give up, considering the cave to be a dead end. And without a general access to the action-guiding topic (the competition on the micro level, and Tolkien's theme of good and evil together with the significance of friendship at a broader level), the game appears insignificant. The structuring of many games to demand enhanced skill from level to level and finally to reach the goal – in action games often marked by the 'boss-fight' – emphasizes the pattern of power and control. For Fritz (1997) this is one of the sources of fascination and pleasure that video games have to offer, particularly for young gamers:

> One of the main issues at all for children, adolescents and young adults is the grappling with power and control and the desire to determine one's own life in the face of the constant experience of

> loss of control. Therefore many children, teenagers and young adults seek out to test themselves in media worlds. Here they achieve a scope and a space in which they are permitted the awareness to exercise power and domination through control (ibid 196).[73]

Control and self-efficacy are therefore means by which power and a sense of agency is gained. But coming back to the scene of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, the flip side of the control-focus is unveiled: playing Aragorn in the cave (as is determined by the game) is not an easy task. While, at the beginning of the level, the player traverses a corridor where singular skeletons can easily be defeated, later the main quest is reached and with it numerous skeletons, ghosts and other malicious enemies. The less skilled gamer will presumably fail this level, retrying it in the hope that her skills will improve and the level will be mastered. If this is not the case, the player will most probably quit the game in frustration. The skilled player, on the other hand, will consider the task of the *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* game as far too easy, since all paths and actions are predetermined. This player might give up in boredom.

Pleasurable gameplay therefore is often linked to the concept of flow as developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (2000). Flow is defined as the "complete absorption of an agent in her/his actions" (ibid: 58). It is the autotelic experience of mastering actions whether the actions are play, sport, work, or art that is characterized by an absent-mindedness and complete control over the course of action. In order for flow to occur, a balance between action affordances and action skills has to be established. A game has to articulate in an unmistakably way the affordances that are required from the player and give feedback to her accordingly. The player needs the skills to match the affordances of the game. Given the balance of affordance and skills, flow as a form of emotional pleasure occurs.

Experiencing video games has recently been conceptualized as gameplay. Gameplay refers to the media-specific quality of experiencing video games, to the formalized interaction that is constituted by the interplay between player and game rules. Approaches to video game experiences often either focus on rules or on content. In suggesting a model that regards video gameplay as a special form of mediated social action, that accounts for the game rules that are implemented by a software system, and by considering also the levels of representation, *playing video games has been conceptualized as a specific form of doing media.* It is a communicative act, embedded in the socio-cultural sphere of everyday life with games and players being interlaced in processes of cueing, inference and meaning making. The general act of

73 Original cit.: "Eine der wichtigsten Thematiken überhaupt für Kinder, Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene ist die Auseinandersetzung mit Macht und Kontrolle und der Wunsch anstelle des permanent erlebten Kontrollverlustes das eigene Leben selbst zu bestimmen. Von daher suchen sehr viele Kinder, Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene ihre Bewährung in der 'Welt am Draht'. Hier gewinnen sie einen Spielraum, in dem sie das Bewusstsein haben dürfen, Macht und Herrschaft durch Kontrolle ausüben zu können" (Fritz 1997:196).

perception and meaning making relies – like all forms of perception and meaning making – on the basis of schemata and scripts. They help us to organize the ongoing information flow in everyday life, film viewing, television watching and video game playing.

Self-efficacy, control and *flow* have been considered as favourable form of experiencing video games. Self-efficacy has been defined as one's own direct-causal influence on a situation, all the small input-output loops of the interface-interaction. Self-efficacy thus supports the individualized perception of being able to act significantly in this world. It thus is a crucial aspect of agency. Video games provide a favourable platform for self-efficacy, since it allows for major output (e.g. an explosion) with only minor input (e.g. a mouse click). *Self-efficacy is linked to control* inasmuch as the control over several aspects of the gameplay (e.g. point of view or spatial navigation) results in feelings of empowerment. Following Fritz (1997), *this interplay of power and control in video games is constituent for the game experience.* Only via control, is the pleasurable condition of *flow*, *the perfect balance between action affordances and action skills* achieved. Self-efficacy, control and flow are thus markers that enhance agency.

4.5.3 Video Games and Agency

4.5.3.1 First-Wave Agency: Laying the Foundations

Janet H. Murray has coined the concept of agency in game studies heavily in her influential work *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997). According to Murray, agency is an elementary and at the same time pleasurable characteristic of the medium of the computer, allowing the user to influence the course of events. Murray's work, though, could not have been possible without Brenda Laurel's *Computers as Theater* (1993). With this account of the Aristotelian drama model, Laurel provided a most influential human-computer activity model. Also drawing on Laurel's work, Espen Aarseth, in 1997, conceptualized texts that require a "non-trivial effort" to be read as "ergodic literature" (Aarseth 1997). These three approaches today form the groundwork for game studies in general and game studies' concept of agency in particular. On account of this, their work will be introduced in some detail.

"Agency", according to Murray, "is the satisfying power to take meaningful actions and see the results of our decisions and choices" (Murray 1997: 126). Following Murray, agency constitutes alongside with 'immersion' and 'transformation' the aesthetics of the medium of the computer.[74] While agency is not a genuine charac-

74 *Immersion* is defined as "the experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place" which is "pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content" (Murray 1997: 98); *transformation,* as the computer's possibility to transform elements seamlessly, refers to the aesthetic and technological

teristic of the computer exclusively,[75] the computer nonetheless presents ideal circumstances to enable the "feeling of agency" in its different implementations: "on the computer we encounter a world that is dynamically altered by our participation" (ibid: 128). Most importantly, agency, in the sense intended by Murray, is neither a characteristic of the medium nor is it interactivity – it lies in the perception of the recipient. As an aesthetic pleasure it is the environmentally-induced psychological and emotional state of the recipient: "When things are going right on the computer, we can be both the dancer and the caller of the dance. This is the feeling of agency." (ibid: 128).

In its broadest sense, Murray's agency is produced by the possibility to alter the world around us dynamically.[76] The most common place for agency to occur is the structured activities of games. A second form of agency derives from the pleasure of spatial navigation, a concept that has also been employed by Manovich (2001: 244 ff.). It is the mere pleasure of orienteering, of "orienting ourselves by landmarks, mapping a space mentally to match our experiences, and admiring the juxtapositions and changes in perspective that derive from moving through an intricate environment" (Murray 1997: 129). Agency as alternation and agency as navigation coincide in spatial video games. In her account of the adventure maze and the hypertext, Murray clarifies the structuring potency of the media materiality, or the textuality of a media text. She rejects the agentic potential of a maze and of the hypertext: while the former is frustrating since only one loophole is given, the latter is frustrating due to its unsolvability and its infinity. Murray argues that the art of designing video games with an agency appeal then lies in the balancing of exciting, problem-solving journey stories: "The key to creating an expressive fictional labyrinth is arousing and regulating the anxiety intrinsic to the form by harnessing it to the act of navigation" (ibid: 135).

Another form of agency derives from the pleasure to wilfully change or reinterpret the structuring rules of a text. The misappropriation of an online game such as *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, since 2004), to reinterpret it as social network rather than an online role playing game, the modification and appropriation of the designed game environment or the characters in it, or the use of (non-intended) cheats are all forms of "constructivist pleasure" of agency as described by Murray (cf. 1997: 147 ff.).[77]

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possibilities of computer generated images (CGI): "It makes us eager for masquerade, eager to pick up a joystick and become a cowboy or a space fighter, eager to log on to the MUD and become ElfGirl or BlackDagger" (ibid: 154).

75 Murray lists participatory theatre performances, singing and dancing or jazz improvization as spheres where agency occurs.

76 It should be noted that for Murray agency only applies to art forms, not to everyday forms of social action.

77 A *modification* (abbreviated to mod), is the redesign of items, weapons, characters, enemies, models, textures, levels, story lines, music, and even game modes. Mods can be either 'officially' made by the

Murray's account of agency carries important implications. First of all, agency is conceptualized as a psychological and emotional process, which is facilitated by certain textual structures, by the textuality of a media text. Agency is thus distinguished from interactivity or mere activity. Furthermore, Murray provides indications for the comprehensive nature of agency. Agency, according to her, is not restricted to electronic environments but also emerges "to a limited degree in traditional art forms" (ibid: 128). While this observation does not cover the whole social dimension of agency as carved out in the present work, it nevertheless does not take the bait of assigning agency to a certain medium (and, as the following chapter will show, many approaches of agency fall into this trap). Murray also points out three different forms of agency: the general possibility to alter the environment, navigating and orienting oneself in an environment, and misappropriating an environment for one's own sake. Yet, Murray argues that video games are most inclined to enable agency due to their game structure. Anderson (1996), Hallenberger and Foltin (1990) and Stephenson (1967), however, argue for audiovisual narration to be conceived as play, or cognitive play. Accordingly, the notion of video games being in favour of agency is thus challenged in the present work.

Despite of Murray being often quoted as the founder of agency in game studies, the origins can be traced back to Brenda Laurel's book *Computers as Theatres*, first published in 1991. Deriving from her interest in human-computer interaction, Laurel argues that interactivity should be conceptualized as a form of human action (Laurel 1993: 20). Thereby Laurel shifts the focus from technically determined interactivity approaches towards human agency. She justifies her approach accordingly:

> In the past, I barked up the same tree. I posited that interactivity only exists on a continuum that could be characterized by three variables: frequency (how often could you interact), range (how many choices were available), and significance (how much the choices really affected matters). A not-so-interactive computer game judged by these standards would let you do something only once in a while, would give you only a few things to choose from, and the things you could choose wouldn't make so much difference to the whole action. A very interactive computer game (…) would let you do something that really mattered at any time, and it could be anything you could think of – just like real life. Now I believe that these variables provide only part of the picture. There is another, more rudimentary measure of interactivity: You either feel yourself to be participating in the on-going action of the representation or you don't (ibid: 21).

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game developer or 'unofficially' made as fan art. Probably the most famous mod in the history of video games was the Half Life (Valve Corporation, 1998) mod Counter-Strike, developed by Minh Le and Jess Cliffe in 1999, which was later redeemed by Valve. *Cheats* can be either considered as direct game file manipulation to generate, for instance, 'blood-cheats' (due to the German rating system, many video games are sold in a 'no-blood' version); unintended use might also be conceived as cheat; using walkthrough when being stuck in a game, pushing a character to a high level in a MMORPG or endowing characters with 'godly' powers are all mechanisms that can increase the player's own (and decrease others') perception of agency (cf. Kücklich 2008).

The feeling of participating in an action is at the heart of the agency concept as later employed by Murray. At the same time, technological factors such as range, frequency and significance, as described by Laurel, become subordinate. It is not that the technical characteristic of input possibilities allow for agency, instead the audiovisual representation has to match the input adequately. Laurel's central concern is how people can participate as agents within a representational context. The underlying assumption involves an analogy between human-computer interaction and drama. Laurel employs Aristotle's drama theory with the six qualitative elements of structure; "spectacle" (everything that is seen), "melody" (everything that is heard), "language" (the selection and arrangements of words or signs), "thought" (inferred internal processes leading to choice: cognition, emotion, and reason), "character" (bundles of predispositions and traits, inferred from an agent's pattern of choice), and "action" (the whole action being represented) (ibid: 50). In this model character and action are related aspects. According to Aristotle, play can exist without characters, but it cannot exist without action. With this emphasis in mind, Laurel applies the model to human-computer interaction and video games. Agents are defined as entities that can take action (ibid: 69). Hence, "all computer programs that perform actions that are perceived by people can be said to exhibit agency in some form" (ibid: 60). Thus the computer (or a computer generated character) is also constructed as agent. Laurel escapes the contradiction of the machine/agency dichotomy via attribution. Similar to the attribution approach of Werle (2002), as outlined in chapter 2.2, for Laurel the crux is to attribute agency to the computer. Via attribution and by defining goal-oriented social action as the overcoming of conflicting sources, the computer is conceptualized as being capable of agency.

While Laurel gives no further explanation of how computer-agents 'feel' when participating in the electronic environment, she offers a useful model of action processes in video games. Video games are built upon programs that contain a certain number of potential actions for players. They differ from traditional narrative insofar as here it is not the program that connects events over the course of time, rather it is the player. How to conceptualize the actions in the course of playing time? Laurel (1993: 69 ff.) developed the model of the 'flying wedge'. While a linear plot is the development from the possible to the probable to the necessary (and herein lies the interactive potential of film and television – to make the audience engage in that cognitive play from the possible to the necessary), in interactive forms of media the modeling of potentials is influenced by the player's real time choices and actions, narrowing possibilities and creating routes of probability. Every play session and every different player thus creates an individual line, leading to multiple possible necessities.

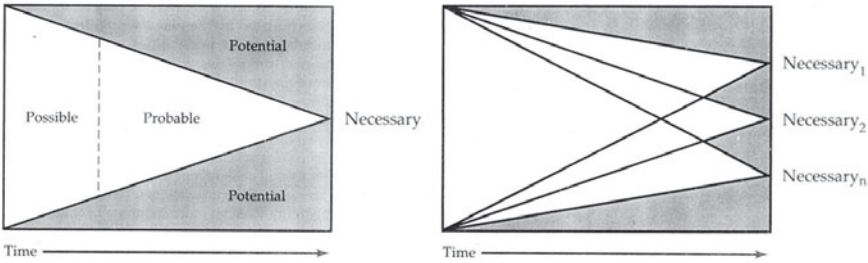

Figure 2: The Flying Wedge for linear and interactive formats (Laurel 1993: 70, 72)

It is also Espen Aarseth's aim to capture the experience of electronic texts beyond a techno-centric notion of interactivity. In his book *Cybertext – Perspectives of Ergodic Literature* (1997), he classifies electronic texts – cybertexts in reference to Norbert Wiener – into ergodic and non-ergodic literature. A cybertext for Aarseth is two-fold: a normal text and a machine with the ability to produce several manifestations of the same text:

> The concept of cybertext focuses on the mechanical organization of the text, by positing the intricacies of the medium as an integral part of the literary exchange. However, it also centers attention on the consumer, or user, of the text, as a more integrated figure than even reader-response theorists would claim. The performance of their reader takes place all in his head, while the user of cybertext also performs in an extranoematic sense. During the cybertextual process, the user will have effectuated a semiotic sequence, and this selective movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of 'reading' do not account for. The phenomenon I call *ergodic*, using a term appropriated from physics that derives from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning 'work' and 'path'. In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text (ibid: 1).

Thus ergodic literature is a text that needs physical action to be interpreted. By making a nontrivial effort the reader chooses one path from many possible paths. The cybertext becomes a space of experience to be navigated through. According to Aarseth, experiencing an ergodic text offers different pleasures than to experience a non-ergodic text. While the last form of text requires only passive acts of interpreting the pleasure deriving from the ergodic text is the pleasure of acting out power on the text and to experience agency. Aarseth approach is somewhat contradictory, since he differentiates between the interpreting allegedly passive position of a reader and the consequential activity of a player: "The cybertext reader is a player, a gambler; the cybertext is a game world or world-game; it is possible to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths in these texts, not metaphorically, but through the structures of the textual machinery" (ibid: 4). But at the same time, he regards media activity and its results as illusory.

4.5.3.2 Second-Wave Agency

Agency as an important characteristic of video games has been re-employed by numerous scholars in game studies; it has been frequently addressed as one of the core pleasures of playing video games (e.g. Adelmann/Winkler 2009; Brown 2007; Carroll/Cameron 2005; Charles 2009; Cheng 2007; Fencott 2001; Glas 2010; Harrell/Zhu 2009; Klastrup 2003; Knoller 2010; Maccallum-Stewart/Parsler 2007; Mallon 2008; Parsler 2010; Poremba 2003a, 2003b; Quack 2009; Schott/Burn 2004; Schumacher/Korbel 2009; Tanenbaum/Tanenbaum 2009, 2010; Thue/Bulitko/Spetch/Romanuik 2010). Yet, the concept itself remained strangely underdeveloped. Usually Murrays quote of "the satisfying power to take meaningful actions" (1997: 126) serves as a satisfactory theoretical grounding. Some works equate agency with interactivity or add agency as additional aspect of interactivity. In analogy to the myth of the 'hyperactive audience' (see chapter three) agency is sometimes understood as "the more, the better" (cf. Harrell/Zhu 2009: 1) provoking a debate on absolute or free agency that has been unmasked as illusory (cf. Maccallum-Stewart/Parsler 2007). Approaches in game studies that refer to agency do only rarely exert an interdisciplinary view. The sociological roots of agency have only been vaguely touched upon by Murray (1997) and Laurel (1993), and, as a consequence, are also mostly ignored by their successors. Sociological approaches as well as action-oriented communication models or approaches of film and television studies are in large parts of no consideration. There are, however, some approaches that place agency at the centre of their investigation, thus deploying a more sophisticated approach to the topic. These are the works of Kristine Jørgensen (2003a), Carr et al. (2004) and Michael Mateas (2004), with some related works such as those by Steven Dow (2008) and Wardrip-Fruin et al. (2009). Jørgensen employs Aarseth's concept of apoira and epiphany to explain the role of agency as problem solving. Mateas, Wardrip-Fruin et al. and Dow develop their approach following Laurel's Aristotelian drama model, thereby providing a design-oriented perspective. Carr et al. also examine agency with a focus on agency as the engagement of fans beyond the actual game text. Besides these more extensive works, the topic of agency is recurrently employed in conference papers and anthologies. The approaches either draw on first-wave agency approaches (Murray, Laurel, Aarseth), on actor-network theory, or on fan activity as agency. Only seldom do scholars employ an interdisciplinary background that is rooted in sociology or media and communication studies.

Free vs. Restricted Agency

Agency as a form of player pleasure has been largely conceived in the tradition of Janet H. Murray and her concept of passing significant change to the course of

events. It is the possibility of video games allowing for the players actually *to do* something. As such, agency is considered a consequence of interactivity: video games based on computer technology provide a direct feedback channel that enables the display of the consequences of the player's input immediately. The ideal of agency is the fictitious Holodeck that can react to any imaginable user input, allowing the narration to unfold in any direction without constraints. The mismatch between the agency ideal (the Holodeck) and the actual (and future) possibilities of video games has elicited debates on the very nature of agency. Since video games are based on a software program with inscribed rules of behaviour and representational output, the possibilities to significantly influence the course of game progression is determined by the program code. McCallum and Parsler (2007) thus stipulate "at present, no game can ever grant full agency – the ability of a player to move as they will and make totally free behavioural choices" (ibid: 1). Full agency then is, according to the authors, an illusion, a view that is also promoted by Charles (2009), Krzywinska (2003), and Arsenault and Perron (2009: 119 f.), who argue that players are not active but reactive. Charles reasons that illusory agency – in reference to Roland Barthe's readerly and writerly (scriptable) texts – may be conceived as a "faux-scriptable" text which "lulls the player into an interpretative passivity" with the users as "mere puppets of the text" (Charles 2009: 289).

Two problems arise from the concept of illusory agency. Firstly, as pointed out in chapter 2, the agency we are capable of in real life is also restricted by habitus (Bourdieu), structure (Giddens), knowledge resources and other dispositions, as well as by the desires of other individual and institutional agents around us. Restrictedness is an integral part of agency. Neither in everyday life nor in media experience will full agency come to pass. Secondly, the cultural pessimistic view of Charles disregards the premises of an active audience that has been deployed in the last decades. A more adequate approach towards video game agency is proposed by McCallum and Parsler (2007). Like Charles, they dismantle the illusion of agency:

> The depth and detail of the text and its related intertexts engages the reader, making them feel part of something greater. By being part of that imaginary construct, they are encouraged to believe that their actions are individual and independent. However, in reality they are held within a frame of meaning that is entirely created by the game world. Whilst they might believe they are free to imagine its contents, with the plethora of intertextual references within the world helping them with this illusory belief, in fact they are governed by tight structures. This is the essence of Illusory Agency (ibid: 6).

Whereas Charles regards this illusion as beguilement of the player, for McCallum and Parsler it is the very nature of video game agency. Invoking the assumption on perceived interactivity as outlined in chapter 3.3, the activities of the players, and not the material premises, come into focus (cf. Downes/McMillan 2000; McMillan 2002; McMillan/Hwang 2002; further developed by Wu 2005). The emphasis on the separation between technology and user, as proposed by Kiousis (2002), is

equally applicable to video games. Perceived interactivity and illusory agency mark the same area: agency as a restricted and relational concept of significant actions that results in the processes of cognition, evaluation and emotion. As such it is not a question of freedom versus restriction but a question of perception.

Perceived vs. Secondary Agency

The concept of perceived agency as outlined above follows similar assumptions as that of perceived interactivity. In both cases the focus is shifted towards the perception and 'feeling' of the user. Another perspective is employed by actor-network approaches and the like. Here the difficulty of performing and perceiving agency in computer-generated environments is solved by integrating the machine with the network or nexus (Gell 1998) of action. In chapter 2.2, the equation of humans and machines has been rejected. To avoid confusion in terminology I will nevertheless briefly outline the concepts of perceived and secondary agency as employed mainly by Poremba (2003b) and Parsler (2010). Parsler uses the terminology of perceived agency in a different way than described above. He is interested in the situation that occurs in games when the player (or the player character) encounters non-player characters (NPCs). According to Parsler, players attribute agency to the NPCs, they perceive them as agentic beings, a phenomenon that is well established in traditional non-linear media such as film:

> This capacity to act and interact can lead players to attribute similar abilities to those characters within the game that they meet and interact with. The imagination is key here, vital to a belief that fictional characters have desires and intentions of their own (ibid: 137).

Perceived agency here does not refer to one's own agency but to the environmental objects. Parsler alternatively suggests the term of attributed agency, which in fact seems to be more suitable, being compatible with Werle's model of attributed agency (Werle 2002; see also chapter 2).

Secondary agency as introduced by Gell (1998), on the other hand, is the agency that is incorporated in artefacts on behalf of their creating artists. The onlooker of an art object will be influenced by the artist's agency. Parsler describes this as the waterfall effect, by which the primary agency of the game designers seeps into the game and is manifest as secondary agency that affects the player (cf. Parsler 2010: 138 f.).

Gell (1998) conceptualizes human agents as "primary agents" and art objects as "secondary agents" (ibid: 17) that form an art nexus consisting of artist, recipient and index (art work). Secondary agents are not self-sufficient but form conjunctions with human associates. Poremba also adapts Gell's model for video games, claiming that here "the game author maintains a secondary agency in the game which is subsequently instantiated by the player" (Poremba 2003b: 24 f.). Thus, while the

author can be considered the composer of a game, the player then is the implementer of it. This form of primary authorship that establishes a domain of action is, according to Murray (1997), procedural authorship, it is the "creating of a world of possibilities" (ibid: 152 f.). A secondary author uses these pre-created environments "as material for the assertion of their own agency in producing a cultural product" (Poremba 2003b: 26).

The Different Modes of Video Game Agency

In laying the foundations of an approach to video game agency, Janet H. Murray (1997) described agency not as monolithic but as differentiated. She suggested the influence on the course of action/narration, the very general power of "taking meaningful actions and see the results of our decisions and choices" (ibid: 126). However, 'meaningful actions' are not exclusively the goal-oriented and problem solving strategies. Murray also identified the pleasures of navigation and constructivism as forms of agency. Spatial navigation emerges when a media text is structured and constructed in the way that anxiety is aroused and regulated (cf. ibid: 135). Constructivist agency emerges when the game text is misused in a way that it is reinterpreted according to the imagination of the player. In a later work Murray (2005) suggests conceiving of the meaningful and significant actions towards a text as "dramatic agency". Dramatic agency then is a design principle:

> (…) in order to maximize story power we have to integrate the interactor's actions with the story content. When we are successful we create the experience of dramatic agency, the cuing of the interactor's intentions, expectations, and actions so that they mesh with the story events generated by the system (ibid: 4).

This intuitive differentiation is in need of a more systematic approach. Carr et al. (2003) accordingly state that "different forms of agency operate in and around players' engagement with the games" (ibid: 150). Following Bandura (2001, 2006) the authors suggest differentiation between personal agency, proxy agency and collective agency. Personal agency thus refers to the interrelation between the player and the interactive environment. Proxy agency refers to mediated forms of agency, to the use of other (knowledge and practical) resources that help to cope with the game. Collective agency reflects on the artefacts and practices which require a socially interdependent effort such as fan culture activities and the generation of artefacts (cf. Schott 2008: 134).

While the second category (proxy agency) is not entirely selective, collective agency allows consideration of participatory texts and audience activities that cannot be captured by Murray's original concept. Yet, for the purpose of a cross-media model this approach is promising. Most approaches to video game agency, however, are engaged with personal agency. With no claim to be exhaustive, I will in-

troduce the most influential and – for the present work – relevant approaches of personal agency in video games before considering agency by proxy and agency beyond the actual text, collective agency.

Personal Agency

Following Brenda Laurel and Janet H. Murray, the model of agency has recently been reconceptualized and re-evaluated by Mateas (2004), Dow (2008), Wardrip-Fruin et al. (2009), among others. Mateas, who reconsidered Laurel's model in the first place, aimed to craft games with a maximum of "player agency" (Mateas 2004: 19). In this reconceptualization, Aristotle's six qualitative elements of structure are further modeled. Adapting it for interactive drama, Mateas replaces character by user action, thus simply putting the player inside the drama.

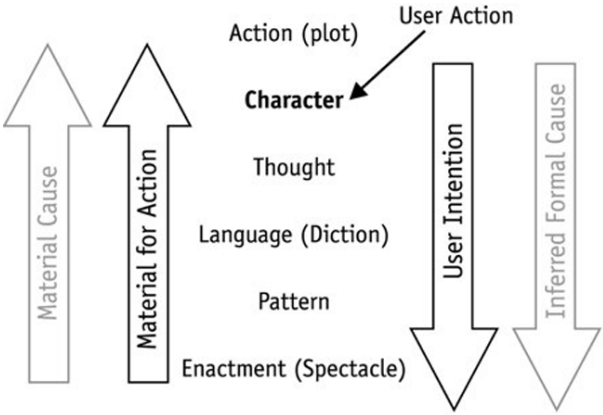

Figure 3: Player as Actant (Mateas 2004: 24)

While the author's perspective is from above (from action to enactment), the recipient's perspective is from below: by the enactment or the media presentation, via pattern, language, thought and user action, finally the action/plot is revealed. In interactive drama the implicit recipient and the auctorial approach are replaced by "material for action" and "user interaction". These materials for action need to be identified by the recipient in order to experience agency. They need to "cry out to be grasped" (ibid: 25). The material affordance matches the formal and material condition. Agency can be experienced, "when there is a balance between the material and formal constraints":

> When the actions motivated by the formal constraints (affordances) via dramatic probability in the plot are commensurate with the material constraints (affordances) made available from the levels of spectacle, pattern, language, and thought, then the player will experience agency. An imbalance results in a decrease in agency (ibid: 25).

Only when the formal elements communicate their affordance in a clear way, can the potential of the given (interactive) material be maximized. First-person shooters – despite the fact that they offer a very restricted range of possible actions – thus have a high affordance character: "shoot everything that isn't you with the weapons you can collect" is a convincing and self-explanatory challenge. Thus it is due to the game and interaction design to make the affordance of the material audiovisually or even hapticly (e.g. Sony's *Dual Shock* vibrating controller) noticeable and convincing. Agency, in this sense, is an interface model that can be optimized, in adapting to the recipient, as the example of *SimCity* (Will Wright, 1989) demonstrates:

> While initial engagement with SimCity is based on player expectation, the elements presented on the surface have analogues within the internal processes and data. Successful play requires understanding how initial expectation differs from system operation, incrementally building a model of the system's internal processes based on experimentation. This is how agency happens (Wardrip-Fruin et al. 2009: 5).

This model relies on prior knowledge – world knowledge and knowledge about game structure and dramaturgy – of the recipient, an approach that is well developed by communication and media studies. Wardrip-Fruin et al. (2009) call this the "available interface material" (ibid: 5). Agency thus is based on choice that depends on the materiality and textuality of the medium's interface. While the recurrence of prior knowledge and experience implicitly involves processes of evaluation and meaning making, neither Mateas nor Wardrip-Fruin et al. nor Dow give these processes further consideration. Tanenbaum and Tanenbaum (2009, 2010) rightly allude to the importance of meaning in the process of agency. It is one matter that the material constrains and affords actions. But there are also more 'open' games, such as *Grand Theft Auto IV*[78] (Rockstar Games, 2010), that allow the player to explore the environment in a less constrained way. Here agency does not necessarily evolve from strategic choice, but from applying meaning:

> At a purely cognitive level, the player chooses to engage in this fiction, and to allow the drama of the moment to create the belief that her actions have meaningfully advanced the story (…). [Thus] agency is not about selecting between options in this case, but is instead about expressing intent, and receiving a satisfying response to that intent. Commitment in this sense might be a purely cognitive process, or it might involve player actions (ibid: 8).

Hence, when McCallum-Steward and Parsler (2007) claim that full agency is illusory, not only are they not aware of a sophisticated sociological understanding of

78 Acronym: *GTA IV*

human agency, but also they fail to recognize the dependence between materiality, textuality, meaning and agency. Grodal and Gregerson (2009) also argue that the sense of agency depends on the overall game design and on the interface design in particular (cf. ibid: 67 ff.). Interface design then is not only a question of surface design but also of control schema. It obviously does make a difference if a video game is controlled via keyboard and mouse or if we swing the Wii-remote like a racket to play a tennis match. In the end, neo-Aristotelian approaches match the more sophisticated theoretically firmly grounded approach of cognitive film theory with its concept of cues, inferences and hypothesis on the basis of schemata (see chapter 4.3) and the mechanisms of the processes of media communication and meaning making (see chapter 4.1).

A less design-oriented approach and more player-oriented is offered by Jørgensen (2003a, 2003b). According to Jørgensen, meaning in video games is basically rooted in problem solving. "When the player is able to solve the problems by finding solutions and executing them and thus initiate game progression, this is an example of *computer game agency*" (Jørgensen 2003b: 1; emphasis in the original). The author thus conceptualizes agency as limited to personal agency and also to goal-oriented problem solving. On the basis of first-wave agency approaches and social theory, she outlines a model that serves the demands of a computer-generated environment, considering activity, action and situations as determining factors of agency. In the situation of a video game, the player "exchanges *apoiras* with epiphanies", puzzle with illumination (ibid: 3).[79] Each time the player performs a step towards epiphany, agency emerges (Jørgensen 2003a: 49 f.). The processes of exchange involve some media literacy in recognizing the particular apoira in the first place, the player has to activate schemata about constraints and possibilities of the particular game, they have to employ their prior knowledge, beliefs and hypotheses.

Jørgensen's model treats agency as an emotional process that occurs in the life-world sphere of the players, requiring activities and premises that are well developed by communication, media and film studies. While the approach is most fruitful to give a profound understanding of personal agency that evolves from the capacity to overcome apoiras and solve problems, it rests upon the notion of intentionality. Agency here is restricted to goal-oriented, intentional and rational processes. Yet, as has been explicated in chapter 2, agency is not necessarily tied to intentionality. Also other textual triggers mentioned by Murray (1997), such as the navigable space, are not considered. Furthermore, there are indications that related concepts such as participation (see chapter 4.4.3) might also allow for the sense of agency. Thus, while Jørgensen provides a convenient model to capture computer

79 Jørgensen borrows this terminology from Espen Aarseth (1997) who considers the interplay between *apoira* and epiphany as one core aspect of the ergodic text: *apoiras* must be overcome by epiphany and the player form hypotheses about the 'adequate' epiphany.

game agency, her model at the same time is too restricted in terms of modes of agency and in due consideration of cross-mediality.

Fan Activities as Collective Agency

Several scholars have argued that the feeling of agency not only emerges during the actual gameplay but is also situated at the meta-game level. Since the process of media appropriation is not restricted to the actual process of reception, it is also plausible that the feeling of agency can stretch beyond the concrete act of reception. Most obvious examples for agency beyond the text are forms of collective fan activities. In Celia Pearce's account of emergent authorship (2002b) she describes how the culture of MMORPG[80] such as *Ultima Online* (Origins Systems, 1997) and of 'god' games such as *The Sims* (Will Wright, 2000) allow through textuality, interface design, and player-generated trends (e.g. the modification *Counter-Strike*) an experience that transforms the consumer into the consumer/producer (ibid: 8). Games traditionally challenge notions of authorship since they have a long history of user participation such as hacking or modding[81] and even the industry itself encourages "audience usurpation of design authority" (Poremba 2003b: 7). The original author thus becomes the context provider, while the players create the contents. Poremba explores "player-production [digital game artefacts] as a mode of authorship resulting from the agency of the game player" (ibid: iii). Artefacts that are created by the players, such as modified levels and objects or even whole new games, as well as fan art such as paintings of machinimas[82], become vessels of agency. This form of audience participation, "emergent authorship" (Pearce 2002) or "secondary authorship" (Poremba 2003b), can be considered as agency demonstration by the players: "Game players demonstrate their agency not through the following of another creator's script but through their authorship of artifacts" (ibid: 27).

In contrast to this view, Murray (1997) argues for the model of procedural authorship. The assumption of the recipient's authorship is in her view a fallacy. Being able to play creatively in a prestructured environment is not comparable to actually creating this environment with its rules and appearance. Procedural authorship then is the peculiar form of authorship that provides a possible world within which the players and users can act. It is thus a specific form of writing practice of the professional author, and not the empowerment of the recipient over the text.

80 Massively Multiplay Online Role Playing Games.

81 *Hacking* refers to the subversive culture of playfully and skilfully performing of computer programming; *modding* is a activity in computer game culture that refers to the modification (Mod) of discrete game elements such as skins, levels, objects or even complete games.

82 The coinage *machinima* is the product of machine and animation and describes computer game technology based on the game engine to produce animated movies in real-time.

A third view is possible that allows us to escape this contradiction. Carr et al. (2003, 2004), Schott and Burn (2004), and Schott (2008) suggested not only to consider personal agency in video gameplay but also proxy agency and collective agency. For Schott, agency is "generative, creative, proactive and reflective" (ibid: 134), it is the cognitive and emotional experience of a player, that can be located at all three levels; personal, proxy and collective. By means of the example of the video game *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* (Oddworld Inhabitants, 1997) Schott and Burn (2004) analyze forum posts to investigate in the different layers of player agency. While proxy agency is gained via the "Spoiler Forum" (ibid: 259) and the discussion of narrative development and technical support, collective agency evolves through all kinds of fan production such as fan art and discussions. *Oddworld* fans heavily engage in pencil drawings, sharing and discussing their works with the community. The authors claim that the *Oddworld* forum,

> (…) as a socio-structural arena (…) necessitates 'agentic transactions' in which fans oscillate between producers and products of the social system. By working conjointly to produce a thread of this nature, Oddworld's fan culture sets the standards for its own production practices, levels of aspiration, and presumably the subsequent self-efficacy experienced by those who are reinforced for meeting their standards (ibid: 268).

Within fan cultures and through fan practices the recipients take on the resources that are provided by the producer's side, rework and reinterpret them, thus giving them their own, new meaning. Through this processes of collective fan practices agency, in the sense of making meaning (according to Tanebaum and Tanebaum 2009, 2010), can evolve.

Subversive Gameplay as Proxy Agency

Proxy agency has been defined as a socially mediated form of agency where individuals draw on the resources of expertise to perform successfully. As mentioned above, this category is not very selective, providing intersections with forms of collective agency. But while collective agency describes the pleasure of enhancing and sharing the text, proxy agency can be considered as means to ends, which – although being able to provide collective agency – helps primarily to progress in the text. The uses of walkthroughs, or the installation of cheats, are examples of 'illegal' empowerment of the players who subversively play against the author-intended rules or modify them. Kücklich (2008) defines cheats as player actions that "change the player's perception of the game world" (ibid: 55). To successfully traverse the world of the *Tomb Raider* Series (Core Design, Crystal Dynamics, 2003–2013), and to find all the hidden secrets, the use of fan-created walkthroughs are very common among players. While for many the use of walkthroughs does not represent a cheat in the common sense, a manipulation of the program to enable a character to become immortal is a cheat, even if it is producer generated. The same applies to the

most popular keyboard combination CTRL-ALT-SHIFT-C followed by the word "rosebud" executed by a *Sims* player: instantly 1000 Simoleons (the Sims currency) fill the Sim account, enabling the player to take care of the more important things of Sim life, and not bothering with how to earn money. Kücklich summarizes these cheats into three categories: (1) cheats that speed up narrative progression, (2) cheats that increase the player's frequency of interaction, and (3) cheats that enhance the range of the player's options. While in single player environments cheats only affect the player (and the system), in multi player environments it becomes apparent that the increase of ones own agency is made at the expense of other players' agency. From 'duping' (producing high-level characters) to 'townkill' (permission to kill players in otherwise secure towns), cheats can affect other players in a negative way. "One player's increase in agency is another player's loss of immersion (…) subjecting them, in effect, to the same doubts and fears they might expect offline" (Kücklich 2008: 68).

However, increasing the ones own agency is not always linked to the loss of another's agency. Carlson and Corliss (2007) provide an insightful example of how personal, proxy and collective agency interplay with each other, increasing the pleasures of agency and the pleasures of participation. They investigate phenomena such as 'rubble jumping' in *Halo* (Bungie Studios, since 2001). Players 'dope' the characters (with some cheats such as immortality) and perform artistic speed runs and jumps, which are recorded and published on a web forum for other players and fans to comment on. Another practice is 'glitching': the players investigate and look out for code errors (such as walking in the air, passing solid walls etc.) in order to share their achieved insider knowledge with the community.

Subversive forms of gameplay are considered to provide a high degree of agency. Not only do players exploit the agency potential that is inscribed in the program code, but they also employ a form of creative and productive agency that transcends Murray's notion of constructive agency. In directly manipulating the game code, players become producers not of the game as such but of their own artefacts as vessels of their own agency.

Agency as Agent/Patient Relation

In the praxeologic approaches (see chapter 2.1.3), the corporeality of practice and agency have been outlined. Grodal and Gregerson (2009), Krzywinska (2003) and Pormeba (2003b) all employ a perspective on agency that accounts for the body in their approaches. For Grodal and Gregerson humans are agents who – through their biological embodiment with body surface and body interior – are able to influence the world (cf. Gregersen/Grodal 2009: 65). Interactive media offer a simulated world where the player through an interface can mould the players' embodied experience. Thus the human body is considered "as a physically-existing, biologi-

cally evolved entity" *and* the "experience of ourselves as embodied beings" (ibid: 65). The capacity to take significant actions – agency – involves the physical accomplishment of actions. This physical act again needs a counterpart, the patient (see chapter 2.2.2). Considering the majority of actions in video games, however, they do not provide a balance of active performance and being acted upon, as everyday life suggests. Interface experiences rather "facilitate certain isomorphisms related to agency but not others" (ibid: 80). In video games we hit the keyboard or swing the controller. We immediately receive an audiovisual feedback presentation on screen. What we do not get is the same embodied action in return. While in real life we oscillate between the states of being an agent and being a patient, in video games we are the permanent actors: "In other words, players can dance, swordfight, and fish the nights away in the comfort of their living room, but they still get no hugs and kisses" (ibid: 81).

Yet, what the authors bemoan is not necessarily a deficiency. As the example of the *Painstation* (by Volker Morawe and Tilman Reiff, 2001) shows, being embodied acted upon might produce an intensive game experience, but at the same time the boundaries between the real and the play sphere blur: the *Painstation* is a special *Pong* offshoot that allows two players to compete against each other. The clue is the direct physical feedback against the player when they fail (each time the ball is lost). While the game is controlled via a control dial with the right hand, the players have to constantly press down two buttons with their left hand, ensuring that the hand stays in place. The feedback is – as the name indicated – painful. Either, an electric shock, a heating field, or whippings tortures the players in increasing intensity and frequency. While the game proves to be a constant party hit and is frequently presented at conferences and exhibitions, the motivation to play is more a trial of courage and less enjoyment and recreation. The secure realm of a game, where the state of being acted upon, being the patient, remains on the representational surface, might not be a problem at all, but exactly one of the enjoyments media experiences offer their recipients.

However, the sense of agency and the skilful being in control is not a permanent state in video games and not a necessary one. Most video games (games like *Tetris* excepted) provide a mix of interactive and non-interactive sequences. The first-person shooter *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Treyarch, Ideaworks, 2010) makes extensive use of cinematographic material. Not only the introduction and the level dividing cut-scenes, but also numerous filmic inserts activated by scripts that react to specific plot points create a fluent, nearly seamless experience oscillating between interactive and non-interactive moments for the player. For Krzywinska (2003) video games always "create scenarios in which the pleasures and frustrations of being acted upon can be experienced: the dialectic on/off dynamics of interactivity create and heighten this (…) this is always balanced against the sphere of interaction that promises self-directed agency" (ibid: 16). Thus not the embodied and

physical mode of being acted upon as Grodal and Gregerson (2009) put it, but the structural necessity of the game's interactive dramaturgy that guides the player's attention and cues her inference and input-action becomes the agent that acts upon the player: "The metaphysicalized determinism of the game accrues for the player a direct and heightened experience of being acted upon" (Krzywinska 2003: 25).

Subjectivity and Identity

There is yet a broader dimension to video game agency. Via agency we are able to perceive ourselves as subjects and come to construct our identities (see chapter 2.1.4). Media experiences in general allow us to play with roles and identities without direct consequences in real life. Thus, identity and subjectivity are linked to the spectrum of action of social agents (cf. Castells 2010; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner/Cain 2003). While it is disputable if a player's identity is changed in the appropriation of game rules, as de Mul (2005: 260) states, games as well as other media experiences doubtlessly do have an effect on the player and their identity formation. In this connection, Adelmann and Winkler (2009) employ the term "para-action" (ibid: 5 f.). In delimitation of the concept of parasocial interaction as introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), para-action denotes the possibilities of acting 'as if' in video games (whereas television is considered to enable para-communication). For the authors the pleasure that emerges from para-action (and if we follow their argument further, from para-agency), is the sovereignty that is outsourced to a confined space in the spare time to an unproductive sphere. In computer games the individual is again able to experience herself as acting subject, freed from the restriction of everyday life, from the necessity of earning and caring for money, paying the mortgage, and meeting the requirements of work (cf. ibid: 5). The pleasurable side of these para-actions is, then, that they allow for short action-chains: "In computer games we can swing the club again. There the chains of action are reduced in an exciting way. Cause – effect. Jab jab – and gone. Outside of the game the long chains of mediation reign" (Adelmann/Winkler 2009: 10).[83]

4.5.4 Summary

Brenda Laurel, Janet H. Murray and Espen Aarseth were the first to face the phenomenon of agency in video games as recipient-related. Murray's "satisfying power to take meaningful actions" is still the core and the starting point for many recent approaches to video game agency.

83 Translation by S.E.

Out of the variety of different approaches on agency in game studies, the recognition of different modes or levels of agency has emerged as one central aspect. Murray's remarks on *goal-oriented*, *navigational* and *constructivist* agency as well as Bandura's *personal*, *proxy*, and *collective* agency indicated the necessity of a differentiated model of agency. Most attention has doubtlessly been paid *to personal agency* and its different formations. Personal agency has been conceptualized primarily as a *goal-oriented way to progress in the course of events* of a video game. Murray suggested including the less intentional *spatial orientation*, while others (e.g. Tanenbaum/Tanenbaum, 2009, 2010) emphasized the general impact of *meaning making* in contrast to goal-oriented progression. The impact of the *interface design* for the perception of agency has been highlighted by neo-Aristotelian approaches. Accordingly, the materials for action need to be recognized by the recipients, *they need to cry out to be grasped*. This *material affordance* refers to the *prior knowledge* of the players and thus to *action and control schemata* that are employed in recognizing and perceiving agency.

Another field of research is engaged in *agency that emerges on a meta-game level beyond the actual game experience*. Following Bandura's modes of agency, *collective* and *proxy agency* are both forms of agency located at this meta-level. Fan activities such as fan paintings, modding, machinimas, or other forms of player production become vessels and expressions of *collective player agency*. Murray's *constructivist agency*, on the other hand, can be considered as *proxy agency*. While forms of proxy agency simultaneously might constitute collective agency, its main aim is focused on *text progression*. All forms of subversive gameplay – cheats, walkthroughs or other forms of text manipulation – are strong (proxy) agency carriers: *not only do players exploit the agency potential that is inscribed in the program code, but they also employ a creative and productive agency potential that withdraws from the control of the text*.

In this chapter the interrelation between agency and identity has been outlined (see 2.1.4). Via agency we are able to perceive ourselves as subjects and come to construct our identities. Video gameplay, and with it video game agency as a form of doing media, is thus a specific form of social action – media action. Like other forms of media action, it allows us to play with probabilistic world models, to identifiy with characters or evaluate situations in an 'as if' mode, in the specific form of *para-actions*. Media doing and media agency thus equip us with experiences that add to our 'real life' experiences. In this way, *media agency has an impact on the formation of our identities*. The specific situation of the video game experience is pleasurable in its own terms. It is what Adelmann and Winkler (2009) call the short action-chain without everyday-life constrictions: "cause – effect; jab jab – and gone" (ibid: 9).[84]

84 Translation by S.E.

4.6 Discussion

Doing media is a *specific form of social action*. Because it is a practice that is embedded in everyday life, people are able to *assign meaning* to a concrete media text in the act of reception and appropriation. Regardless of the specific form of media text – be it a cinema movie, a television show, or a video game – *people actively employ specific media practices that are essential to complete the text*.

Cognitive film theory provides a model derived from cognitive psychology that explains *how we are able to perceive the world around us in a meaningful way on the basis of schemata, scripts, inference making and hypotheses building*. These processes are neither typical for film viewing nor television watching, but can be considered as a universal way of accessing and processing information. The *textuality* of a specific media text forms the *patterns of appeal* that guide and structure the processes of inference making.

As important as cognitive activities are *emotional activities* of the recipients, which go hand in hand with cognition. Emotions arise from the i*nterplay of cognition and affects*. Specific textual characteristics, plot dramaturgy, story, camera techniques (such as close ups) cue emotional reactions. Prior emotions are stored in schemata and scripts, allowing us to respond immediately to emotion cues that trigger emotional associations. In film theory there is a strong emphasis on *character induced emotions*, however, more recent concepts also refer to the *staged situation*, as inducing a *mood* (Smith 1999) an *empathic field* (Wulff 2002), or *artefact emotions* (Tan/Frijda 1999) thus indicating that media texts without 'deep' characters are also able to produce emotion beyond the so-called ego-emotions.

Examination of different forms of media texts, which have been considered to require audience participation beyond the cognitive and emotional act of inference making and hypotheses building, has shown *that forms of media agency might be prevalent in all of the considered media texts*. The mode of *passive control* that is facilitated by stereotype-based structures, the activity of *cognitive control* and *mind game* (also labelled performative agency), the constitution of *audience as an integral part in reality and casting shows* or the *additive* mode of reception *in transmedia storyworlds all* indicate that the perception of agency might be more than clicking our way through an adventure game.

Considering agency in game studies has clarified the need for a differentiated model agency. Rather than a monolithic condition, agency emerges in different modes that were at first allocated as *personal agency*, *proxy agency* and *collective agency*. The next chapter will integrate forms of control and agency as outlined in film and television theory with agency as outlined in game studies and elaborate a *comprehensive model of agency as a specific mode of media involvement*.

5 *Agency* as a Mode of Involvement

At the core of the present work is the question of the role of agency in the process of reception. Having expounded and elaborated on agency as a crucial and identity constituting capability of performing as influential beings in this world and having outlined and explicated the various concepts of media reception and appropriation that are related to agency, there is enough evidence that agency is a cross-media overarching and comprehensive way of experiencing media texts. Due to these considerations, agency will be established as an emancipated category of media involvement next to other forms of media involvement. This requires some forethought and consideration. Firstly, the conceptualization of modes of involvement in general has to be clarified. How is involvement conceived, and considering agency as one mode of involvement, what are the other modes? Do they operate separately from each other or in interrelationships? Which dispositions decide on the mode that is deployed? Which responsibility is on the recipient's side, and which on the textual and medial side?

In summary, involvement here is understood as the general attachment to any media text with both cognitive and emotional activities of the recipient. Agency is conceptualized as one specific mode of involvement that arises in the interplay of audience dispositions with (momentary) dominant reading strategies and the mediality and textuality of the actual media text that suggests and triggers these specific modes.[85] The model does not, however, explain processes of selection or the circumstances that brings a specific media bias or liking, but it offers a structured approach to the micro-processes of the actual processes of text reception, and of involvement that depend on a variety of factors. Differing from related approaches, the concept introduced here is perceived as an overarching and comprehensive model of media involvement in general that includes all forms of media communication. After elucidating on the model of involvement, as it is understood and designed in the present work, the different modes of involvement with their relation to agency are introduced, and agency, as a mode of involvement, is elaborated.

85 A similar approach to interrelations is formulated by Früh and Schönbach with their *Dynamisch-transaktionaler Ansatz* (Früh/Schönbach 1982, 2005).

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5.1 Involvement Reconsidered

In its broadest sense, involvement refers to the intensity and amplitude of participation in processes of reception (cf. Mikos et al. 2008: 113). As such it consists of the sum of perceptual, cognitive, emotional and conative activities that the recipient is aligning to the media text. Hasebrink states, "a more or less strong involvement in media reception refers in general to the degree of internal participation with which media users follow a media offering" (Hasebrink 2003: 117).[86] It is thus a procedural, regulating force, emergent theoretically in all modes of reception and all kinds of media and media texts. Wirth (2006) stipulates that "involvement is probably one of the most successful concepts of communication research and media psychology, but is originated in the context of a different research domain", however, "scholars have to cope with a confusing heterogeneity of definitions and operationalizations of involvement" (ibid: 199). Often assigned to emotional forms of text-recipient alignment (e.g. Friess 2011; Wirth, Hofer/Schramm 2012), involvement originally is not tied to the emotional sphere, but describes the general attachment to a (media) text. In the present work, I will use the concept of involvement to refer to any form of textual attachment that can either be related to cognitive interpretation or to emotional experience. The works of Vorderer (1992), Donnerstag (1996) and Suckfüll (2004) give exhaustive accounts of the different senses of involvement and will be considered more extensively.

Involvement is commonly conceptualized as form of attention that the recipients direct to the media text on behalf of specific circumstances and prerequisites (e.g. Krugman 1966, Halff 1998, Rapp 1973, Vorderer 1992). As such, involvement is not only tied to reception processes and recipient's dispositions, but also to the mediality, textuality and situationality – in short to the dispositive of the medium. Suckfüll states:

> Involvement is not a feature of the medium. The medial stimulus has no specific strength that would affect the characteristics of involvement. Nor is involvement a generalized disposition of the recipient. Characteristics of media offerings and features of the recipient are related in a reciprocal, procedural context (Suckfüll 2004: 84).[87]

Television, for instance, is sometimes regarded as a low involvement medium, while cinema or 3D-cinema are considered high involvement media. Television has to compete – so the assumption goes – against other sources of distractions: like radio it is considered as a 'by the way' medium. Video games, on the other hand, have

86 Translation by S.E.

87 Original cit.: "Involvement ist kein Merkmal des Mediums. Der mediale Stimulus hat keine bestimmte Stärke, die sich auf die Ausprägung von Involvement auswirken würde. Ebenso wenig ist Involvement eine generalisierbare Disposition des Rezipienten. Merkmale des Medienangebots und Merkmale des Rezipienten stehen in einem wechselseitigen, prozessualen Zusammenhang" (Suckfüll 2004: 84).

our full attention through the necessity of user input; cinema with its specific setting and atmosphere allows for a concentrated and directional attention. Mediality in the sense of McLuhan, apparatus in the sense of Baudry, or dispositive in the sense of Hickethier sensitize for the media specificity of film, television or video game and their suggested degree and mode of involvement. However, mediality is only one aspect of involvement. More central to the concept are the reception processes and activities.

In the tradition of literary theory, involvement has been conceptualized in the dichotomy thesis as either cognitively active and distanced, or emotionally active and without distance to the text (cf. Vorderer 1992: 73 f., Suckfüll 2004: 103 f.). Rejecting this differentiation (and the herein implied negative significance for popular texts), Vorderer, after Rapp (1973), conceptualized involvement as either low and analytically distanced, or emotionally *and* cognitively highly involved. In conceiving involvement as both a cognitive and emotional activity, the traditional notion of the more worthwhile cognition against emotion is abandoned. According to Vorderer, the analysing/distanced reception is characterized by an audience that are observers, admirers, or contemnors of media artefacts, while high involvement is characterized by media users who, wilfully and in control, forget about their real presence and feel part of the mediated world (cf. ibid: 83), a notion that will become relevant with respect to the concept of presence later in this chapter.

A contrary use of high and low involvement is described in Donnerstag (1996) with reference to Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and their Elaboration-Likelihood model. The aim of the authors was to examine how attitudes are formed and changed in the process of (informational) media communication. Yet, their thoughts on involvement and information processing can be transferred to other media experiences. Following their assumptions, high and low involvement leads to different information processing. While low involvement results in automated processing, high involvement results in controlled processing, that is, the recognition and adoption of messages. In the inversion of the argument, so-called immersive media that offer a high degree of vividness (cf. Steuer, 1992), such as 3D-cinema or virtual reality, are considered to produce low involvement situations, because here the subsidiary messages of immersive media become dominant. Not the personal interest, but sensual aspects (vividness) becomes the focus for the recipient, triggering automatic processing (automated focus of attention). Highly immersive media thus would be considered to produce low involvement situations. On the other hand, a medium that is low in terms of vividness (e.g. a book) but high in personal interest would facilitate high involvement situations and trigger controlled processing of information (cf. also Suckfüll 2004: 90). Donnerstag (1996) explicates in reference to Petty and Cacioppo:

> In contrast to the findings of high involvement in low involvement the subsidiary impressions of media messages are crucial. In other words the peripheral message factors or context characteristics

> influence the effect of the messages decisively, whereas the quality-determining characteristics of communication clearly have a subordinate function, they might even maintain no significance at all (Donnerstag 1996: 303).[88]

Due to their research interest in outlining a "general theory of attitude change" (Petty/Cacioppo 1986: 125), the authors focused on media messages rather than on composition, aesthetics and form. The different validation of content versus form is unsustainable for the present reasoning. In contrast to the reasoning of Donnerstag and Petty & Cacioppo, form and content are not considered as triggering different routes of information processing (automated or controlled). But abducting from their research results, the general assumption of these differing information processing modes are related to the degree or level of involvement. In low involvement situations the automated focus of attention can be considered as first-level involvement. When thematically and aesthetically triggered into deeper involvement, controlled processing of information will also take place. This perspective detaches the degree of involvement from mediality and content as sole determining factors, and replaces it with the interplay of the recipient's dispositions, mediality and textuality.

In tracing the concept of involvement back to social judgement theory,[89] Donnerstag emphasizes interest, attention, perception, motivation and commitment as linked aspects of involvement:

> Recipient-involvement represents different states of concern in the process of reception of media content. This can be both, (political) information as well as advertising messages. The contents of communication comprise inter-individual differing meaning or personal relevance for the recipients. Therefore, involvement or concern represents a differentiated active psychological (information-) processing of the contents. Formulated from a negative point of view, other activities during media use can restrict the attention and affect the whole processing process in the sequel. Involvement is affected by personal factors as well as by situational and stimulus-specific factors. (ibid: 48).[90]

88 Original cit.: "Beim Low Involvement sind – im Gegensatz zu den Erkenntnissen zum High Involvement – die nebensächlichen Eindrücke der Medienbotschaften von entscheidender Bedeutung. Dies heißt, die peripheren Botschaftsfaktoren bzw. Kontextmerkmale beeinflussen die Wirkung der Botschaften in entscheidenden Maßen, wohingegen die qualitätsbestimmenden Kommunikationsmerkmale eindeutig eine untergeordnete Funktion haben, wenn sie sogar nicht ohne Bedeutung sind" (Donnerstag 1996: 303).

89 According to Donnerstag, involvement is introduced by Sherif and Cantrill (1947), who consider ego-involvement as a process that occurs when a topic touches on central aspects of the self-concept: The person is personally involved in the situation (cf. Donnerstag 1996: 24 ff.).

90 Original cit.: "Rezipienten-Involvement steht für unterschiedliche Zustände der Betroffenheit im Rezeptionsprozess von Medieninhalten. Dies können sowohl (politische) Informationen, als auch Werbebotschaften sein. Die Kommunikationsinhalte haben für die Rezipienten eine interindividuell unterschiedliche Bedeutung bzw. persönliche Relevanz. Involvement oder Betroffenheit steht deshalb auch für eine differenzierte aktive psychologische (Informations-) Verarbeitung der Inhalte. Formuliert man es aus einer negativen Sichtweise, so können andere Tätigkeiten während der Mediennutzung die Aufmerksamkeit einschränken und in dessen Folge den gesamten Verarbeitungsprozeß

In the concept of attitudes (cf. Rosenberg and Hovland, quoted in Donnerstag 1996; Petty and Cacioppo 1986), concernment (*Betroffenheit*) is linked to the attitudes of people that are formed by habitus and structure and that contain cognitive, affective and conative aspects (Hartmann et al. 2005: 32, Wirth 2006: 203 ff.). The original concept of involvement thus requires a form of personal interest. According to Sherif and Cantril (1947, quoted in Donnerstag 1996: 57 ff.), a person is highly involved when the topic or the product of focus is of intrinsic importance, or of personal meaning, to them. Thereby, the notion of concernment can be considered as central to media involvement, although this aspect is usually not explicitly specified. It refers to the points of attachment (*Anknüpfungspunkte*) that media texts provide to their audience. Points of attachment can either consist of relevant action-guiding topics (e.g. coming of age), of genre interests (e.g. fantasy) or of a general personal interest (e.g. romance, political engagement, computer science, etc.). They can also relate to representation, since genre interests and personal interests could also refer to an interest in design, art, or the general virtuosity of a media text.

While involvement is a concept that is used in many differing ways, in the present work it is considered as the interplay of audience dispositions, specific reading strategies that form modes of involvement, and the mediality and textuality of media texts that favour certain forms of involvement. The influence of mediality has been addressed in reference to the apparatus theory and the concept of the media dispositive. In terms of the recipients' activities and processes, the graduality of involvement with the degree of intensity that can be scaled as high involvement, on the one hand, and low involvement on the other, has been outlined. Low involvement is thus accompanied by automated processes of reception, while high involvement is characterized by controlled processing of information.

Because of its lack of selectivity from a general perspective in media reception, involvement has been repeatedly criticized. Halff (1998) states that "involvement is interrelated with important insights of cognitive processes (…) its own significance is, however, arbitrary. Involvement can be allocated to any cognitive process of media reception and effect" (ibid: 153).[91] Suckfüll (2004) suggested rejecting the terminology altogether in favour of 'modes of reception'. However, as suggested earlier, *conceiving involvement as a meta-category with procedural and regulating impact that relates to the intensity and amplitude of any possible mode of reception* proves to be convenient. While it does not specify the mode of recipient-text relation in particular, it does refer to the *degree of closeness and distance, to concernment, to personal interest and to points of attachment and modes of information processing that are employed during the process of reception, and that emphasize the interplay between recipient's dispositions, mediality and textuality with composition, aesthetics, and form.*

beeinträchtigen. Involvement wird neben den personenbezogenen Faktoren durch situative wie auch stimulusspezifische Faktoren beeinflußt" (Donnerstag 1996: 48).

91 Translation by S.E.

Modes of Reception and Modes of Attention

The concept of different modes of involvement that are facilitated by either the textuality of a media text or by the recipient's dispositions is not entirely new. The general two-part differentiation of media reception – either deeply involved or analytically distanced – has been already outlined according to Vorderer (1992). Film scholar Roger Odin (2002) has, over the course of his research work, identified overall eight different "modes of attention" that form a first starting point for further considerations. According to Odin, a combination of the multiple modes of film (fiction film, documentaries, home movies, etc.) create, via operation, multiple forms of attention. The fundamental thought is that film texts and recipients have to create a functioning "space of communication" in order for the film experience to be successful. On account of this, the recipient takes on a specific role that "regulates the production of the *film text* (…). A role can be described as a specific psychic positioning (cognitive and affective) that leads to the implementation of a certain number of *operations* that produce meaning and affects." (Odin quoted in Buckland 2000: 82; emphasis in the original). The operations (figurativization, diegetization, narrativization, monstration, belief, mise en phase, and fictivization) produce modes of attention such as the spectacle mode (perceiving the film as spectacle), or the home/private mode (when the film relates to the recipient's own experiences) (cf. ibid: 88 f.).[92] A mode of attention is thus the product of the recipient's role with an implemented operation along with the mode of a film. The mediality of the media class and genre is thus a crucial aspect in the formation of the specific mode.

While Odin accounted for the recipient's activities, the vantage point in his model remains the textuality of the media text. Suckfüll's model of reception modalities represents a shift towards the recipient as primary constituent factor for her modes of reception in delineating reception modalities as different strategies of approaching a media text, that are appropriated in the course of media socialization. There are two crucial premises at stake: first, reception modalities operate in a comprehensive, cross-medial way, and second, recipients develop a dominant reception modality. The concept of dominance concurrently implies that other modalities come into use during the same reception process. The transition from one mode into the next thus is no exception but an integral part of the concept. For instance, a recipient might switch from a more involved and emotional mode of reception to a more distanced mode of reception when a movie turns out to be brutal and violent. Reception modalities then have a double function: on the one hand, they describe the mode of the actual reception, on the other hand they can

92 The other modes are: the fictional mode (where the audience relates to the diegesis), the dynamic mode (where spectators resonate to images and sound), the documentary mode (relating to real events), the persuasive mode (relating to a moral or truth), the artistic mode (the work is perceived as the work of an auteur), and the aesthetic mode (focus on the technical aspects).

serve as criteria of media selection (cf. Suckfüll 2004: 119). Suckfüll's model is no hypothetical model but an empirical one. She identifies seven empirically verified modes of reception: presence, looking for ideas, identification, narration, commotion, production, play, adding analysis, consumption and aesthetic as further potential dimensions (cf. ibid: 136 ff.).

Some of Suckfüll's categories relate to the findings of the *ARD/ZDF Langzeitstudie Massenkommunikation*[93] that identified a range of utilitarian motives of the audience so as to explain media engagement and its pleasures. Suckfüll's mode of "looking for ideas" thus matches the item "In order to get thought-provoking impulses". Her approach is, however, not entirely utilitarian. Like Odin, Suckfüll reasons that the situation of reception, and with it the apparatus, at least gradually influences the mode of reception:

> Reception modalities are used in a situation that has been marked as safe, controlled and without consequences. In such a situation the spectator can give it a try: he's looking for a change and goes to his limits. Within the process he changes the available reception modalities depending on specific characteristics of the media offering. When characteristics match the reception modality the reception process subsequently will be recorded as success. (…) Reception modalities are interdependent, a construct specifically related to the processes of media reception. That is to say that only the confrontation with a particular characteristic of the media offering within a specific situation determines the relevance of the modality for the reception process and vice versa. Reception modalities are acquired during the course of a media related socialization and are changeable. In the reception process they are used adjustable, however, depending on the characteristics of the media stimulus (Suckfüll 2004: 125 f.).[94]

A utilitarian grounded model stems from Askwith (2007). Emanating from Dennis McQuail's account on uses and gratifications, he identifies five logics of engagement: the "logic of entertainment", the "logic of social connection", the "logic of mastery", the "logic of immersion", and the "logic of identification" (ibid: 101). His categories display some overlaps with Suckfüll's approach as well as with the ARD/ZDF study. For instance, Askwith's "logic of entertainment" is much aligned with Suckfüll's "mode of commotion" and "mode of consumption", and with the items "because it's fun", "because I can relax", and "to forget about everyday life".

93 *ARD/ZDF Langzeitstudie Massenkommunikation* available online: http://www.media-perspektiven.de.

94 Original cit.: "Rezeptionsmodalitäten werden in einer Situation eingesetzt, die als sicher, kontrolliert und konsequenzlos gekennzeichnet wurde. In einer solchen Situation kann sich der Zuschauer ausprobieren: Er sucht Abwechslung und geht an seine Grenzen. Innerhalb des Prozesses wechselt er in Abhängigkeit von bestimmten Merkmalen des Medienangebots zwischen den ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Rezeptionsmodalitäten. Passen Merkmale und Rezeptionsmodalitäten zusammen, wird die Rezeption im Anschluss als Erfolg verbucht. (…) Rezeptionsmodalitäten sind ein interdependentes, spezifisch auf die Medienrezeption bezogenes Konstrukt. D.h., erst die Konfrontation mit einem bestimmten Merkmal des Medienangebots in einer spezifischen Situation entscheidet über die Relevanz der Modalität für den Rezeptionsprozess und umgekehrt. Rezeptionsmodalitäten werden im Laufe einer auf die Medien bezogenen Sozialisation erworben und sind veränderlich. Im Rezeptionsprozess werden sie flexibel eingesetzt, allerdings in Abhängigkeit von den Merkmalen des Medienstimulus" (Suckfüll 2004: 125 f.).

Aligned with Odin's "fictional mode" is Askwith's "logic of immersion" (Askwith 2007: 109 f.), and Suckfüll's "mode of presence" and "mode of narration" (Suckfüll 2004: 142).

In the field of game studies, Calleja (2007, 2011) provided a model of player involvement in the (video) game situation. Calleja conceptualizes different modes of involvement as different frames in the sense of Goffman (1986). Accordingly, the specific modes of involvement he identifies (which are: kinaesthetic involvement, spatial involvement, shared involvement, narrative involvement, affective involvement and ludic involvement; cf. Calleja 2011), are not fixed within a reception situation but players are able to alternate between the different levels swiftly and easily. The more acquainted the players become with the situation, the handling, and towards the 'ergodic text', the more they incorporate the challenges. The increasing mastery of text handling thus leads to "incorporation", a term that is coined by Calleja to accommodate the "subjective experience of inhabiting a virtual environment facilitated by the potential to act meaningfully within it while being present to others" (Calleja 2007: 257).

Table 1 provides an overview of the models and their intersections (with the ARD/ZDF study as an additional reference included).

Odin: Modes of Attention	**Suckfüll: Modes of Reception**[95]	**Askwith: Logics of Entertainment**	**Calleja: Digital Game Involvement**	**ARD/ZDF Study**[96]
The fictional mode (where the audience relates to the diegesis)	Presence (being captured by the storyworld) Narration (relating to the content)	Logic of Immersion Intertextual immersion, world building, hyperdiegetic space	Narrative Involvement (designed narrative and personal narrative) Spatial Involvement (navigation, orientation)	-
The artistic mode (the work is perceived as the work of an auteur)	Production (relating to the making of the media text)	Logic of Immersion Extratextual immersion: being involved in the production practices	-	-
The aesthetic mode (focus on the technical aspects)	(Analysis – relating to the audiovidual design)	-	-	-
The dynamic mode (where spectators resonate to images and sound)	(Analysis – relating to the audiovidual design)	-	Kinesthetic Involvement	-

95 Suckfüll empirically verified the modes; "Looking for ideas", "Identification", "Presence", "Commotion", "Narration", "Play", and "Production". The modes "Analysis", "Aesthetics", and "Consumption" were only indicated but not verified.

96 ARD/ZDF Langzeitstudie Massenkommunikation

The spectacle mode (perceiving the film as spectacle)	(Analysis – relating to the audiovidual design)	-	-	-
The home/private mode (when the film relates to own experiences)	Looking for ideas (Relating to the own life)	-	-	"In order to get thought-provoking impulses"
The documentary mode (relating to real events)	-	-	-	-
The persuasive mode (relating to a moral or truth)	-	-	-	-
-	Identification (Identification and homophily)	Logic of Identification Self identification: validation, emancipation; social Identification	-	-
-	Commotion (emotional arousal) (Consumption – passive pleasure of being entertained)	Logic of Entertainment Being entertained, escape from problems, relax, fill free time, emotional release and sexual arousal	Affective Involvement (affecting the mood and emotional state)	"because it's fun"; "because I can relax"; "to forget about everyday life"
-	Play (playing with probabilities)	Logic of Mastery Satisfies the intellectual desire to master complexities, interpret nuances, solve challenges; mastering narrative formats: episodic, serial and complex narrative; mastering textual relationships	Incorporation (gaining mastery/control/flow) Ludic Involvement (decision making)	"because it helps me to cope in everyday life"
-	-	Logic of Social connection Engaging in social interactions with other viewers, a sense of belonging	Shared Involvement (aspects of communication with and relation to other agents)	"because I don't feel alone"; "being able to take part"
-	-	-	-	"because I want to be informed"
-	-	-	-	"because it belongs there out of habit"

Table 1: Concepts of Involvement

The final perspective that is employed for further reasoning is offered by Friess (2011). Unlike the former approaches, Friess's aim is not to provide a comprehensive model of involvement, but to consider the differences between the mode of play and the mode of narration and its consequences in detail. She contrasts (cognitive) interpretation, (emotional) involvement, recipient's activities, distancing and sovereignty, and the communication situation (ibid: 184 f.) within the two modes, and applies her findings in an experimental setting. In analogy to Calleja's statement of the fluidity of modes of involvement and in correspondence with the perspective here employed, Friess argues that the two modes cannot be understood as respectively exclusive modes but might occur in alternation during the reception of a media text (cf. ibid 185). Her specific findings will be incorporated in the elaboration of the model of involvement that is suggested in the following.

Regardless of the question of accuracy of the singular categories, Odin, Suckfüll, Askwith, and Calleja add valuable aspects to the understanding of the processes of media reception. By developing a model that constructs media reception as influenced by specific modes, which focus on the recipient, as transitional and flexible, and as depending on prior media experiences, they show that the employed strategy of involvement is neither arbitrary nor unlimited. It also extends approaches of audience segmentation by stressing the interplay of audience related disposition with media characteristics and textuality. The filmic or game-specific operations cue the recipients to certain modes of reception.[97] Yet, it depends on prior media experiences, individual dispositions and resources, on the whole media socialization, which strategy is dominant in the first place. Following this elaboration, agency lines up with other strategies such as immersion or identification. Following the elaborated principles of reception (see chapter 4), and the presented approaches to strategies and modes of media involvement (see above), a model of media involvement is presented that accounts for agency as a distinct mode of involvement. However, conceiving agency as a distinct strategy does not imply that it is completely detached from other modes of involvement. The elaboration of the model firstly requires clarifying involvement as meta-category. Secondly, the different modes are discussed and evaluated with regard to their relation to agency.

5.2 The Model of First- and Second-Order Involvement

Consolidating general principles of reception with findings from approaches to reception strategies (Vorderer 1992, Suckfüll 2004), modes of attention (Odin 2002), logics of engagement (Askwith 2007), the model of digital game involvement

97 In the pre-communicative phase of media reception, aspects of genre and notions of the 'viewing contract' influence the attitude of the recipient, thus influencing the mode of reception employed.

(Calleja 2011), and play and narration as modes of reception (Friess 2011), a model of media involvement is developed, that accounts for different reading strategies in relation to the staging of form and content.

Involvement is considered as a two-stage process of media reception that is embedded as media action in everyday life. The recipients with their socio-cultural and individual dispositions (aspects such as age, gender, material and knowledge resources, identities and media strategies, etc.) appropriate the media text that consists of specific media attributes and textual aspects. In the process of *first order involvement* the media text is recognised as text on the basis of access to schemata, of organized clusters of knowledge. Thus, a general form of text recognition and emotional attitude is constituted. This first order involvement thus is mandatory for all processes of media reception only on the basis of general text recognition and general emotional involvement the second order modes can evolve. The *second order of involvement* thus is attached on top of the general reception activities.

According to the dominant reception strategy appropriated in the course of media socialization and in interdependence with the general mediality and the specific textuality of a media text that favour some modes of involvement over the others, a specific mode of involvement is employed. The modes thus interrelate with the disposition of the recipient, with the medium, with the concrete textuality of the media text and with the actual situation of use. As the literature review indicated, modes are not stable during the process of reception but might change, overlap, and emerge concurrently. According to the particular success of the deployed strategy, the particular mode can reflect back on the recipient's dispositions and the formation of her dominant reception strategy. In the process of general recognition, understanding, and meaning making of text, the modes of involvement are significant, since, according to the different strategies of text appropriation, different thematic and emotional aspects are emphasized. For instance, the meaning of a text and its significance for the recipient in her everyday life will be different if appropriated in the mode of habit or in the mode of immersion/presence. The same applies for the other modes. Modes of involvement thus resonate in both directions: backwards to the reception strategies, and forwards towards the processes of meaning making. In the downstream phases of media appropriations other second order modes might dominate. Inspiration, analysis or agency might have a stronger duration of effect than immersion/presence or spectacle.

In this model neither mediality and textuality nor the recipient is fully accountable for the outcome of this communicative situation and hence the produced meaning, but the interplay between them. These interweaving conditions have also been emphasized by Früh and Schönbach (1982) in their dynamic-transactional approach (*Dynamisch-transaktionaler Ansatz*). The media communication model that aims to incorporate the recipient's possibilities with the media allowance, conceives media reception as a process consisting of different phases, that presupposes a recipient having cognitive and activational states (e.g. knowledge resources, mental

states, etc.), and a media offer with form and content as basic preequisites for the initial communication situation (phase one). In phase two the initial cues of the medium are brought into alignment in a selection/interpretation process to constitute phase two of the communication situation (the appropriation phase). Similarly, approaches within cultural studies have repeatedly emphasized the socio-cultural preconditions and cultural discourses within which media communication is embedded and which are thus the preconditions for meaning making.

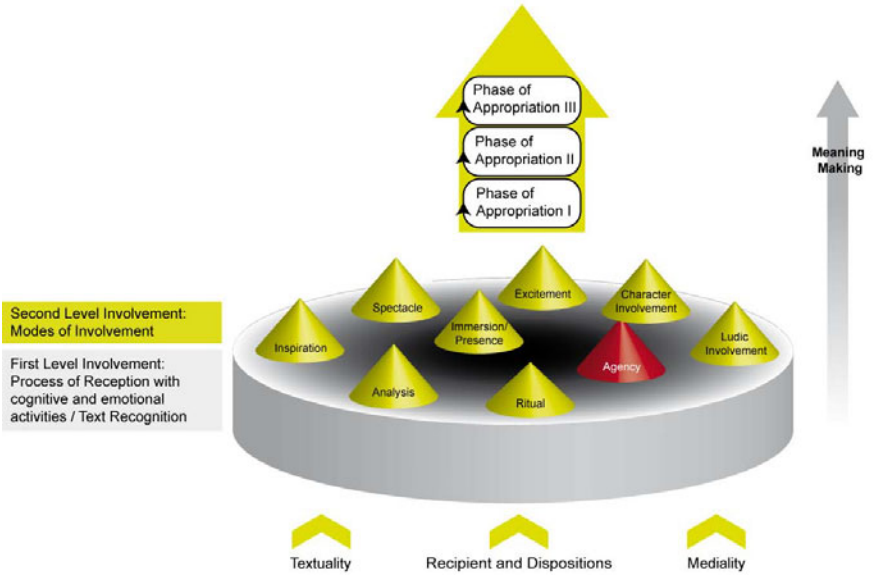

Figure 4: First and Second Order Involvement (Eichner 2014)

Important for the present model is:

- the embedment of the communicative situation in the socio-cultural sphere as outlined in chapter 4;
- the acknowledgement of the interplay and reciprocity of the recipient's dispositions and the mediality and textuality of the text as determining factors for the dominant reception strategy;
- the differentiation between first and second order of involvement;
- the fluid alternation between the modes of involvement in a specific media communication situation; and finally,
- the media-overarching appropriability of the singular modes.

The preconditions not only influence the process of meaning making, but also the degree of involvement. For instance, in the course of reception a deeply involved or distanced reception depends to a certain degree on the composition of form and dramaturgy. However, the prior media and genre knowledge are also important, since a player with specific genre knowledge will employ different criteria than the inexperienced player. An inexperienced player will most probably conceive the game *Crysis 2* (Crytek, 2011) as a game with stunning graphics. An accomplished 'hard-core' gamer, on the other hand, will perceive the game as poor imitation of its pre-cursor *Far Cry* (Crytek, 2004) without real innovation potential (cf. Eichner 2014).

In broad accordance with Suckfüll (2004), Odin (2002), Askwith (2007), Calleja (2011), and Friess (2011), I have identified specific modes of involvement and located them either at the centre (high involvement) or the border (low involvement) of the involvement scale. These modes are: *immersion/presence*, *character involvement*, *ludic involvement, excitement*, *spectacle, analysis*, *inspiration*, *habitual involvement*, and *agency*. These modes are central for the process of reception and are accordingly elaborated and considered in their relation to agency, which is the central mode of interest.

Immersion/Presence	As will be elaborated later, the concepts of immersion and presence are in many respects interchangeable and are subsumed into one mode of involvement. This category has some accordance with Askwith's logic of (textual) immersion and Suckfüll's mode of presence and narration and Calleja's narrative involvement. Also the spatial involvement as employed by Calleja and Odin's fictional mode are of relevance for this category.
Character Involvement	The mode character follows Askwith's logic of identification as well as Suckfüll's mode of identification. In an earlier work, Calleja (2007) referred to this aspect as performative involvement.
Ludic Involvement	Play as a special form of social action (see chapter 3.4) has been appropriated as form of doing media in chapter 4 (in detail see chapters 4.3.2, 4.4.1, 4.5). Friess (2011) also focused on play as a mode of reception. In the concept of play some of Suckfüll's aspects of narration and her category of play are integrated. It is also partially reflected by Askwith's logic of mastery and Calleja's ludic involvement.
Excitement	Excitement agrees with Askwith's logic of entertainment and Suckfüll's mode of commotion and Calleja's affective involvement. This category is also matched by some of the items of the ARD/ZDF study ("because it's fun", "because I can relax", and "to forget about everyday life").
Spectacle	Spectacle, referring to the overwhelming audiovisual effects, corresponds to Odin's dynamic and spectacle mode. Of relevance are also aspects of Suckfüll's mode of analysis.
Analysis	In compliance with Odin's artistic and aesthetic mode as well as in reference to aspects of Suckfüll's mode of production and analysis and Askwith's logic of (extratextual) immersion, the mode of analysis is conceptualized as a form of distanced involvement and reflection.

Inspiration	Inspiration derives from Suckfüll's mode of looking for ideas and has also analogies to Odin's home/private mode. In the ARD/ZDF study it refers to the items "In order to get thought-provoking impulses", "because I want to be informed", "because it helps me to cope with everyday life".
Habitual Involvement	The ritual mode – although not mentioned by any of the authors – is also considered as a central mode of involvement. It adheres to the habitual mode of getting involved as outlined by Vorderer (1992: 71f.) or Mikos (2001): it is matched by the ARD/ZDF study item "because it belongs there out of habit".
Agency	Agency as a mode of involvement contains aspects of Askwith's logic of mastery, Suckfüll's and Friess's mode of play, and Calleja's idea of kinaesthetic involvement. Agency also comprises the concept of participation that has been outlined in chapter 4 (4.4.3). Here aspects of Askwith's logic of connection, Calleja's shared involvement and the items from the ARD/ZDF study "because I don't feel alone" and "being able to take part" support the conception of this mode.

Table 2: Modes of Involvement (overview[98])

5.2.1 Immersion and Presence

Immersion and Presence are two concepts that share more commonalities than exhibit differences. The concepts are often used in a related or likewise way, or considered as partial aspect of the respectively other (e.g. Lombard/Ditton 1997: 3ff.). Despite the strong academic attentiveness that the concepts of immersion and presence engender, the selectivity towards general text involvement is not entirely evident. While some aspects exceed the characteristics of involvement as conceptualized in the previous section, other aspects display amalgamations. While these inconsistencies are in need of further explanation, in the present work the two concepts will be introduced in their most conventional interpretations and conciliated into a mutual mode of involvement.

Immersion

Largely in accordance with involvement, immersion is often used to describe the general attachment of a recipient to a text. Deriving from literary theory, it commonly refers to the deep and joyful engagement with a media text whereby the rest of the world is forgotten: "The experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content" (Murray 1997: 98). Immersion metaphorically pictures being submerged in water. Thus, the recipient leaves the 'real world' (land and air) to be submerged (not to dive!) into water (the media). In contrast to its metaphoric picture, immersion is not a passive

98 For a more detailed derivation and synthesis of the singular modes see Appendix I.

state whereby things happen to the recipient but an action that consists of various cognitive and emotional activities. Other concepts picture immersion as active transgression of a border between the real and the mediated world, the image space. Askwith (2007) noted that the desire to get close to the text, to immerse in its diegesis, is often accompanied by the "tremendous effort in developing an 'encyclopaedic' level of knowledge about the diegetic worlds" (ibid: 111), a notion that emphasizes the recipients' activities. Murray also considers immersion as linked to interactivity and agency: "The more realized the immersive environment, the more active we want to be within it" (Murray 1997: 126). Following Murray, immersion is a prerequisite for agency to occur.

In order to create this action space, recipients have to actively create belief of the fictional world, according to Coleridge's notion of the "willing suspension of disbelief". This process is described by Ryan in her possible world theory (M.-L. Ryan, 2001). The idea behind her approach is the assumption that reality is the sum of everything that is imaginable. At the centre stands the actual world with numerous possible worlds as its satellites. In order for the possible worlds to be probable, they have to be attached to the actual world by an accessible relation, either by logic, by physical laws, or by "temporal directionality", the "what would have happened if …" (ibid: 99 f.). Yet, the step that is missing, is how to traverse to that possible world, how to experience it rather than just looking at it? What Murray, after Coleridge, calls the active creation of belief is in Ryan's terminology the act of recentring – attributing actuality to the possible world and thus making it actual (ibid: 102). Experiencing a fictional universe (a possible world) as actual is, according to Ryan, the "basic condition for immersive reading" (ibid: 103). However, Ryan does not offer an explanation of how the re-centred subject can – from her new position inside a possible world, now achieved as actual – reflect on the 'real' actual world. The weakness of Ryan's approach and that of many other immersion models is that, once the mediated world is engrossed, it is not obvious how we are aware of what is real and what is mediated while we are totally immersed. How do we get back to reality, when we are no longer aware of it? The notion of complete immersion is thus not sustainable. Readers of a book or viewers of a film might momentarily forget about the 'real' world in focussing attentively on the storyworld or course of narration. Under normal circumstances, however, they still realize that they are not inside the book or film. There is a constant awareness of our being in the world that is not replaced by total immersion.

Another tradition of immersion research is followed by film and art theory.[99] Here, the (audio-) visual apparatus of the medium is central, since it is considered to enable a "spatio-temporal participation" in a simulated world (Schweinitz 2006:

99 For further reading on immersion see e.g. For further reading on immersion see e.g. Huhtamo (1995), Murray (1997), Ryan (2001), Grau (2001), Schweinitz (2006), Curtis (2008), Neitzel (2008), Pietschmann (2009).

138). The assumed ideal of immersion is again complete and total immersion, posing a media mythology that is, as Schweinitz and Huhtamo (1995) point out, not new at all:

> The quest of immersive experience is a cultural topos, which has been activated – and even fabricated – now and again in culturally and ideologically specific circumstances (…). As the first domestic 'machine of vision' serving as mass medium, the stereoscope anticipated the role that television as an instantaneous 'virtual window' would later adopt (ibid: 160f.).

Notions of total immersion can be also found in Bazin's myth of the *cinema total* that displays the aspiration to completely substitute reality by resonating to the plurality of senses, and in the approach of Hugo Münsterberg, who considers film as a highly immersive medium: the dispositive of film is considered to isolate the recipient from the real world, thus facilitating immersion (cf. Schweinitz 2006: 146). Technological dispositions that foster the activation of a plurality of senses – a 360-degree full visual media experience with overwhelming audio-visual effects – are, according to Grau (2001), constituent of an immersive media experience. Yet Curtis (2008: 93) has rightly alluded to the fact that the apparatus perspective neglects the activities of the recipients as a relevant factor for immersion. In the view of Grau, not a specific mode of reception, but a specific mediality accounts for immersion, a circumstance that is also confirmed by Wegener and Jockenhövel (2011). In contrast to this, Curtis suggests – aligned with the model of involvement presented here – conceiving immersion as "the result of a complex framework condition of reception, that presupposes the confrontation with textuality, with structures of perception, and the space in between" (Curtis 2008: 92).[100] Curtis explains immersion:

> Filmic immersion arises essentially, I argue, by two operations that must be consistent with each other: on the one hand by combining performance and combination effects arising from the confrontation of the multimodality of perception with an aesthetic object, and on the other by the aesthetic effects of empathy. In this sense, immersion is not just to be conceived as the effect of specific properties of perception or as perception illusion. Rather, immersion can be described as an aesthetic effect that – precisely by the enlivening impulses of empathy – causes manifold possibilities of involvement – beyond a naturalistic strategy of depiction (ibid: 97).[101]

100 Translation by S.E.

101 Original cit.: "Filmische Immersion entsteht im Wesentlichen, so meine These, durch zwei Vorgänge, die miteinander im Einklang stehen müssen: zum einen durch die Kombinationsleistung und Kombinationseffekte, die durch die Konfrontation der Multimodalität der Wahrnehmung mit einem ästhetischen Gegenstand entstehen, und zum anderen durch die ästhetischen Effekte der Einfühlung. In diesem Sinn ist die Immersion eben nicht ausschließlich als Effekt der spezifischen Eigenschaften der Wahrnehmung oder lediglich als Wahrnehmungstäuschung zu fassen. Vielmehr ist Immersion als ästhetischer Effekt zu beschreiben, der gerade durch die Verlebendigungsimpulse der Einfühlung zu vielfältigen Möglichkeiten der Involvierung Anlass gibt – und das auch jenseits einer naturalistischen Abbildungsstrategie" (Curtis 208: 97).

In accordance with the outlined model of involvement (see p. 141), immersion is not reduced to the technological dipositions, but is the "diegetic effect", referring to the "experience of the fictional world as the environment", wherein "the feature film creates the illusion of being present in the fictional world" (Tan 1996: 52). Sometimes, this diegetic effect is described as transportation. Deriving from literary studies, transportation refers to the "persuasiveness of narratives" or the "mental imagery evoked by a story" (Schubert/Crusius 2002: 2). This again corresponds to the willing suspension of disbelief, that requires an activity of the recipients not only to accept the diegesis of the fiction, but also to actively and imaginatively produce and shape it. Understood in a transmedial context, this diegetic effect refers not only to narratives, but also to other forms of fictional media worlds and environments.

Presence

Similar to the concept of immersion, actual conceptions of presence commonly refer to the subjective feeling of actually 'being there' in a virtual world whether it is a virtual reality or a fictional story world. The terminology of presence can be traced back to Artificial Intelligence researcher Marvin Minsky (1980) who described a form of technically mediated remote presence.[102] Since then, many differing definitions and perspectives have produced various concepts of presence. It is doubtless a concept of high interest as the formation of research societies and international funded programs demonstrate. Since 1995 the research group of Frank Biocca and Wijnand IJsselsteijn has conducted research in the M.I.N.D. Lab group (Media Interface and Network Design) on presence; in 2002 the International Society for Presence Research (ISPR) was founded (with Matthew Lombard as president) and a European funded project on presence unifies various research groups working on presence, e.g. the German research group at the IJK Hannover (*Presence – Measurement, Effects, Conditions*: MEC) around Werner Wirth, Saskia Böcking and Thilo Hartmann.

The ISPR defines presence as follows:

> Telepresence, often shortened to presence, is commonly referred to as a sense of 'being there' in a virtual environment and more broadly defined as an illusion of nonmediation in which users of any technology overlook or misconstrue the technology's role in their experience.[103]

102 Minsky used the term to "convey the idea of these remote control tools, scientists often use the words 'teleoperator' or 'telefactor'. I prefer to call this 'telepresence', a name suggested by my futurist friend Patrick Gunkel. *Telepresence* emphasizes the importance of high-quality sensory feedback and suggests future instruments that will feel and work so much like our own hands that we won't notice any significant difference" (Minsky 1980).

103 Webpage of the ISPR; http://ispr.info/about-presence-2/about-presence/ (21.03.2013)

Lombard and Ditton (1997: 3ff.) list six different conceptualizations of presence (with "presence as immersion" as one of them), with one mutual central idea[104]: "The perceptual illusion of non-mediation" (ibid: 7). Accordingly, presence occurs when the fictional or digital environment addresses people's senses so it is perceivable and seemingly non-mediated: it is just there. The richer and more natural the addressed senses, goes the assumption, the more likely presence can occur. The concept of a sensual richness originates in the approach of Steuer (1992; see also chapter 3). Drawing on Sheridan (1992), Biocca (1992), Laurel (1993), and Rheingold (1991), Steuer identifies two main dimensions of presence, vividness and interactivity: "The first, *vividness*, refers to the ability of a technology to produce a sensorially rich mediated environment. The second, *interactivity*, refers to the degree to which users of a medium can influence form or content of the mediated environment." (Steuer 1992: 80, emphasis in the original). Vividness connects to McLuhan's hot media; it is a technological based category that refers to the number of sensory dimensions presented simultaneously and the sensory depth (breadth and depth). Since 'traditional' media do usually only address our audiovisual sensory system, they can be regarded as low in terms of breadth. Most approaches to presence follow this idea on the assumption that "in general, our visual and aural senses dominate our perception and have been most often identified with presence" (Lombard/Ditton 1997: 9).

In line with the concept of immersion as introduced above, the surrounding (audio-visual) devices come into focus. Image quality, image size, the visual field, motion and colour dimensionality as, for instance, is employed in 3D-cinema (cf. Grau 2001), but also camera techniques such as close-up views in still images (sensation of realism), first-person perspective in video games (Lombard/Ditton 1997: 11), the mode of direct address (evoking parasocial interaction), or even the handheld camera (e.g. in *The Blair Witch Project*, Daniel Myrick & Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), are aesthetic elements and techniques that are conceived to effectuate presence. Experimental efforts such as *Earthquake* (Robson, 1974), *Polyester* (Waters,

104 The others are: *presence as social richness*: a medium should be perceived as socially warm, and intimate. The more intimacy and immediacy a medium allows, the higher its social richness; *presence as realism*: this concept assumes that the degree of realism increases presence in media. Lombard and Ditton criticize, rightly, that photorealism alone is not tantamount to realism in terms of social and perceived realism; *presence as transportation*: The oldest version of presence refers to the 'being there' feeling. In Germany, the AOL slogan "Am I 'in' yet, or what?" ("Bin ich schon drin, oder was?"), performed in 1999 by tennis star Boris Becker, is symptomatic of the mind model of this approach. It is the feeling of being transported to a moulded world or the other way around: the artificial world is transported to the spectator; *presence as social actor within medium*: this refers to Horton and Wohl's concept of parasocial interaction (Horton/Wohl 1956), where the media situation is consciously equated with a face-to-face situation; *presence as medium as social actor*: the recipients treat the *medium* as a social interactor. This refers to the ELIZA-effect but also to the observation that the television device is treated as communicative partner (e.g. by not leaving the viewing area in the middle of a segment).

1981), or the *Sensorama* (a multi-sensual cinematic machine developed by Morton Heilig) added odour and/or vibration to the audiovisual sensation. Also theme-park rides can be considered as attempts to expand the traditional audiovisual experience. Steuer (1992) employs the example of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, where the smell of gunpowder enhances the ride-experience (cf. ibid: 82).

Immersion/Presence

In her approach to digital environments, Murray (1997) identified immersion, agency and transformation as the three constituent qualities. Only when people feel immersed, when they perceive the sense of being within the fictional world, is a space enabling agency constituted. In connecting immersion with agency and interactivity, Murray stands on her own. Presence approaches, on the other hand, do consider interactivity as an integral part of the presence experience. Steuer (1992), Lombard and Ditton (1997) and Biocca and Delaney (1995), all emphasize the necessity of being able to interact with the mediated environment. While this activity is mostly perceived in terms of techno-centric interactivity (e.g. Steuer identifies speed, range, and mapping), Lombard and Ditton add the *willing suspension of disbelief* and the recurrence on prior media experiences as constituting recipient-based aspects of experiencing presence.

While both immersion and presence relate to the same phenomenon, immersion – deriving from literary, art, and film studies – usually refers to the inner mental process to embark to the storyworld, while presence is commonly linked to technological devices of virtual reality and its interactive potential. Wirth and Hofer (2008) and Hartmann et al. (2005) aim to elevate the model of presence from its exclusive relation to virtual reality in suggesting a two-level model of presence: thus, (spatial) presence can be understood as "a reception modality (…), with the recipients feeling a) physically present in the medial environment and b) recognizing and reflecting on the action opportunities" (ibid: 23).[105] This means that "mental capacities of the recipients are *completely* absorbed by the mediated environment respectively the real environment is *completely* shut out" (ibid: 23; emphasis in the original).[106] Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) have referred to this state as cognitive absorption as a form of deep involvement, characterized by temporal dissociation, focused immersion, heightened enjoyment, control and curiosity (ibid: 673). Presence, according to Hartmann et al. (2005), initially requires involvement. As already elaborated, vivid or 'immersive' media conduct automated focus of attention, while less 'possessive' media afford more controlled focus of attention. Hartmann et al. congruously reason: the higher the interest in the content, or the more thrilling and

105 Translation by S.E.
106 Translation by S.E.

exciting a narrative, the higher the controlled focus of attention (cf. ibid: 26). Yet, to achieve the state of presence, the media environment instead of the 'real world' has to be signified as the primary frame of reference. In the involved process of any media reception process, it should be possible for the recipients to decide which frame of reference (egocentric frame of reference) is valid. Usually there are two options to choose from: the spatial situation model of the 'real world' and the mediated spatial situation model. Various factors such as noise (e.g. inconsistencies and illogical elements), attention, interest and media characteristics can influence the validity of the egocentric frame of reference. Once the frame is chosen, it becomes the primary frame of reference and the sense of 'being there' evolves: the recipient is present in the mediated world – VR, 3D-cinema, book, video game, or television. Similar to Rayn's concept of re-centering, the mediated world is then framed as primary world. And align with to Ryan's model the mediated spatial situation model does not explain how recipients are able to reframe the actual world as primary world again.

Schweinitz (2006) provides a solution for this problem. He emphasizes the oscillating double positioning between immersion and distance which establishes media experience in its play character, thus differentiating it from real life and enabling the specific pleasures of mediated worlds. With regard to video games he claims that "without oscillating between immersion and distance no another such immersive video game would be imaginable. Otherwise it would loose its characteristic as game/play thus annihilating the fascination of the medium" (ibid: 153).[107] Following the earlier statement that media reception in general can be conceived as play, Schweinitz' claim comprises validity for other media as well. Presence and immersion then are based on general involvement and require the choice of framing, of the *willing suspension of disbelief* on behalf of the recipient. Schubert and Crusius stated: "we ourselves build a model in which we feel present" (Schubert/ Crusius 2002: 3), thus emphasizing the constituent role of the recipient's cognitive and emotional activities in this process. For some media presence and immersion becomes the dominant mode of reception, while for other media it remains marginal. Yet, since immersion and presence relate to the storyworld and the narrative space, this mode of involvement is a fundamental way of perceiving fictional media texts and storyworlds and attributing them as real for the moment. This does not imply that we are completely lost in these worlds (see also Suckfüll 2004: 106). The momentary point of total immersion, of 'being there', is always flanked by the self-conscious perception of 'being here' in the (real) world.

Ultimately, this is not the place to decide which terminology – immersion or presence – is more compelling or adequate. But in consideration of its relationship to agency, there are indicators that the feeling of being there creates an action space

107 Translation by S.E.

wherein actions can be performed, enabling agency. Immersion and presence help us – or even are a precondition – to perceive ourselves as agents *in* the virtual or storyworld rather than as onlookers. Otherwise, assuming the feeling of being there as a verifiable mode of involvement, unsuccessful agency could be perceived as 'noise', as disruption that forces the recipient involuntarily to return to distance. A study conducted by Dow (2008) indicated that in certain settings and situations presence can have a decreasing effect on agency: Dow found a "trade-off between unconstrained immersive interfaces that strive for presence and carefully-constrained interaction mechanisms that emphasize agency" (ibid: 231). Yet, he also found evidence that different types of player conceived a different degree of agency. This strengthens my assumption that the dispositions of the recipients play an important role in the employed mode of media involvement. Agency and presence/immersion thus can be considered as relational modes that have an increasing but also decreasing effect on each other.

5.2.2 Character Involvement

Identification and Closeness

The attachment and relationship between audience and media personnel – whether fictional characters, television personal, or protagonists of a documentary – are considered as crucial for the anticipation of, and involvement with, a media text. As Cohen puts it:

> Identification provides us with several important keys to fictional involvement: Identifying with a character provides a point of view of the plot; it leads to an understanding of character motivations, an investment in the outcome of events, and a sense of intimacy and emotional connection with a character (Cohen 2006: 184).

Accordingly, the concepts of identification, parasocial interaction and empathy are at the core of many media approaches. They refer to a recipient-based process, as well as to certain media characteristics and media artefacts, and a specific strategy of staging that trigger and enable these processes.

Identification, in its commonly used sense, refers to the psychological process by which recipients occupy the position of a character completely, so as if the events occurring to the media character happen to themselves, and as if the ambitions and feelings of that character were their own ambitions and feelings. This comprehension of (media) identification is neither uncontested nor consistent. Many approaches in communication studies (Cohen 2001, 2006; Klimmt, Hartmann/Schramm 2006; Liebes/Katz 1993), cultural studies (e.g. Ang 1985; Fiske 2009; Morley 1994), film studies (Noel Carroll 1996; Eder 2006a, 2006b; T. Grodal 1997; Mulvey 2004; S. Murray 1995; Plantinga 2009; Tan 1996), and television studies (e.g.

Keppler 2001; Livingstone 1990; Mikos 1996b) engage in and criticize the concept of identification and empathy as a core element of text-recipient relationship.

The psychological origins of identification are usually ascribed to Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, "identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person" (Freud 1920: 60). While it thus plays a role in the Oedipal complex, identification also refers to the "possibility or desire of putting oneself in the same situation" (ibid: 64 f.). This is known as Freud's primary identification, narcissistic identification and partial identification.[108] For Wollheim (quoted in Cohen 2001: 247), identification is the imagination of being someone else and imagining behaving like someone else. Identification thus "requires that we forget ourselves and become the other – that we assume for ourselves the identity of the target of our identification" (ibid: 247).

But identification goes beyond the psychological process of identification as the mechanism of recognizing the self in the early childhood phase. It is a fundamental social ability that is crucial for the process and act of communication. Communication as action, in the sense of Habermas, requires the capability to adopt the perspectives, needs and desires of our counterparts (cf. Habermas 1997: 148 ff.). It is an important mechanism for shaping one's own identity in childhood and adolescence (cf. Erikson 1973), but it is by no means reduced to that phase. Identification with others enables us to act out and to play with roles and possible courses of action that would not be possible in real life. It is thus an imaginary process that involves cognitive and emotional activities. The media text must provide certain points of identification, that is, it has to establish a character or field to which the spectator can relate in an identificatory way. It is commonly assumed that, for the recipient-based side of identification, various factors such as attitudes, values and interest as well as gender, age or ethnicity determine the process of identification. While a scientific prejudice might be the assumption that female spectators are more likely to identify with female characters and male spectators with male characters, empirical studies suggest that many girls identify with male characters, younger people show tendencies to identify with older characters, and so on. This idea, extensively examined in feminist film and media studies,[109] suggests that identification is much more complex than a matter to be reduced to similarity and homophily. Furthermore it is not to be understood as a stable process, but rather as a "semi-permeable membrane" (Oately in Cohen 2006: 185). A media text not only provides multiple positions to identify with, but it is also up to the recipient to

108 "First, identification is the original form of emotional tie with an object; secondly, in a regressive way it becomes a substitute for a libidinal object tie, as it were by means of the introjection of the object into the ego; and thirdly, it may arise with every new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct" (Freud 1920: 65).

109 As elaborated by Laura Mulvey in her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975/2004), and the related answers, critiques and further developments.

decide on the subject position to hold, or even to employ a multi-perspective position in the text.

The concept of identification has been criticized for being too presuppositional, too reductive, and too naïve. People usually do not conceive of themselves as Bruce Willis in *Die Hard*, but they may imagine being as heroic and hard-boiled as his character. They anticipate with the protagonists, they fear with them, or they are curious about how they will proceed. Accordingly, Eder suggests replacing not only identification, but also empathy with the concept of closeness (Eder 2006a, 2006b). But since we are not really close to a mediated character, it is a form of imaginative or attributed closeness:

> Characters are mental constructs, so viewers cannot be close or distant to them in the sense of spatio-temporal or social relations. But they can feel or imagine being close to them in such ways, and those imaginings are in some respects analogous to feelings of being close to real people (cf. Currie/Ravenscroft 2002). Such psychological reactions are founded in the ways human minds are constructing phenomenal as well as fictional worlds. Audiovisual representations of characters can be conceived of as dense streams of cues that trigger a wide range of mental reactions in the viewers: perceptions, feelings, imaginings, and others. Some of those mental processes are in relevant ways similar to mental reactions it encounters [sic!] with real persons or their medial representations (Eder 2006a: 2).

Wulff (2003) too suggests a more differentiated perspective on identification. He describes the process of recognition as character synthesis, including for instance the staged character, the actor, knowledge about the actor as well as narrative knowledge, but also psychological processes of recognition and attribution. The alignment between media character and spectator thus evolves across multiple levels. Eder (2006a) identifies them as spatio-temporal proximity (accordance with lifeworld as well as the cinematic staging such as close-ups), understanding and perspective-taking (knowledge levels of the recipients, including narrative and everyday knowledge), familiarity and similarity (referring to concepts of homophily), parasocial interaction and affective closeness.

As mentioned earlier, identification has been regarded as crucial for experiencing films and other media. Rightly, the concept has been criticized as too reductive and too naïve. More differentiated concepts – such as that of closeness – clarify the complexity of character involvement. Character alignment can now be considered as the dominant mode of reception in certain media: a character is the presupposition for perspective-taking to occur. When there is no prior perspective, identification is not possible. While fiction films usually provide characters, they do not necessarily do so. Many factual television formats do not contain a character in development to whom the audience can relate. Video games more often than not do have characters; however, only in narrative-based games are the figures equipped with 'character' – with needs, goals, emotions, and desires. Often, they are rather proxies, allowing the player to project their own needs and desires onto the avatar.

Parasocial Interaction

Eder (2006a) described parasocial interaction as one form of aligning to a media character. Parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship have been widely discussed in recent years (e.g. Gleich 1997; Hartmann et al. 2001; Keppler 1996; Klimmt et al. 2006; Krotz 1996; Mikos 1996). While originally serving as a model explicating on the specific interaction situation that arises from the mode of direct address (cf. Horton/Wohl, 1956), parasocial interaction has come to be understood as constitutive for the media situation as such (e.g. Klimmt et al. 2006), as analogous to identification (e.g. Keppler 1996), or as the presupposition for identification (e.g. Mikos 1996b). In its original conception, parasocial interaction describes the situation of the media paradox of "intimacy at a distance" (Horton/Wohl 1956: 213). When a moderator, TV quiz master, or news presenter turns to the audience at home, addressing them directly, seemingly a situation of social interaction is established. Horton and Wohl point out that this "illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer" is one of the most remarkable features of mass media (ibid: 215). It forms a specific media communication situation whereby both parties – recipients and media actors – act 'as if' they were actually interacting, thus constructing the illusion (or attribution) of a face-to-face interaction while missing the reciprocity of real interaction situations.

Mikos (1996b), following Goffman's concept of frames (cf. Goffman 1986a), suggested perceiving social interaction as constituted by a specific frame, the media frame. The actions within this frame consist of specific meanings and of specific rules that constitute the game of parasocial interaction (Mikos 1996b: 100 f.). Television is considered the favourite space for parasocial interaction in deploying a specific form of media performer, namely the persona (cf. Hippel 1992). We know that the moderator is not addressing us personally (supported by specific aesthetic modes such as camera techniques and montage); however, we are willing to attribute the condition of a face-to-face interaction to this media situation. The recipient in this situation is the implicit interactor, thus differing from the process of identification where the recipients take on the role of media characters. The direct addressing of the viewers in parasocial interaction situations and their presumed adequate reaction constitutes the favoured space of television, the media frame. The difference between this and actual interaction becomes obvious: it is only the performer who is in control, while the recipients can either join in, or abandon the situation; they remain in the answering role. It is a one-way concept based on an imagined relationship (cf. Wegener 2008: 294) and it is this process of imagination that constitutes the processes of activity on the side of the recipients. For Lombard and Ditton (1997), parasocial interaction forms one of the causes of presence. In attributing 'realness' to the communication situation the recipients get close to the text, they are not mere onlookers but participants within the media frame.

For Mikos (1996b, 2001) and Keppler (1996) parasocial interaction extends the mode of direct address between a persona and the audience. Also the performers of a scenic situation (e.g. the actors in a TV series) act for the audience, constructing the audience as an implicit part of the situation with the actors as personae in a narrative situation (Mikos 2001: 129). Through the scenic staging of familiar patterns of interaction, the recipients are enabled to assign to, project on, and identify with the media personae. Similar to Werle's theory of attributing agency to machines (Werle, 2002) and to Adelmann and Winkler's concept of para-action in video games (Adelmann/Winkler, 2009), the process of parasocial interaction can be considered as a process of attribution, facilitated and triggered by specific medial and textual characteristics, but processed by the recipients' cognitive and emotional activities. In conceiving parasocial interaction as the general process of attributing a media situation as being real, it serves as precondition for all forms of character alignment – projection, perspective taking and identification or affective closeness.

Character involvement is important for agency, since one of its powers is to position the recipient within the text and to regulate intimacy and distance. It structures the ride through the virtual reality and through the storyworld. Thus the specific form of character involvement has a priming effect on our sense of agency. It does make a difference if we fear for the character, if we willingly make up a non-existent dialogue between us and the moderator, or if we project ourselves onto a flat playing figure that serves as vessel for our own doings and agency. Accordingly, Perlin (2004) suggested that recipients of linear narratives can experience the agency of the characters as if it was their own agency. Character conception is a creator's decision that triggers our character involvement. And the form of character involvement again influences our feeling of agency.

5.2.3 Ludic Involvement

In chapter 3 (3.4), play has been conceptualized as a specific form of social action that is constituted by processes of framing. On its very basic level, the play-frame connotes the realm of 'as if', of a 'let's pretend' modus. The approaches and studies reviewed above indicate that play thus is not characterized by textual traits but is constituted through the framing activity of the recipients. Anderson (1996: 126) stipulates that play is immanent in all media experiences. This 'safe area' offers one of the general pleasures of media experience. Distinct from the very general and phenomenological notion of play as a meta-frame for media experiences, ludic involvement refers to a more specified and focused form of play. It is characterized by the foregrounding of rules that need to be explored and appropriated. It refers to the mode of ludus, as elaborated by Callios (1958/2001), and explicated in chapter 3.4. Calleja (2011), who identified ludic involvement as one mode of gameplay,

defines it as the "interaction with hierarchies of goals and the decision-making process that surrounds such interaction" (ibid: 149). Motivation, decision making and plan formulation are part of the ludic involvement, "that enables players to work their way through a hierarchy of goals either self-assigned, set by the game, or set by other players" (ibid: 149 f.). The players therefore have to identify or formulate primary and/or subsequent goals to execute their plan formulation. Depending on the textuality of a game, the goals are either pre-given by the game structure or it is up to the player to formulate a personal goal. The player of *The Sims* series of games (Maxis, since 2000) could, for example, shift away from the goal favoured by the game and try to let the Sims die in the most imaginative ways. Other media texts are also open to personal goals. In *I'm a Celebrity* the recipient can, for instance, vote for the most controversial character instead of the most likeable character of the show. Ludic involvement is further characterized by rewards. As Calleja (2011: 161 f.) points out, rewards are manifold and range from level upgrades, new items, and the extension of the navigable space to informational or audiovisually overwhelming cut scenes. Video games and technically interactive media allow for personalized forms of rewards containing direct responses, while films and many forms of television rely on more mind-based forms of rewarding-systems.

Depending on the mediality and textuality of the media text, it refers to a more cognitively based activity (such as cognitive play in mind games) or to the spatial exploration and navigation of a digital environment. Video games are considered particularly suitable for their players to adopt, via an interactive interface design, a pre-given frame of play, and to carry out pretended actions. Following Friess (2011) in her account of the play mode of reception, ludic involvement can be characterized as a shift from a more narrative understanding of a text with processes of identification and top-down processes of information processing towards an egocentric perspective, self-experiencing (ibid: 179), and explorative bottom-up process of information processing (ibid: 178). It is the mode that is characterized by mental activities of playing with probabilities and world making (ibid: 169), where "the recipient experiences him/herself as agent" (ibid: 182), indicating that agency is experienced. In the mode of ludic involvement it is not the course of events and the fate of characters that are foregrounded but the *capabilities of the recipient* – the accuracy of the hypothesis in a complex narrative, the right guess in a game show, or the correct decision in a video game.

Ludic involvement is thus related to agency, while, by implication, this does not indicate that agency is exclusively achieved by the ludic mode. It is, however, one of the constituting factors for the mode of agency.

5.2.4 Excitement

Emotional activities are – as elaborated in chapter 4.3.1 – essential for the process of reception and meaning making. In combination with the structure of knowledge, the emotional activities can come to dominate the mode of involvement. Specific formal-aesthetic structures and decisions are strong cues for particular forms of emotions. The horror movie is a genre that relies heavily on strong emotional specifications such as thrill. Mikos (1996a: 44 f.) suggests a differentiation between feelings of expectations that constitute the media experience at a very general level, and are thus an integral component of any media reception, and emotions as situative qualities. Mikos conceptualizes these emotions as contextualized in a similar way to the modes of involvement presented in this thesis:

> (…) emotions as situative qualities of experience and sensual experience, which are based on the spectator's previous, biographically significant experiences. It is, thereby, of particular importance that emotions are not seen as isolated, intraindividual steps toward stimulation, but that they always exhibit a relationship to the individual's social reality. They only crop up within the situative framework of social interaction (ibid: 45).

In analogy to Greg Smith (1999) and Wulff (2002), Mikos uncouples media emotions from character. Not via the fear for or with a character, but on the basis of positive and negative feelings of expectations that have to be cognitively interpreted, can the recipients be taken in emotionally. Once the feelings of expectations are established,[110] the recipients can activate past experiences from their own memories. On the basis of emotional expectations, memory expectations are cued in the sense of Smith, they are "directly felt via a moment of *scenic comprehension*" (Mikos 1996a: 46; emphasis in the original). Especially in horror movies, thrillers or crime stories, these situative qualities of emotions can dominate the media experience. The recipient employs the mode of excitement. Once the scenic arrangement changes, another mode might be employed. Again, the predispositions from knowledge resources come into focus: genre knowledge and media literacy enable the recipients to form reliable expectations towards the course of events and towards the expectable emotions. The play with deep situational emotions, with excitement and thrill, with being in control and being overwhelmed, thus becomes a pleasurable experience. However, as Mikos states: "The reception of a horror film, then, frequently turns into a real horror for first time viewers" (ibid: 42). A more experienced viewer, on the other hand, knows the genre conventions and adjusts her expectations adequately, or reframes the employed mode and switches to the emotionally safe area of the analysis mode.

110 According to Bloch (1985) these feelings are; anxiety, fear, terror, and despair on the negative side, and hope and confidence on the positive side.

In chapter 4.3.3 the interrelation between suspense and passive control has been outlined. While the mode of excitement is autonomous in its own right, specific forms of excitement such as suspense can support and trigger the mode of agency.

5.2.5 Spectacle

The dominance of the visual at the expense of narrative was subject to academic debates since Tom Gunning's influential article "The Cinema of Attraction" (1990). Darley (Darley, 2000) describes this academic area of tension as.

> Nevertheless, in critical studies of the dominant cinema institution, centred upon analysis of classic narrative films, attention has most frequently focused on the 'tension' between the narrative dimension and the visual dimension, that is, between identifying with characters, being absorbed on a fictional world and following the plot on one hand, and the pleasures involved in looking at images on the other (ibid: 104).

A similar tension can be found with respect to video games. It is apprehended that the dominance of the visual – especially in its outstanding form of spectacle – can deflect from the rules of the game, thus being opposed to the core experience of gameplay (cf. more extensively elaborated in King (2002) and Eichner (2014)). That this judgmental opposition between form and content versus the visual is unsustainable has been elaborated at length in Prince (2010), King (2000), Mcclean (2007) and Darley (Darley, 2000). Spectacle is an important aspect of media experience that can support, contrast or even dominate form, yet it does not do so automatically. Spectacle operates on more levels than the "wow effect" (Barker, quoted in McClean 2007: 9) and, especially in video games, visual and special effects perform game-relevant functions: they can intensify the perception of space, they support the narration by giving audiovisual cues and highlighting points of interactivity, and they can serve as agency carrier, as when a little click with the mouse induces an enormous and spectacular explosion (cf. Eichner 2014: 279 f.).

Spectacle as a mode of involvement accordingly occurs when the recipient employs this mode as dominant during the course of reception. An earlier study on the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001–2003) revealed that spectacle, as indicated by Odin (2002), was indeed a common mode of filmic experience.[111] Accordingly, the authors claim:

111 International Research Project *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy (2003–2007): The Babelsberg Team (Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen "Konrad Wolf", Potsdam-Babelsberg) consisted of: Lothar Mikos (head), Susanne Eichner, Elizabeth Prommer, Sabrina Schäfer, Michael Wedel, as well as the students: Ulrike Aigte, Nadine Baethke, Angela Burghagen, Patrick Jantke, Jesko Jockenhövel, Jörn Krug, Cornelia Robe. The research design consisted of a multi-perspective, multi-dimensional study of the reception of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and was connected to the worldwide study (project coordinator Martin Barker, University of Aberystwyth, Wales). Worldwide more than 20,000 re-

> Action and special effects, for instance, can draw viewers into the action on the screen, overpowering audiences with visual attractions and increasing visual pleasure: viewers are so spellbound by the visual attractions on the screen that they forget the world around them. In this way, action scenes and special effects are essential elements of film texts, leading the recipients to involvement. The huge battle scenes in *LotR* and the special effects used in them probably contributed greatly to the viewers' involvement. (Mikos et al. 2008: 114).

The focus on spectacle during reception was matched by the results of the cinema audience survey as well as by the results of the focus group discussions. For instance, the distinct majority of the audience perceived the films as "a great cinema experience", with "impressive battles". This was matched by comments of the focus groups who referred to the films as "larger than life", as "unique" and "great experience", as "spectacular", "gigantic experience", with "great images, landscapes, sets", referring to the "overwhelming" effect of the film's visual imagery (cf. ibid: 120 f.). Interestingly, while the movies did offer the mode of spectacle on the level of textuality, the focus groups clearly showed that the employment of the specific mode of involvement depends on the dispositions of the recipients. Viewers who had a prior (extensive) knowledge of the books of J.R.R. Tolkien were more immersed in the narrative unfolding, sometimes employing an analytic reception strategy when comparing the films with the books. Viewers who did not know the books in advance switched to the reception strategy of spectacle since the narrative posed too many logical threats and inconsistencies for them (cf. ibid: 123 f.).

As pointed out with reference to video games, spectacle can have the effect of increasing agency when combined with interactive elements. Audiovisual effects can support the affordance of the material, serving as an indicator and an implemented form of human-computer interaction that allows for a smooth handling of the interactive elements and their recognition in the first place. With respect to linear narratives and presentations, Darley (2000: 177) refers to Fiske's notion of carnival: Fiske considers body spectacle as carnivalesque, and carnival as an "exaggeration of play" (Fiske 1987/2009: 242), empowering the recipients to escape the agency of the "social machine" and employ their own agency by refusing the sense and the "notion of subjectivity as a site where sense is made" (ibid: 254). Thus, spectacle allows a form of second-order agency – not one gained over the text, but one gained via the media text over the structuredness of the social system.

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spondents participated in the study. The Babelsberg Team analysed the production context, the film trilogy, partly the books and the video games, conducted a discourse analysis of the film critiques, and did four reception studies: 1. A representative telephone survey with 1000 participants prior to the film release (Want-to-see factor, role of marketing). 2. Interviewed 352 movie-goers shortly after the premier. 3. Five focus groups (male, female, gamers, readers, movie goers) 4. Online interviews (n = 1161). A number of related publications have been released (Mikos/Eichner 2006; Mikos/Eichner/Wedel 2006; Mikos et al. 2007, 2008).

5.2.6 Analysis

While the former modes can be considered as highly involved modes, the mode of analysis affords a more distanced posture. Vorderer (1992) described the analysing reception as a general distanced form of involvement placing the recipient as onlooker rather than participant in the action (ibid: 83). There is some evidence that analysis is not merely gradually less involvement, but that it refers to a specific artefact-related mode of reception. Vorderer describes it thus:

> Analytical reception denotes a more distanced attitude towards the fictional (here: filmic) happenings with the viewers interested as (in this event largely uninvolved) observers of the filmic structure, of the actors, of location and in particular to the specific topics raised by the film (ibid: 83).[112]

The recipients are thus observers, admirers, or contemnors of media artefacts. Odin (2002: 43 ff.) identified two modes of attention that can be considered to relate to the mode of analysis; the artistic mode, where the work is perceived as the work of an auteur, and the aesthetic mode, with a focus on the technical aspects of a media text. The 40-year-old designer who watches the latest Pixar film might do so predominantly because he admires the work of the animators and designers and less because of the immersive storyworld. In the *Lord of the Rings* Study (Mikos et al. 2007) the participants of the focus groups reported the importance of reviewing and evaluating the – by then brand-new – techniques of special and visual effects. Aspects of Suckfüll's mode of production (reflecting on the making of a media text) (Suckfüll 2004) and Askwith's extratextual immersion (Askwith 2007) are also aspects of this mode that offers recipients the pleasure of admiring media artefacts, or employing their own expertise in evaluating and discussing the making, look or composition of a film, television format, or video game.

Texts that strive against being accessed by the recipients can be considered as obtaining characteristics that facilitate the mode of analysis. The difficulties that arouse in watching *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997), and approaching it in the 'classic' mode of immersion might result in an unsuccessful communication situation. Here, the logic of interpretation and meaning making do not follow a causal structure but rather an associative mode, as described by Wuss in his perception-, conception-, and stereotype-based model (PCS-model) (cf. Wuss 1993). Missing causal and stereotype structures prompt recipients to employ less conventional modes of viewing strategies, and the mode of analysis with its focus on artefacts and artificiality is a suitable mode to approach non-conventional media texts.

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112 Original cit.: "Unter einer *analysierender Rezeption* soll hingegen eine distanziertere Haltung gegenüber dem fiktiven (hier: filmischen) Geschehen verstanden werden, aus der heraus die Fernsehzuschauer als (an diesem Geschehen weitgehend unbeteiligte) Beobachter am Aufbau des Films, an den Schauspielern, am Drehort und insbesondere an bestimmten – vom Film angesprochenen – Themen interessiert sind" (Vorderer 1992: 83).

As will be outlined in the exemplary analysis, intertextuality offers the recipients the possibility to experience a specific form of agency that displays analogies to Askwith's mastering textual relationships (Askwith 2007: 106 ff.). Gaining expert knowledge and applying it to the text during the course of reception or in the phases of appropriation displays similarities with the mode of analysis. Yet, I would argue that analysing a specific setting has the potential to support agency. However, analysis does not automatically result in agency. The mode of analysis can amplify the sense of agency since it allows appropriating and sharing expert knowledge that can be conceived as a form of mastery. It thus can be assumed that the modes can occur jointly or in alternation.

5.2.7 Inspiration

Odin identified the home (or private) mode to capture how the media text relates to our own experiences (Odin, 2002). In this conception of modes of involvement this perspective reaches beyond a certain mode. As has been elaborated in chapter 4, doing media is always embedded in everyday life. Only by relating it to prior experiences and prior knowledge can we assign meaning to a media text. The mode of inspiration thus does not refer to the general process of meaning making but to the specific strategy of getting new ideas or learning something. While this implies some closeness to certain genres (e.g. counselling shows or simulation games), theoretically all media texts can be approached with the mode of inspiration. In relation to agency, inspiration has no direct correlating effect.

5.2.8 Habitual Involvement

Most modes of involvement that have been described so far either afford some specific aligned form of attention (immersion/presence, analysis, character), or intention (inspiration). Along with excitement and spectacle, the habitual mode is the last mode that is neither targeted nor intentional. Mikos (2001a) emphasized the habitual and ritual character of television reception. Routines and rituals are conceived as instruments to gain control over the contingency of everyday life (cf. ibid: 62). Routines exculpate people from the conscious decisions and control of everyday actions and concurrently allow the transformation of monotonous everyday routines into pleasurable fantasies and daydreams. While routines are individual actions, rituals can be understood as the collective and social form of routines, structuring the everyday life and allowing for escapist fantasizing and daydreaming. Media reception – and here especially television – is embedded in the normal routines of everyday life and is used in a ritualized way. Programme structures such as dividing the day into early morning, daytime, early evening, prime access, prime

time, and late evening, can be considered as a reaction to habitual viewing practices. Vorderer (1992) has pointed out that habitual viewing is not a fixed disposition of a certain audience segment, but related to specific situations. In some situations viewers apply a habitual viewing strategy, in other situations other modes become dominant (ibid: 67). Habitual viewing then is the symbolic act of cutting off the working day, to mark the transition from work to leisure time, or to signal that one does not wish to be disturbed. The habitual mode is thus characterized by motives and pleasures beyond the form and content of a media text.

The habitual and ritual mode of television usage has been the subject of several studies. Koch (2010) and Naab (2012) pointed towards the difficulties of prior audience research and the co-mingling of the two concepts (cf. Koch 2010: 64 f.; Naab 2012: 280 f.). Naab also alludes to the difficulty of conceptualizing the habitual mode as either low or high involvement (ibid: 55 f.). Koch could find no evidence for the correlation of involvement and the habitual mode. What he reasons, however, is that the mode is a preferred mode of certain viewers that can be transferred to other media usage: "The customary user of one medium tends to a habitual usage of other media" (Koch 2010: 206).[113] This supports the initial notion of the modes as being connected to dispositions of the recipients.

The habitual mode of media reception interrelates with agency in facilitating second-order agency in the sense that it makes us agents of our own lives, in structuring and organizing our everyday lives, and to escape the determinations and constraints of everyday necessities.

5.2.9 Agency

Deriving from sociological approaches, agency has been defined as the general ability to perform actions, always implying the capability of *could have acted differently*. Furthermore, agency has been conceptualized as depending on socio-cultural resources, it thus is acquired and not inherited. Situationality, processuality, influence, meaning making and intentionality have been identified as core aspects of agency that do not necessarily have to occur in interplay. Agency, in other words, refers to the feeling of being an agent, and of being able to act, to make a difference, to influence in a significant way. Furthermore, via processes of attribution, we are able not only to conceive our own agency in real life, but also our agency in media performances, other people's agency, the agency of a fictional character (para-agency), or of an artificially generated system (attributed agency). While personal agency is considered an important aspect of the formation of our identities, proxy agency and collective agency are also relevant forms of media agency and the formation of our selves.

113 Translation by S.E.

With this general definition in mind, the actual state of media theory with regard to film, television and video games has been examined for indicators for agency. In the literature on film, general play activities (e.g. Anderson 1996), cognitive play and passive control (Wuss 1993, 2009), willing play with diverse possible meanings in complex narratives, and the staging of contingency, have been identified as triggering the mode of agency. With regard to television viewing, audience participation in game settings, interactive technologies and the additive mode of reception in transmedia environments (cf. Jenkins 2006) have been considered as compatible with agency.

In relation to video games, the concept of agency has been intensively discussed in recent years. In contrast to many scholars in this field, I have integrated video game reception into general media reception and into *doing media* with processes of cuing, inference and meaning making as the very basis of text/game recognition. With Murray's notion of agency as "the satisfying power to take meaningful actions" (Murray 1997) as springboard for most later approaches, agency has been conceived as a specific mode of video game involvement. Only by exploring a digital spatial environment with implemented rules, it was argued, is agency likely to occur. A closer look at the concept unveiled the general alienability to other media forms. Yet, due to the decoupling of game studies from other scientific traditions such as sociology, the concept of agency derived from an occupation within a restricted perspective, often with a lack of interdisciplinary perspective. As a result, agency in game studies is widely conceived as intentional interactivity rather than related to meaning making. The application of agency approaches in game studies could identify agency as *goal-oriented way of progress in the course of events*, as *spatial orientation* and as *meaning making* in the sense of *making a difference* (e.g. Tanenbaum/Tanenbaum 2009, 2010). The significance of interface design, and thus on textuality, has been highlighted by Wardrip-Fruin et al. (2009) and others. Personal goal-oriented agency thus is triggered by material affordance that needs to 'cry out to be grasped'. A second branch of research is engaged in agency that emerges on a meta-game level beyond the actual game experience. This has been conceptualized as creative and collective agency, indicating the mode of agency as evolving from fan activities or from subversive gameplay.

Central to many approaches on agency are the concepts of self-efficacy (one's direct causal influence on a situation in the form of feedback loops), control, and flow. While Fritz (1997a) assumes control as constituent for the game situation, this does not indicate that feelings of control and flow, as aspects of agency, do exclusively occur in game situations. However, certain textual markers and certain recipient activities seem to be more adequate than others to trigger agency. The mode of play with its shift towards an egocentric agentic perspective (cf. Friess 2011) might facilitate agency. On the medial and textual side, interactivity has been widely discussed as precondition for agency. In a close account of interactivity, it has been resumed that interactivity is neither play nor agency. In fact, the concept of interac-

tivity proves to be unfeasible for a pragmatic media approach since it generally does not relate to the recipient's actions, but to the materiality of the media. The discussion of interactivity in chapter 3 demonstrated that material interactivity is less significant for the reception than perceived interactivity. As a result, it can be concluded that, first, material interactivity is not a necessary precondition for agency to happen, and second, that in the situation of media convergence (a) many forms of television also comprise material agency and (b) media texts are not any longer restricted to one medium or one reception situation. Interactivity thus becomes a contested concept.

Participation

One concept that has become popular in television studies is participation. In the formation of participatory culture, recipients are empowered to approach the text in an active, productive mode (cf. Jenkins 1992). Participation can be considered as one aspect that enables agency. While originally describing a (pre-internet era) fan-specific mode of reception, in the era of Web 2.0 and media convergence, participation becomes a central key in media reception. Online technologies not only facilitate the formation of de-located communities, they also allow for a conglomerated knowledge formation, a collective intelligence that enables collective agency:

> To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience (Jenkins 2006: 21).

The recipients of transmedia storyworlds have been described as textual poachers, who approach the transmedia universe via additive comprehension (see chapter 4.4.3), making sense of the various textual segments that the cross-media storyworlds offer. Following Jenkins' differentiations, the mode of participation implies a close engagement with a textual universe that requires additive comprehension. Fully elaborated, this close engagement turns into fan engagement. This participatory mode of reception affords a closeness to the text, an ongoing continuing engagement with the text, reworking and rereading it, thus integrating it to everyday life and actively adding something new to it, making it an "active resource" (Jenkins 1992: 62). This affords a mode of reception that is characterized by a mixture of proximity and critical distance. Jenkins convincingly argued that participation was not least aided by certain technological developments that facilitated the formation and practices of (fan) communities, on the one hand (via internet), and specific practices such as rewatching, reworking, and thus coming closer or critically distancing at the same time (via VCR, DVD, streaming and download). Through the practices and modalities of participation, fans then obtain a higher degree of agency: they control the text by repeated viewing, slow motion, discussions of de-

tails, they become producers of text-related fan art that escapes the control of the (original) producers, and they exert collective agency in forming clusters of collective intelligence. Collectivity and the social production of meaning thus form constituent aspects of participation: "Fan reception cannot and does not exist in isolation, but is always shaped through input from other fans and motivated, at least partially, by a desire for further interaction with a large social and cultural community" (ibid: 76). Negotiating the media content, gossiping on the latest development, and retrieving feedback on the fan's own productive outputs, are aspects that constitute participation and distinguish participation from other highly involved modes of reception.

Engagement

Participation and engagement are sometimes used interchangeably. Ziegenhagen (2009) provides a simplified summary: engagement is the general form of media involvement, enhanced by fan participation over different platforms (ibid: 63 f.). However, the terminology of engagement derives from a different research tradition than participation, namely the American television industry. The MI4 consortium (Measurement Initiative: Advertisers, Agencies, Media and Researchers) provided the following definition of engagement: "Engagement is turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding media context" (Askwith 2007: 26). While it is rather dubious to assume that the presented brand is simply enhanced by the surrounding media context, the work of the consortium, as well as a number of studies dealing with engagement, indicate the interest, as well as need for information, in this topic. In game studies, engagement is sometimes equated with Bentham's notion of "deep play" (McMahan 2003: 69), referring to a near-obsessive mode of gameplay that players employ. This obsessiveness links to the initial notion of fandom that is considered as part of engagement.

On the basis of the industrial and academic positions towards engagement, Askwith (2007) developed a new model of engagement. He defines engagement as "an overall measure describing both the depth and the nature of an individual's specific investments in the object" (ibid: 49), and employs the idea of "touchpoints" that serve to intensify audience engagement.[114] Engagement then consists of the

114 Askwith very concretely lists several touchpoints that serve to intensify audience engagement. The identified points do not, however, relate to all possible touchpoints, but to touchpoints that can be generated by media producers. These are: "(1) Formal Program Qualities, referring to the opportunities for engagement with the core program content of a television text, enabled by the program's narrative construction, premise, etc.; (2) Expanded Access, referring to the opportunities for engagement with the core program that result from the distribution of content through multiple platforms, devices and business models; (3) Repackaged Content, referring to the opportunities for engagement with variations of core program content produced and distributed as repackaged/reorganized program content; (4) Ancillary Content, referring to the opportunities for engagement with

recipient's attitudes and needs towards a media text: (1) consumption of object-related content and products; (2) participation in object-related activities and interactions; (3) identification with aspects of the object, both to self and others; (4) motivations (or desires) for each of the above. Engagement, in this sense, is "a larger conceptual process encompassing a consumer's overall attitude and pattern of interaction with a program's 'brand'" (ibid: 52). It is thus the industrial perspective on the recipient's commitment to the text (or brand) which explicitly includes strong dedication such as fan behaviour. It incorporates into a general media action approach ideas of the unrestricted text (cf. Mikos et al. 2007: 80 ff.) and Jenkins's ideas of participation. In considering industrial approaches, engagement is definitely an interesting viewpoint, however, a closer look reveals that engagement is not a stand-alone mode of reception but implies participation from an industrial perspective. It can rather be considered as a partial aspect of what Henry Jenkins identified as participatory culture.

Participation can be considered as one aspect of agency, since it requires a great amount of self-reliant actions from the recipients, thus participation without agency seems to be unlikely. However, this only applies to one of the forms of agency identified so far – collective agency. In summary, it can be said that when participation becomes the dominant mode of involvement, it goes hand in hand with collective agency.

As initially reasoned, the aim to identify agency as an overarching and comprehensive mode of involvement stems from the observation that the significance of agency seems to be ubiquitous. Via agency our identities are constructed and stabilized. Competence, power, authority and expertise are core concepts in psychology, human resource development, educational science, and social sciences. Media competence and media literacy, empowerment and control are central questions of media use in the lifeworlds of people. Agency as a mode of reception, as a pleasurable and meaningful way of perceiving ourselves as agents in the process of media reception, has until now not been conceptualized. The various approaches of media reception studies that try to grasp this sentiment and attitude have been outlined in the course of the present work and will now be compiled into a manageable model.

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additional content developed to extend, enhance, contextualize, supplement, or provide information about the television text, including textual extensions and extratextual information; (5) Branded Products, referring to the opportunities for engagement that emphasize practices of acquisition and ownership by the viewer, enabled by the production of show-related objects; (6) Related Activities, referring to the opportunities for engagement that position the viewer as an active participant in program-related acts, including themed, experiential, productive, and challenge-oriented activities; (7) Social Interaction, referring to the opportunities for engagement that position the television text as the basis for interaction with other viewers, the show's creative professionals, or the narrative's characters; and (8) Interactivity, referring to the opportunities for engagement that allow some direct interaction between the viewer-participant and the television program, encompassing the more specific possibilities of acknowledged contribution and influential interactions" (Askwith 2007: 98).

6 Levels and Points of Agency

Psychology theory – and here most notably Bandura (2001, 2006) – differentiates between three levels of agency; the individual (personal) agency, agency that relies on the expertise of others (proxy), and agency that occurs when following a shared goal, combining efforts (collective). Personal, proxy and collective agency have been adopted by game studies to cover the different social situations and constellations in which agency occurs (Carr et al. 2004, Schott 2008). This established categorical system will be adopted and refined in consideration to media agency. As the literature review indicated, agency as a reception experience is triggered on diverse levels and by multiple factors that need to be identified and classified systematically. Once the general levels and possibilities of agency have been carved out, the singular media – games, films and television formats – will be tested towards concrete points of agency. That is to say that the sociological dimension of agency, the general ability to perform actions and thus make a difference and being aware of it, as a process that is characterized by situationality, processuality, influence, meaning making and intentionality, and that has been considered in terms of diverse concepts in its media adapted manifestations, is now consolidated into a concerted model.

Personal agency thereby takes a key role within the model. The most fundamental form of agency – in 'real life', as well as in media experience – is the sense of personal agency. Only on the basis of personal agency are the other distinguished forms – creative and collective agency – likely to occur. However, the diverse challenges and types of media we face necessitate a differentiated understanding of coping, mastering, and perceiving agency. The literature review provides strong indications that the perception of agency manifests itself in different forms. Differentiating between different particularities of agency at the same time allows integrating media experiences that hitherto have not been deemed to adhere to agency. The most obvious differentiation can be drawn between haptic agency and narrative agency. Since linear narratives as a rule do not provide their recipients a sophisticated form of haptic influence that concurrently changes the representational layer, they were widely considered as not enabling agency. As the theoretical debate has shown, this reasoning in not sustainable. Personal agency unfolds over different textual strategies, namely through *mastering narrative*, *mastering choice*, *mastering action*, and *mastering space*. As a special form of agency that gains even more value in convergent media environments and transmedia story universes, *creative agency* will be

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treated as another subcategory of agency. When creative agency meets the collective, another focus and another significance occurs. *Collective agency* thus will also be considered as distinct from personal and creative agency.

6.1 Personal Agency

6.1.1 Mastering Narrative

Throughout the different approaches towards video games, films, and television, the mastering of the narrative has proven to be the most basic form of personal agency. The play with probabilistic world models (cf. Ohler/Nieding 1996, 2001; Ryan 2001) has been conceptualized throughout the different media. At a very general level, it presupposes the recognition of the text with its pattern of appeal, and the interpretation of the text in its polysemy according to one's own encyclopaedic resource of narrative and representational knowledge (cf. Eco 1990), and according to one's prior knowledge and experiences in the lifeworld (cf. Weiß 2001). This process is not fixed, instead it can be regarded as a playful and pleasurable process by which meaning is assigned (but might also be altered) to a text (cf. Fiske 1987/2009). While this constitutes the very basis of media communication which has been conceptualized as first-order involvement, agency as a second-order mode of involvement occurs when the pattern of appeal suggests to play with, and master the textual structure that makes for a narrative. This is based either on strong genre conventions, as in genre films, or on the conscious play with audience expectations in complex narratives.

Following Wuss's approach of "passive control" (Wuss 2009: 165), the romantic comedy *The Proposal* (Anne Fletcher, 2009) serves as an illustration. In this film, which will be examined in more detail in chapter 7.2, the overcoming of obstacles – the Canadian executive editor in chief, Margaret Tate (Sandra Bullock), and her assistant Andrew Paxton (Ryan Reynolds) pretend to be engaged in order to prevent Margaret's deportation to Canada – provides no real surprises for the audience. In the course of the narrative unfolding, not only the immigration agent, but also the personalities and personal histories of the two protagonists complicate the situation, until finally the genre-specific expected outcome unifies the two as a real loving couple. Here the mode of agency occurs punctually, as discrete incidents, while the reception experience is dominated by other modes such as immersion/presence or excitement. Yet, when retrieving the initial diegetic information and while staging the general hypotheses concerning the narrative and dramaturgical course of events, a sense of agency evolves that is met again at the end, when the initial hypothesis turns out be right with the sentiment of "I knew it!".

A different textual strategy is provided by complex narratives in film and television. In the science fiction movie *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010) Dominic Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) conduct corporate espionage by infiltrating the subconscious of their target subjects in order to get information. The businessman Saito (Ken Watanabe) employs Cobb not to retrieve but to incept a thought in the subconscious of an heir, Robert Fischer (Cillian Murphy), to disband his father's company. While the situation complicates, Cobb and his team have to immerse deeper and deeper into the subconscious of Fischer, finally reaching the 'Limbo', the deepest level, so as to succeed with their plan. To keep up with this complex mental play and with the different levels of possible realities, the spectators need to be attentive and vigilant to keep up with the parallel courses of events, set on the different subconscious levels. In the end, the circle closes with the mission apparently accomplished and the obstacles seemingly overcome, while there remains well founded evidence that the presumed level of the real world was not real at all, but situated in the subconscious of Cobb himself. The audience is thus left to question the significance of the story as a whole, while the game of reconstructing the inner logic and probability of the mind game – the ludic mode – remains a pleasurable experience. The mode of agency, according to the hypothesis, enables the spectator to fully enjoy the filmic possibilities of the mind game. The mode affords a constant reflection and evaluation of the proposed filmic material that is tested against inconsistencies and probabilities. However, in reference to Jenkins and his concept of additive comprehension (cf. Jenkins 2006), when the game turns out to be unsatisfactory or too arduous for the recipient, the mode can swiftly be changed. With its overwhelming way of presenting the narration, with the cinematography, montage, visual design, and sound design created to interweave and overwhelm the audience emotionally, *Inception* strongly cues immersion and excitement, while at the same time offering the possibility to participate in the mind-game that allows not only for ludic involvement during the phase of reception but also for agency in the downstream phase of appropriation to occur.

Likewise, the audience of *Lost* (J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffery Lieber, ABC, 2004–2010) can either enjoy the dramatic unfolding of the mystery and the narrative, or decide additionally to actively follow the cues the narrative offers. Mittell (2009) calls this the demand of a "hyper-attentive mode of spectatorship", where *Lost* fans "embrace a detective mentality, seeking out cues, charting patterns and assembling evidence into narrative hypothesis and theories" (ibid: 128 f.). For instance, the famous number combination in *Lost*, "4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42", initially turn up in the first episode on top of the mysterious bunker, the Swan's hatch. In episode two, the numbers become more dominant in the form of the countdown code that has to be inserted in the Swan station in order to prevent a catastrophe. With the numbers occurring together or in parts frequently during the show (e.g. as the lottery numbers of Hurley; when Hurley's car broke down, the numbers showed

on the speedometer; Danielle's notes showed the numbers; Flight Number 815 contains parts of the numbers; etc.), the question of their inherent meaning is raised. The numbers are thus a textual cue for an agentic mode of involvement: in a sense, they cry out to be grasped. Correspondingly, they were a subject in the fan-wiki Lostpedia,[115] in many other fan sites and blogs, or in the alternative reality game (ARG) *The Lost Experience*. In the end, the numbers turned out to relate to each of the 'candidates'; John, Hurley, Sawyer, Sayid, Jack, and Jin (or Sun). While the numbers remain mysterious until the end for the immersive viewer, the agentic viewer might find out various facts concerning the numbers (for example, that the sum of the numbers is 108, which bears significance in Buddhism and Hinduism).

As the examples of *The Proposal*, *Inception* and *Lost* demonstrate, different narrative strategies cue the spectator into the mode of agency, whereby the cues induce either a strong, durable sense or only an incidental moment of the mode of agency. Askwith (2007) furthermore pointed towards the dependency of "personal interests and preferences" (ibid: 104). When the subject matter is of great personal interest, recipients are more willing and better prepared to employ the mode of agency. Genre preferences and genre expertise, such as the preference for the 'mind-game' movie, complex television series, or reality and quiz shows, offer media possibilities and themes for their audience that are of special interest to them. Only when the viewer is personally interested is the challenge to play with the ambivalent text probabilities accepted instead of taking on the immersive position of waiting for the text to unfold. The person who watches *Millionaire* needs a positive attitude towards the challenge of guessing along, and of hoping for the candidate. Fans of a complex narrative such as *Lost* need to be ready to solve the show's mysteries, to take up on the various hints and cues in order to complete the puzzle of the show – while at the same time accepting that not everything will be unravelled.

Mastering narrative then is by no means restricted to 'linear media'. The goal-oriented aim in video games to overcome and solve aporias and gain epiphanies is the "power to progress the course of action in a game" (Jørgensen 2003b: 3). Jørgensen, after Aarseth (1997), pointed to the importance of prior knowledge and experience for the overcoming of aporias, of problems. Like the hidden cues in *Lost*, the solution in games is more obvious for the experienced, more dedicated player. An inexperienced player might overcome aporias by trial and error, though without experiencing agency. For instance, in the optional tomb level "Flooded Vault" in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, Eidos Montreal, 2013), Lara has to traverse a flooded area that is electrified, in order to reach the hidden secrets. Following Jørgensen's concept of problem-solving, the player must initially cognitively identify the aporia (finding a way to traverse the water) that is motivated by the goal to find

115 *Lostpedia* is a wiki-powered online encyclopedia where fans gather new facts on the *Lost* universe; http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page (30.05.2013).

the hidden secrets. This affords a "controlled navigation in a limited space, which means that space and events technically and practically limit the player's actions to a certain degree" (Jørgensen 2003a: 115). Out of the many possible actions, the player has to de-electrify the water briefly to get to a position from where she can pull up a raft using her rope-equipped arrow. Now the player, alias Lara, can direct the raft to a position where it is possible to direct the electrical socket out of the water and onto the raft. The water is now de-electrified and the aporia turns into epiphany whereby agency occurs.

Similar to the concept of Laurel's flying wedge (see p. 112) Calleja (2011) states that a general, satisfactory sense of agency in video games "arises from transforming the contingent into the known or achieved" (ibid: 58). Only by a degree of contingency, of uncertainty, can one's own actions become meaningful in the sense that it makes people feel involved in the game, of deciding by one's own means how to proceed and what to do. As Askwith (2007) puts it: "In all cases, however, this mode of engagement provides a specific form of pleasure often associated with games: the satisfaction of overcoming a challenge" (ibid: 104).

6.1.2 Mastering Choice

Many media texts – either narrative or game oriented – provide their recipients with the possibility of choice. When this choice is deliberately made – no matter if the choice leads to the desired outcome or not – agency can evolve. Many reality show formats try to engage their viewers in an agentic manner by providing them with the possibility of choice. In *I'm a Celebrity*, the audience is asked to decide on which candidate should take part in the next 'bushtucker trial', and later on who is going to leave or stay in the camp. Admittedly, the influence of each individual spectator is only minor, however, the real impact of the single call-in is not what matters. More important is – as the discussion in the present work demonstrates – the momentary feeling of influence and making a difference on the side of the recipient. In the moment of taking up the telephone to vote on the next candidate, the want and need to influence and make a difference is met. When in the final show of *The Voice of Germany* (2012, prosieben) the show master announced that "The voice of Germany was elected by you at home today", shortly before the bars on the screen revealed Nick Howard as the winner, the choice of the spectator was emphasized on the level of dialogue, on a visual level, and by the show's dramatic structure. Until now, the coaches were in charge of the candidates' advance, but in the end it is up to the individual spectator to make the final decision, to make the difference.

Mastering choice is also at work when guessing along in *Millionaire*. As has been outlined, this either refers to the process of guessing along with the candidate in front of the classic television set, or while concurrently using a second-screen

device to play along with – and thus against – the show's candidate in the live quiz. In a direct mode of address, the German quiz master Günther Jauch invites the audience once in every show to call in and win 5000€ by providing the right answer. Again, the structural possibility of a quiz show does not necessarily afford the mode of agency, but as audience research could verify, guessing along provides the most important aspect of the pleasure of quiz shows (cf. Taddicken 2005).

In transmedia storyworlds, such as *Lost*, the recipients are frequently faced with more subtle choices of whether to follow a hint carefully placed in the text or not. In line with Jenkins's additive comprehension (cf. Jenkins 2006), in order to understand the narrative of the television show it is not necessary to follow these cues up to another media platform such as the ARG, *The Lost Experience*. More dedicated viewers of *Lost* who do follow these hints are, however, rewarded with the feeling of expertise, the pleasurable sense of adding a piece to a jigsaw puzzle. When everything falls into place, when the pieces of the puzzle are placed in the right spot, when the guess proves to be the right choice, agency occurs. Mastering choice thus can, when the individual choices add up and relate to the course of unfolding narrative or course of action, lead to mastering narrative.

Video games provide their players with an interactive interface to perform actions within a game. These actions have to be differentiated, though. Not every action marks a significant choice. In fact, much of the gameplay is not based on player choice but on the demands of the game structure (the narrative). In *GTA IV* (Rockstar North, 2008), the player can freely walk and drive around without affecting significant change. Frasca (2003) described how another open-world game, *Shenmue* (Sega AM2, 1999), in contrast to *GTA III* (Rockstar North 2001), evoked boredom and frustration instead of thrill and agency. Although designed with tremendous effort, the opportunity to walk wherever you want to walk and talk to whomever you want to talk to proved to be a dead end. Frasca experienced all doors closed and retrieved the same standardized answers from all non-player characters. Here the game's structure and aesthetics cued the player into choices and actions that were not tied to any further meaning. As Tanenbaum and Tanenbaum (2009) correctly state, in open-world games like *GTA*, the agency that evolves is less a matter of choice, but more a matter of meaning making. Other forms of action, such as violent behaviour or taking somebody's car, result in being arrested by the police (when the player does not leave the site of crime soon enough). The point-and-click horror game *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Game, 2012) guides its players through the narrative, occasionally allowing some seemingly significant choices. In episode 1, "A New Day", the player alias Lee finds herself in a situation where the farmer's adolescent son Shawn, and the boy Duck are attacked by the 'Walkers'. The player has to decide whom to save from the 'Walkers'. Saving Shawn would presumably please his father, the grumpy farmer; saving Duck would probably guarantee Kenny's (Duck's father) favour. Choosing to save Duck will result in

the pleasurable experience that the life of the boy indeed could be saved.[116] While *The Walking Dead* is a highly narrative game, open games like *GTA* allow their players many more opportunities to decide. In *GTA IV* – except when currently undertaking a time-determined mission – it is up to the player to decide when and where to go and how to act. However, these decisions often maintain no significance since the overarching quest of the game dominates the game structure in such a way that navigation and exploring are the only alternatives for following the game's dominant quest. *The Sims* series (Maxis, since 2000) is differently organized. Not navigation and exploration but constructing houses, characters, and relationships is the game's innate action possibility. Since *The Sims* has no clearly formulated, overarching goal that has to be reached in order to complete the game, nearly every decision in *The Sims* becomes a significant choice that enables the mode of agency.

6.1.3 Mastering Action

Most central to video game agency is the conception of agency as performing interactively via an interface (cf. Mateas 2004; Wardrip-Fruin et al. 2009, Calleja 2011). The haptic input of a user in conjunction with the audiovisual reaction on the screen has been widely regarded as the original property of video games and agency. As has been argued, this exclusiveness is hard to maintain in times of convergent media. Television has long been a medium with technologically possible feedback channels. Interactive television has, since its very beginnings, provided its audience with forms of haptic action in the text, with games like Hugo as its early examples. Considering textuality in transmedia environments, it becomes difficult to differentiate texts bound to one particular medium. Also enhanced television, time-shifted viewing and other new practices allow for a much more haptic interaction via a computer-like interface that waters down the borders between games and television. While haptic action, and with it mastering action, is indeed the favourable domain of video games, it is not exclusively tied to video games. But video games facilitate the mastering of action in the text in a much more straightforward and constituent form. For Calleja (2011: 59 ff.) it is the in-game control of objects and avatars, the possibility for the players to move and even change objects, or to react to a changing entity, such as an attacking enemy. It refers to Klimmt's direct-causal influence on a game, the "self-efficacy experience" (Klimmt 2006: 76), outlined by Bandura (Bandura, 2001) as the core aspect of agency. Aligned with the interface-oriented concept of Mateas (Mateas, 2004) and Wardrip-Fruin et al. (2009), self-efficacy can occur on the basis of available interface material that needs

116 Though, whatever the decision of the player, the outcome – Duck is saved – will always remain the same.

to "cry out" to the player in order to be grasped (Mateas 2004: 25). This level of agency is the most obvious form of agency, *since it is the visualized analogy of human action with the incorporation of the bodily movement via mouse or controller*. Some video games rely heavily on haptic action and the thereby arising mode of experience, while others offer their recipients a more complex and many-layered media experience. For instance, *Subway Surf* (Kiloo, SYBO Games, 2012), a paradigmatic example of the easy accessible jump'n'run browser game for mobile devices, affords constant – albeit very limited – reaction from the player. Representing a graffiti artist, the player is hunted by a railway employee and tries to jump over or dive under barricades, concurrently collecting different items such as power-ups, surprise boxes, or money. Also the popular browser game *Angry Birds* (Rovio Entertainment, 2009) represents a type of game where mastery of action provides the most probable, mostly exclusive form of agency experience. Games such as *Tomb Raider*, *GTA IV*, or *The Sims*, however, offer their players forms of mastery that expand the possibilities of mastering action. Here, the mode of agency is comprised of mastering action, mastering narrative, mastering choice, and mastering space.

In this context the impact of cut-scenes can be re-considered. Cut-Scenes have been criticized for disturbing the gameplay but also praised for enabling a cinematic game experience. Unquestionably, cut-scenes do cause an interruption of the current mode of involvement. Therefore game designers attempt to integrate cut-scenes aesthetically smoothly into the gameplay, even relinquishing the possibility of photorealistic film sequences in order to maintain a corporate look between game and film scenes. Nonetheless, the critics of cut-scenes cannot be satisfied by these representational strategies. Conceiving agency as a mode of involvement, it becomes obvious that the textual strategy is changed in such a way during the cut-scenes that the player has to switch to another mode of textual involvement. Depending on the persuasiveness of textual strategies and the individual willingness and preference, the mode can either be changed swiftly, or is conceived as disturbance.

Another aspect in relation to mastering action is control and flow, which have been conceptualized as important features of experiencing video games. As the discussion of agency in the context of sociology, psychology, and technoscience has, however, shown, success is not the key to agency, but to control and flow. We can perceive ourselves as the agents of a successful action – which is indeed more thrilling and pleasurable – but we also are aware of our own doings when they do not result in the intended or desired outcome. In terms of gameplay, this can lead to a frustrating game experience, whereby we do feel like agents but not as very successful ones. Yet the pure representational level of games can serve as a strong textual markers for agency. When clicking on a button and causing a huge explosion – even if the explosion might not have further significance to the course of events – players still feel that they have caused something to happen, similar to the

spectator of the final show of *I'm a Celebrity* or *The Voice*, who calls in for her favourite candidate and watches the bar of the projected graph rise for her contestant.

Mastering action is clearly in favour of a video game structure. Yet, the example of reality shows demonstrates that mastering action is not ontologically restricted to video games or so-called 'interactive media'. Everyone who once experienced the agentic pleasure and thrill of having actually made the decision to pick up the phone and to vote for her favourite candidate, and witnessed the subsequent visualization of the audience's choice, has gained a sense of the haptic dimensions of televisual forms of agency.

6.1.4 Mastering Space

Murray identified navigating and orienteering in a digital environment as aspects of agency (Murray 1997: 129). This presupposes the feeling of presence and immersion in the digital environment. Manovich (2001) also elaborated on the pleasure that derives from the navigable space and the orientation within it. Navigation has been conceptualized with regard to video games as well as to the internet. First-person shooters are based upon the central perceptiveness of the game space (cf. Schrape 2012: 83). Open-world games such as *GTA IV*, which allow their players to explore the environment freely and facilitate a broad array of possible actions which provide the illusion of unrestrictedness, are examples of textual strategies that cue the mastering of space. This mastering is in need of competencies such as the handling and controlling of input devices. Unless the recipient is in control of navigation, agency is not to be achieved. Playing *GTA IV* on the PlayStation affords a certain level of haptic skills. Inexperienced players will have the unsatisfactory experience of bumping into walls, lamp posts and pedestrians instead of speeding through Liberty City. The games *Portal* and *Portal 2* (Valve Software, 2007, 2011) incorporate the navigation experience in the game structure, by providing a spatial puzzle where the players have to create interspatial portals that connect otherwise disconnected areas to proceed in the game. But beyond the concrete mastering of navigational control, the game space inherits appeals of action for the recipients. The exploration of space is at the core of many graphical video games, but is also constituent for early text adventures such as *Zork I* (Infocom, 1980). Opening with the famous sentences, "You are standing in an open field west of a white house with a boarded front door. There is a small mailbox there", the player progresses in the game's adventure by traversing through the adventure space that is created by the game's narrative.

Spatial navigation is not restricted to the textual structure of a video game. Many examples of spatial narrative can be found in film and television. For instance, Michael Wedel (2009) elaborates on the "spatial-temporal organization" of *Run Lola*

Run (Tom Tykwer, 1998) as a "particular mode of audience address" (ibid 135). Here the city of Berlin itself becomes a central theme of the film, it is a heterotopia, a place of society and a place of family that is characterized by inconsistencies and contradictions. When Lola runs through the streets of Berlin it is an unrealistic, impossible route, stringing together the Oberbaum-Bridge, Friedrichstrasse and Mierendorffplatz. While this caused many fan-discussions, Wedel considers these inconsistencies as an important filmic strategy to express the "highly fragmented, virtual and highly paradoxical aesthetic dispositions of *Run Lola Run* as a whole" (ibid: 141). Understanding *Run Lola Run* in terms of Foucault's heterotopias allows to consider the film as a "drama of emplacement – being at the right spot on the right time in a discontinuous and elusive virtual environment, full of surprises and chance encounters – a game she [Lola] can only win if she manages to synchronize herself to all the other rhythms around her" (ibid: 143).

Olek and Piepiorka (2013), in their account of contemporary television, argue that spatiality has to come to focus to grasp the particularities of transmedia storytelling. In reference to Genette (1994) and Bachtin (2008), they claim that spatiality in narratives can be created by the play with different perspectives. For instance, when applying multi-perspective strategies, space comes to dominate time (cf. Olek/Piepiorka 2013: 5). This strategy is not only met by inner-textual elements, but also by current transmedial extra-textual elements, which add to and accompany a specific core narrative. That this affords a special mode of reception is evident in the following quote:

> All the televisual and transmedial elements can be regarded as related constellation, as a place that operates depending on the viewer's perception. Only when the spectator perceives the fragments and establishes a connection the spatial aspects of transmedia narratives become evident. The transmedia universe is thus applied to the different media platforms, yet requires the movement of the perceiving subject (ibid: 7).[117]

Spatiality in film has always been an issue for film theory (cf. Engelke/Fischer/Prange [eds.] 2012). When space in a narrative becomes the dominating structuring pattern, spatially navigating and orienteering within the narrative becomes the afforded activity of the recipients. When this task is met, spatiality becomes a trigger for mastering space whereby agency can occur.

117 Original cit.: "All die televisuellen und transmedialen Elemente können als zusammengehörende Konstellation, als Ort, betrachten werden, die abhängig von der Wahrnehmung durch den Zuschauer funktionieren. Der räumliche Aspekt transmedialer Narrationen wird erst evident, wenn der Zuschauer die Fragmente wahrnimmt und die Verbindungen herstellt. Das transmediale Universum ist somit auf den unterschiedlichen medialen Plattformen angelegt, bedarf jedoch der Bewegung des wahrnehmenden" (Olek/Piepiorka 2013: 7).

6.2 Creative Agency

As reasoned in chapter 4.5, the differentiation in proxy and collective agency proved to be not entirely selective. Admittedly, creative and collective agency also have some overlaps, since creativity can be performed collectively. Yet, the label of creative agency alludes to the productive aspect that is employed in forms of participatory and agentic media reception. The proxy aspect thereby is not neglected, but is part of the creative process: finding the helpful walkthrough or cheat in a video game constitutes proxy agency in the sense of Schott (2008), but at the same time forms a creative action. Creative agency, in the following, will be conventionalized as an individual possibility to engage in specific ways with the text and beyond, whereas collective agency is characterized by the collective engagement with a similar productivity.

Video game culture incorporated from its very beginnings the possibility and practices of using the media text in a creative way by manipulating the program code. A hacker has been described by internet activist Wau Holland as someone "who tries to find a way to toast bread in a coffee machine".[118] Video games have always encouraged users to find a way to become producers by themselves, thus depriving the producers of control and staging a constant threat to the big media companies. A recent example of the subversive power of users is the "hacktivist" group Anonymous, who were accused by Sony of the data theft of more than 100 million PlayStation users' data in 2011, resulting in the temporary deactivation of the PlayStation network. In reaction, Anonymous successfully appealed the online community for DoS attacks (Denial of Service) of the Sony-server.[119]

This old conflict was first effectually met by the developer id software, who published the source code of their games instead of pursuing the hackers. With the id software games *Wolfenstein 3D* (id software, 1992), *Doom* (id software, 1993) and *Quake* (id software, 1996), the interplay between dedicated players and industry was permanently affected and changed. Creating modifications (mods) is a common practice by computer-affine players and can either refer to the modding of singular items or to a total conversion of a whole level or game (e.g. *Counter-Strike*, Valve Corporation, 1999). Modding thus is a vessel and demonstration of the player's agency that manifests in new digital items and environments.

Less sustainable and productive, though not less creative, is the use of help such as walkthroughs and cheats and subversive gameplay, that has been described earlier. Subversive gameplay relates to the strategy of oppositional reading (cf. Hall 1980), with the recipient deciding on the intended goal or course of events. The girl who collects 'deaths' in *The Sims* to enlarge her cemetery (Eichner 2007: 64), or the

118 cf. Frank Kargl: http://ulm.ccc.de/old/chaos-seminar/hacker/hacker.pdf (25.05.2013).

119 http://spielerecht.de/der-fall-geohot-pyrrhussieg-oder-wichtiger-schlag-gegen-die-hackerszene-teil-1-von-2/ (25.05.2013).

'rubble jumpers' in *Halo* (Bungie, 2001) (Carlson/Corliss, 2007) are examples of oppositional reading strategies that afford the mode of creative agency. Video games that allow their players to participate in the production or provide an open structure that enables different strategies manifest the textual structures that facilitate creative agency. In this sense, film and television texts also provide their recipients with the possibility to oppose the intended structure and creatively assign new meaning to it. Enjoying the films of Ed Wood or admiring the amateurishly-acted first episodes of the German daily soap opera *Gute Zeiten – Schlechte Zeiten* (RTLplus, since 1992) illustrate the creative potential of oppositional reading by which the recipients gain control and agency over the text.

6.3 Collective Agency

Collective agency has been described as fan engagement on a meta-text level. Schott (2008) offered an analysis of fan art and its collective discussion by fans of *Oddworld* (*Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*, Oddworld Inhabitants, 1997). Agency evolves through the various kinds of fan art and the communal discussions of the presented artefacts. Fan-sites thus offer a socio-structural arena where agentic transactions circulate between fans, producers and products.

Fan engagement has been an important aspect of media communication that has significance far beyond the fan community. Fans are not only important for the first hype, as the example of *Lost* insistently demonstrates, but also for the value of transmedia storytelling. Only on the basis of the activities of the dedicated fans, does the transmedial universe of *Lost* – and that of any media franchise – gain significance for the mainstream recipient. Fan activities certainly represent a form of creative practice, however, as Jenkins (1992) states, fan activities need the input of other fans, they are genuinely social and collective (cf. ibid: 76). Fan engagement is media-independent – any possible medium and media text has the potential to attract fan activities. Thus the level of collective agency is genuinely transmedial.

While fan practices can be considered as very intense textual engagement, participation is a practice that is of low-threshold and thus open to a less engaged audience. While it can be suspected that agency is a favoured mode of involvement of fans, for the average recipient participation, and with it the mode of agency, constitutes an insular experience. Certain textual strategies thereby cue the recipient into a participating mode. Askwith (2007) identified several touchpoints that serve to increase audience participation: a specific narrative construction, the distribution of content via multiple platforms, the repackaging and reorganizing of this content, offering ancillary content with enhanced value, the allocation of branded products for recipients to own, enabling programme-related fan activities on the part of the producers, offering a platform for social interaction, and enabling forms of interactivity (ibid: 98).

7 Textuality and Agency – Exemplary Analyses

7.1 Method and Objects of Investigation

In order to test my argument, I will examine several examples from different media and different genres, applying a textual analysis following formal-aesthetic premises. This assumes that structural as well as aesthetic aspects pre-structure the processes of reception and appropriation, while not fully determining or controlling those processes. Following the conventions of reception aesthetics I will conduct formal/aesthetic textual analyses that elaborate on the effectual potential of agency within the different media texts. Accordingly, it is assumed that specific textual characteristics – the media texts' textuality – form patterns of appeal that entail the polysemic potential of the text. Polysemy is thus not random, but determined by the texts' organizing structure, by its dramaturgy, by its cinematographic and visual staging, by character relations, by genre structures and genre signals, and by intertextual references. Concurrently, 'the audience' is considered an integral part of any text, since only via reception activities can the meaning of any text unfold, forming something new in the process: the "received text" (Mikos 2001b: 62). This consideration of audience affords the incorporation not only of an implied, ideal reader, but of divers reading formations with their specific dispositions, media preferences, and reading strategies. The model of first and second order involvement accommodates the dimensions of media production and reception, integrating mediality and textuality on the one hand, with recipients and their dispositions on the other, as mutually influencing factors. Cultural studies, notably Hall's model of Encoding/Decoding (1980) and Fiske's notions on textuality (1987/2009), situate the processes of reception and meaning making in a broader socio-cultural context and, at the same time, incorporate the agentic subject and the impact of agency throughout social (and thus also media) action. While these premises are addressed in theoretical terms, actual, concrete reception must be subject to further audience research.

The selection of material for analysis was determined by criteria intended to present a full range of media texts, from video games, to film, and various television formats. The aim was to identify typical agency points that would exemplify the potential of agency particular to different media formats. Two examples representing each media format were selected, and, in consideration of convergent media environments, one example featuring transmedia storytelling. Two film texts demonstrating strong distinctions concerning potential moments of agency were cho-

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sen, the romantic comedy *The Proposal* (Anne Fletcher, 2009), and the mind-game movie *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010). *Lost* (J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffrey Lieber, ABC, 2004–2010) serves as an example of a narrative television format, and at the same time as a paradigmatic example of transmedia storytelling and narrative complexity. As typical example of a contemporary television format, the reality show *I'm a Celebrity … Get me Out Of Here!* (originally developed by Granada Television, 2002) is considered. Two very different video games were selected to represent the great variety of contemporary video games, the action and open world game *GTA IV* (Rockstar North, 2008) and the rather narrative and linear game *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012).

All chosen examples can be considered popular media texts, addressing a large audience and successful in terms of sales, as well as in terms of critical reception, awards and academic interest. They were chosen as typical or even paradigmatic examples of their specific kind and genre. They will thus display different textual strategies concerning agency, allowing consideration of different modes of agency on different levels and with different intensity. On the basis of these exemplary analyses it will be possible to identify media and genre specific strategies, 'agency points', and evaluate their agency appeal accordingly.

7.2 Agency and Cinematic Narratives: *The Proposal* and *Inception*

7.2.1 Genre Expectations and the Goal-oriented Protagonist: The Proposal

In reference to genre films Wuss (2009) states:

> We can (…) provisionally conclude that, by means of their specific, complex formal qualities, genres create various types of possible worlds, which, through standardized transformations of the rules of probability in real life, fulfill a psychological function for their viewers by conditioning their cognition, imagination, and affects so that they can better control reality (…). Within a setting that is basically familiar to the viewer from other films, characters with whom he or she sympathizes act straightforwardly to deal with comprehensible conflict situations and their goal-oriented actions solve these problems in spite of obstacles, thus reaching a satisfactory ending. The Western hero overcomes his opponent in the showdown, the historical hero wins a famous battle, the detective catches the criminal, the captured dolphin escapes to the open sea. And the concept of the happy ending has long served to define the conflict resolution of another group of genres including romantic drama, comedy, and musical (ibid: 256).

Following Wuss and the arguments outlined in chapter 4.3, genre films, through their textuality and specific structure, induce the feeling of passive control as one possible form of agency. Understanding and experiencing films cognitively and emotionally requires activities of hypothesis building, of testing these hypotheses, and to adjust them adequately to the information that is provided via the plot and the aesthetical staging of events. Conventional narratives offer a goal-oriented structure

with goal-oriented protagonists and require accordingly goal-oriented activities of the audience. Some approaches in game studies have linked agency to problem-solving processes and hypothesis building (e.g. Jørgensen 2003a). While for most game scholars a crucial premise for agency is the possibility to engage interactively in the game structure, my reasoning builds on the assumption that haptic interactivity provides only one – but nevertheless a strong – trigger for agency to occur. Taking as a case study film *The Proposal* (Anne Fletcher, 2009), my arguments will be illustrated and tested in regard to genre films.[120]

With a worldwide gross of US$317,375,031 in total by 2013,[121] *The Proposal* ranks sixth place of all romantic comedies, being commercially nearly as successful as Garry Marshall's *Pretty Woman* (1990): having been described by film critics as "annoyingly predictable"[122] and as a "morass of clichés"[123], the film relies heavily on the genre conventions of the romantic comedy with only minor variations of the prototypical story: the role reversal concerning the traditional gender roles with Margaret Tate (Sandra Bullock) as the successful career woman and Andrew Paxton (Ryan Reynolds) as her oppressed assistant, and a second contingency which is provided when the two protagonists – while pretending to be engaged so that the Canadian Margaret can escape the impending deportation to Canada – visits Andrew's family who turn out to be not only very wealthy but also warmhearted towards Margaret. The established hierarchies between her being the assertive boss and him as the dependent assistant is abandoned when it is revealed that Andrew has no material necessity to remain in his job. Apart from these variations, the plot is structured without real surprises or unpredictabilities and it progresses – while facing more or less predictable obstacles – until the two realize that they unconsciously have fallen in love and it ends with them finally happy together.

In the tradition of the screwball comedy, the contemporary romantic comedy contains the mandatory happy ending with a marriage. From *It Happened one Night* (Frank Capra, 1934) to *When Harry Met Sally …* (Rob Reiner, 1989) to *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999) – the genre depicts a surprising stability, depicting "sociosexual conflicts" and the promise of marriage in the end (Schatz 1981: 155). The plotline: boy meets girl, they have to overcome some minor obstacles until they finally are happy together and marry, thus is very reduced in terms of complexity. Accordingly, *The Proposal* as a typical representative of the romantic comedy, should enable the recipient to "exert passive control over the situation, in that they are cognitively

120 For a brief summary of the content of *The Proposal* see p. 164.

121 According to Box Office Mojo: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=proposal.htm (10.06.2013).

122 Dragan Antulov, Draxblog Movie Reviews from 17 December 2009, cited at: http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/10010458-proposal/ (10.06.2013).

123 Andrea Chase, Killer Movie Reviews from 31 October 2009, cited at: http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/10010458-proposal/ (10.06.2013).

in command. That is, they can foresee the possible course of future events and thus anticipate decisions to be made about the conflict in the plot." (Wuss 2009: 234). Wuss, as well as Ohler and Nieding (2001), argues that specific plot and information organization such as suspense-creating strategies increase the sense of control, since the audience is provided with a greater range of knowledge than the protagonists (yet less than the filmmakers). Excitement in *The Proposal* is based in large part on the knowledge that the betrothal between Margaret and Andrew is a sham. While staged in a humorous way, the recipients, in picturing the eventual consequences for the two protagonists, fear the fraud being revealed. It is the overall game of the film to entangle the audience in the game of predicting consequences and hypothesizing the concrete way the film and with it its protagonists are going to solve this conflict and be able to reach the mandatory happy ending. The whole cinematography with its audiovisual aesthetics in concordance with the plot arrangement follows a classic conventional way of Hollywood storytelling, with continuity editing, a conventional arrangement of causality, time and space, and an omniscient narrator, providing the audience with the most possible range and depth of diegetic information, Genette's *heterodiegetische Nullfokalisierung* (cf. Genette 1994).

With its conventional way of telling and representing the story, and with its stable genre signals, the film *The Proposal* generates a very distinct "expectation horizon" (Ohler/Nieding 1996: 131), that allows the recipients to form strong top-down hypotheses on the general course of events. Accordingly, the communication strategy employed in the marketing and distribution phase was to present the film to the potential audience as romantic comedy, and the recipients would expect accordingly a (heterosexual) love story with some obstacles to unfold. In the processes of film reception, the film cues the spectators to generate further hypotheses on the basis of bottom-up processes. These cues work on the narrative as well as the aesthetic level. In the following, the major touchpoints, where the film prompts inference making via narrative and aesthetic cues, are investigated and evaluated in reference to their potential to induce the feeling of passive agency as one form of mastering narrative (on the level of personal agency).

Point 1: Margaret receives notice of her deportation and pretends to be engaged to Andrew.
The incident occurs soon after the exposition, which establishes Margret as a cold and ruthless career woman and Andrew as her ambitious yet sympathetic assistant. As the audience, due to genre expectations, already expects the two will get together in the course of the narrative, the question arises how this forced engagement will affect the future course of events.

Point 2: The immigration office, Mr Gilbertson's doubts, and Alaska
After being threatened by the immigration officer, Mr Gilbertson, with a $250,000 fine, Andrew insists he has been promised a post as senior editor and forces Marga-

ret to propose in public (on her knees) to him. Since clearly, the hierarchies between the two have changed and become more balanced, an approximation seems to be more likely than before. Concurrently, their postulation in front of Mr Gilbertson of a visit to Andrew's family in Alaska causes a change in the course of events: the two are shown travelling to Alaska where they will face Andrew's family. Through Margaret's facial expressions, and via the following flight (in a very small aircraft), as well as via the presentation of Alaska as being in the back of beyond, the audience is cued to expect Andrew's family to be real hillbillies. The audience will accordingly form hypotheses about whether or not the sophisticated Margaret will cope with the simple rural life.

Point 3: Arrival at Sitka, Alaska: the Paxtons
When they are met in Sitka, Alaska, by Andrew's sympathetic mother and his amiable grandmother, Margaret, and with her the audience, realizes that Andrew's family is indeed sophisticated and wealthy, owning seemingly half of Sitka and living in an impressive country estate. The recipients adjust their former hypotheses according to the new information. With the dichotomy of the happy and generous country family on the one hand, and the eager and obstinate Margaret on the other, not only humour is elicited, but also new hypotheses on new obstacles and their overcoming are made: for example if, and for how long, Andrew can and is willing to withhold the truth about Margaret and himself from his family.

Point 4: The ex-girlfriend
With the introduction of Gertrude, Andrew's ex-girlfriend, another possible obstacle is introduced. The audience can speculate about whether or not Andrew and Gertrude are still in love.

Point 5: Margaret opens up to Andrew
Forced to sleep in the same room, Margaret and Andrew have an intensive talk, whereby Margaret confesses her anxieties to Andrew. While the film now cues the audience into the right direction – Andrew and Margaret are about to fall in love – the obstacle of how to stop lying to the family comes into focus. With the idea of Andrew's mother and grandmother of a spontaneous wedding of Andrew and Margaret, the typical deadline is placed, boosting the emotional tension. This opens speculations about the further course of events: when will Andrew tell his family the truth? (Although there is no doubt that this will happen).

Point 6: Margaret's confession and her return to New York
With Margaret's dramatic confession at the wedding ceremony the climax is reached: the immigration officer Mr Gilbertson (who has been 'invited' by Andrew's father) accompanies Margaret back to New York to assure her deportation

to Canada. Finally, with some dramatic as well as humorous entanglements, Andrew rushes after Margaret to confess his love to her. Since Margaret's plane is due to depart, it leaves the last question for the audience: will Andrew be able to confess his love?

With the identification of the most important plot points that concurrently serve as touchpoints for the recipients' inference-making activities, the basis to evaluate the agency potential of the film is provided. In fact, many cues in *The Proposal* are very distinct, leading the audience in the right direction. This is also reflected by the reliable viewing contract between this exceptionally stable genre and its audience and in accordance with the expectations raised by the marketing, the actors, and the critics. The pleasure of *The Proposal* is not about *if* Margaret and Andrew will finally get together, but rather to witness them overcoming the obstacles in an entertaining way – the different hierarchies, the different personalities, to fall in love in the first place, and subsequently how they will overcome the threat of the immigration office and the fact that they lied to the whole family.

Passive control, as Wuss (2009) elaborates, is induced by the "annoyingly predictable" mentioned earlier. From touchpoint to touchpoint, the audience is confirmed in their top-down inferences. All bottom-up hypotheses only bolster the primary and hypothesis-guiding assumptions. This will result in the overall sense of continuity, stability, orientation, and the sense of control. Yet, the cues that induce a mode of agency – the sense of mastering narration via passive control – are repeatedly dominated by excitement (How will these unlike people fall in love? How will they overcome all the obstacles?), surprise (Margaret's idea of the fake engagement; the unintended trip to Alaska; Andrew's rich family) and humour (the featuring of differences between Margaret and Andrew, at first at Andrew's expense and later at Margaret's; the multifaceted character Ramone) and romantic tensions (the love story).

Genre films enable their viewers to gain control over the narrative by matching their expectations – while at the same time offering enough variation to entertain the audience. The general feeling of being in control usually remains an unconscious or preconscious state. That we have been in control only shows when we are either bored by the predictability or disturbed because our hypotheses turned out to be entirely wrong – both situations that would represent a failure in this film. However, beyond the actual reception situation, genre films leave their audience with the feeling of control: "the outcome corresponds to their wishes" (Wuss 2009: 256), the expected has in fact occurred. Within a complex world that cannot be controlled by individuals and that contests their agency in various ways, popular film can serve as proxy for a straightforward and distinct control of one's own life, that, in reality, will never be possible, thus having the potential to mediate a sentiment of agency. The protagonists in the film are thus proxies for our own sense of agency. In *The*

Proposal, Andrew's agency is exposed at several points: first, when he makes Margaret propose in public on her knees, second, when we realize that he is not an oppressed assistant but an ambitious man who pursues his dream of becoming an editor against the will of his father and against the circumstances at the office. Andrew acts out agency, when he has to assert himself against his father, and finally, when he decides and acts accordingly, to get together with Margaret. Also Perlin (2004) suggested that recipients of linear narratives can experience the agency of the characters. At first sight this represents an ontological difference compared with the self-related agency that is the subject of this overall investigation. Yet, when considering processes of para-social interaction that are at work when experiencing any media text, it can be reasoned that, by processes of willing suspension of disbelief, by taking the fictional world as the momentary real world, and by processes of character alignment that allow for a emotional closeness, for perspective taking and role taking, we perceive the agency of Andrew *as if* it were our own. By aligning as much as possible to the character, we feel empowered as Andrew does and transfer this feeling of empowerment – at least for a certain time – back into our real world.

Via correspondence of audience expectations and via the goal-oriented character Andrew, *The Proposal* ensures its audience feels control over the course of events and – via the conventional staging such as continuity editing – also control over the diegetic space. But since the mode of control is not exposed but rather conceptually integrated in this canonical way of Hollywood storytelling, neither do marked-out entry points for agency stick out. The film relinquishes its audience with a general sense of empowerment that is caused by the unifying and goal-oriented strategies of the story and of aesthetics concerning plot structure, pattern of development and characters. While agency is subliminally present it is only seldom recognisable as an emerging second order mode of involvement.

7.2.2 The Play Aspect in Narrative: Inception

Ohler and Nieding (2001a) summarize their concept of play as a reception mechanism in the reception of narrative films as follows:

> The basic idea rests upon the assumption that more developed cognitive systems, providing they cannot accomplish convergent anticipations due to a lack of knowledge or due to the novelty and complexity of the processed stimulus configurations, switch – assuming sufficient cognitive resources – into a playful mode of thinking that triggers divergent anticipations. The playful mode of thinking is nothing more than a cognitively more sophisticated variant of the evolutionary original meaning of play (ibid: 23).[124]

124 Original cit.: "Die Grund-Idee ist, dass entwickeltere kognitive Systeme, wenn sie konvergente Antizipationen mangels Vorwissen oder aufgrund der Neuartigkeit und Komplexität der zu verarbeitenden Stimuluskonfigurationen nicht zu leisten vermögen, in einen spielerischen Denkmodus

Film and media reception has been repeatedly been equated with play in the course of the present work (e.g. Stephenson 1967; Anderson 1996; Wuss 2009). Play also constitutes the underlying concept of approaches to mind-game or puzzle films (e.g. Jahn-Sudmann 2007, Elsaesser 2009) In the following examination of play aspects in *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010),[125] I will consider and test if the processes of play in narrative media facilitate the mode of agency, and attempt to identify the concrete textual strategies that are possible points of agency.

Cognitive film theory describes the processes of film viewing as "schema-driven perception" (Bordwell 1985: 37), with the film pattern cueing the spectator to either build curiosity hypotheses or suspense hypotheses. Bordwell describes the perception of a conventional narrative as follows:

> In our culture, the perceiver of a narrative film comes armed and active to [the] task. She or he takes as a central goal the carving out of an intelligible story. To do this, the perceiver applies narrative schemata which define narrative events and unify them by principles of causality, time, and space. Prototypical story components and the structural schema of the 'canonical story' assist in this effort to organize the material presented. In the course of constructing the story the perceiver uses schemata and incoming cues to make assumptions, draw inferences about current story events, and frame and test hypotheses about prior and upcoming events. Often some inferences must be revised and some hypotheses have to be suspended while the narrative delays payoff. While hypotheses undergo constant modification, we can isolate critical moments when some are clearly confirmed, disconfirmed, or left open (ibid: 39).

The case study of *The Proposal* has shown that, following Bordwell's assumption on general viewer's activities and Wuss's notion of passive control (Wuss 2009: 165), the general processes of perception can induce passive control that enable the mode of agency at some points, while alignment to a goal-oriented character enables us para-socially to experience the character's agency and transfer this sentiment into our real world. In *Inception* (and other forms of complex narrative), the processes of making assumptions and drawing inferences are deliberately disturbed and tricked by the filmic text. The film structure permits "'virtual worlds', impossible situations, and improbable events" (Elsaesser 2009a: 20). Following the protagonists of the main plot deeper and deeper into the subconscious of Robert Fischer, where Dominic Cobb and his team plan to conduct an inception, that is, to plant an idea in Fischer's mind that will become action-guiding for him, the recipients have to cope with an increasing complexity of narration. The presentation of the mission includes five parallel levels of action space, the first being the diegetic reality (although there are hints that this is already a dream level of Cobb), three dream levels of Fischer where the team immerses, and finally the Limbo, the deep-

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‚switchen', der, hinreichende kognitive Ressourcen vorausgesetzt, divergente Antizipationen auslöst. Der spielerische Denkmodus ist dabei nichts anderes als eine kognitiv entwickeltere Variante des evolutionären Ursprungssinns von Spiel" (Ohler/Nieding 2001a: 23).

125 For the summary of the film's story, see p. 165.

est level of subconscious. Furthermore, the audience is faced with a whole crew of protagonists consisting of Dominic Cobb the 'extrator', Arthur, the manager, Eames the conman, Yusuf the chemist, Ariadne the architect, Saito the client and 'tourist', Fischer the target, and Mal, Cobb's dead wife. Although the narration contains no major twists and no intentional inconsistencies it challenges the recipients and their processes of perception. *Inception* clearly follows what Bordwell has identified as "movies with boasted paradoxical time schemes, hypothetical futures, digressive and dawdling action lines, stories told backward and in loops, and plots stuffed with protagonists" (Bordwell 2006: 73).

Since the main idea of the film, the possibility of dreamsharing, is in need of some explanation, not only is much time spent on explaining the mechanisms and peculiarities (Ariadne here functions as proxy for the recipients, with Arthur and Cobb explaining all the details to her), but also a whole side plot is implemented (Saito's test, scenes 2–7[126]), that serves as exemplification for the audience. A second side plot consists of the assembly of the new team that leads Cobb to Mombasa (scenes 21–23). When finally the main plot begins, the film has already passed the first hour, having introduced two independent side plots, seven main characters, Cobb's past with children, wife, father, and the trip of Cobb and Mal into the Limbo, as well as the background details of the main mission. To complicate the situation, the film misleads the audience at the very beginning, starting with a scene that is chronologically at the very end of the story, displaying Cobb and Saito (as old men) meeting at Saito's estate in Limbo (scenes 1, 53). The scene is smoothly cut and matches to the same setting in Cobb's dream level during the initial mission (when Saito tests Cobb's proficiency, scenes 2–7), but situated at the very same place, so that it is impossible for the first-time viewer to arrange and interpret the scene correctly.

Once the main mission begins, the plot soon progresses to the third dream level and from then on is continuously switching between the different dream levels. In the first dream level, Yusuf, the chemist, is steering the white transporter, trying to escape Fischer's mind security and being responsible for the kick, a sudden disruption that retrieves the crew back to the previous level (or reality), in the second level the crew gathers in a hotel room with Arthur having to initialize the kickback from level three with the help of an elevator. In level three, a snowy mountain landscape, the inception is supposed to take place. Yet, because Saito is wounded and dies in level three and Fischer is shot by Mal (also in level three), Cobb and Ariadne follow them into the Limbo in order to finish the mission. In addition to the different and parallel levels, the audience is faced with shapeshiftings (Eames appears as Fischer's uncle), hallucinations (Cobb's visions of his children and his memories), and indicators of unreliable narration (when Cobb's wakes

126 For the detailed scene protocol of *Inception* cf. Appendix II.

up in the Mombasa dream cave we cannot be sure if he really is awake or still dreaming, scene 22). The narrative thus resembles less a puzzle but more a juggling, with the audience trying to keep track of all the information and levels of dreams, while at the same time testing the inner logic of the whole construction of the inner diegetic world and its appearances. Space is thereby central to the film's overall theme as well to its aesthetics. We, as an audience, are advanced step by step to get to know the logics of the spatial constructions of dreamsharing and as a result we have not only a more precise idea of the whereabouts in the different dream levels, but are constantly asked to anticipate the labyrinthine architecture of Ariadne's construction.

The multi-layered and multifaceted narration, the audiovisual aesthetic, the cinematography, montage, sound design and visual design mirrors the dream world and inner minds of the protagonists, providing more often than not disorientation and discontinuity. For example, we only realize a scene is inside a dream with Cobb and Ariadne, when Cobb asks Ariadne to reflect on the reality status (scene 14). Also the frequent hallucinations of Cobb are not always marked as such. Finally, the ambiguous ending is intensified by the setting: Cobb returns to his home, the place we have already seen many times as the setting inside his dreams and hallucinations. With the exact replica of the dream-home, and the mirroring of his children playing in the garden and finally the spinning tractricoid top, Cobb's Totem, the audience is primed not to rely on the pictures that are presented, they cannot be sure about their reality status (scene 55).

Bordwell (2006) argues that puzzle films work on the basis of conventional film structures, gaining their aesthetic strength from playing with conventions. Elsaesser, on the other hand, argues that puzzle films represent a "new contract between spectator and film" (Elsaesser 2009a). Yet, there is no need to consider these statements as contradictory. *Inception* clearly breaks many rules of filmic conventions, but at the same time it is approached by its audience on the basis of hypothesis building and inference making. With the accumulation of puzzle films since the 1990s, it can be assumed that the recipients approach films such as *Inception* with an adequate expectations horizon and with some prior information on the genre and the filmmaker. One filmic strategy that is dominant in puzzle films in general and *Inception* in particular thereby is striking: instead of relying on the suspense-inducing information structure of diegetic information, *Inception* operates on the principle of the momentary. We fear for Cobb to get back to his children, but not on the basis of an information advantage but on the basis of his momentary feelings and memories. The complicated inner logic of the film narrative provides us with just the information we need in order to follow the course of events. The recipient is put in a position of just about keeping track of the unfolding of events, having to cope with an overload of information with respect to plot development, characters, backstory information and the logic of dreamsharing. There is hardly

any time to reflect on the hypotheses and inferences. It can be assumed, therefore, that *certain filmic structures such as the withholding of information in combination with a multitude of story-relevant information, increases aspects of play but at the same reduces aspects of agency during the actual reception process.*

Inception also lacks a reliable goal-orientation of the central character Cobb. While on the level of causal chains the narrative is clearly driven by Cobb's desire to get back to his children, the audience is at the same time unsure about the truth behind it. Cobb is – typically for the puzzle film – unreliable due to his unconfirmed mental state, we cannot trust his motives, rely on the logic of his decisions, or even be sure about his reality status. While during the momentary course of action we can align with any of the multiple characters and enjoy their most incredible dominance against all counterforces Fischer's unconsciousness produces, the overall sense of doubt that is frequently suggested by the film's staging prevails. Within this uncertainty, the multiplicity of action lines and diegetic spaces, and the multitude of characters, a realm for contingency is opened allowing the audience to play with different possibilities. When the contingency is accepted, it puts the audience in a ludic mode of involvement that does not, however, automatically result in agency.

Rather than via genre expectations and character alignment, agency is facilitated by the film's invitation to engage in the intertextual netting of references. *Inception* adopts the postmodern and self-referential play of reference to other films, genres, or arts. From the employment of the Penrose stairs to the photographs of Ori Gersht, via the reference and employment of the reality-bending theme as known from *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999) or *Dreamscape* (Joseph Ruben, 1984), to direct quotes from film classics such as the mirror scene (scene 16) that is picked up from Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) – *Inception* is a rich fabric that opens up to the expertise of the cinephile audience. Also the dominant musical theme, the famous song performed by Edith Piaf ("Non, je ne regrette rien", Charles Dumont, 1960), is extensively used during the film, working not only on a narrative and dramaturgical level (in signalling the approaching "kick") but also in a persuasive, emotionalizing way, when employed in an alienated way as the main theme tune of the showdown.

According to Askwith (2007: 106 ff.), the mastering of textual relationships is one aspect of his logic of mastery. Following his assumptions, via the heavy usage of intertextual references of all kinds, *Inception* clearly establishes entry points for agency to occur. The recipients might be unsure about the unfolding narrative, and the logic behind it. They might ask themselves frequently how the characters got to the next level of action and question its specific reality status, and they might be disoriented in terms of narration, space, and coherence. Yet, via the recognition of intertextual elements and their adherence, another layer of media experience is opened that allows the audience to perform agency via cultural expertise.

While during the phase of actual film reception agency is enabled via intertextuality, the specific structure of the film fosters the post-reception activities, the phases of appropriation. Bordwell (2006: 74) has pointed to the importance of rewatching puzzle films on DVD. *Inception* clearly requires this practice. The structuring of information and the complexity of narration represents a play for the recipient during the process of reception. Yet, points of agency become viral during the following phase of appropriation. Reflecting in discussions with friends on the inner diegetic logic, testing the hypotheses while rewatching the film again on DVD, and searching for more incidents via the Internet facilitates moments of agency. In the search for explanations, the recipient will find numerous interpretations of *Inception*,[127] fan-made video clips with alternative ending possibilities,[128] or the synthesis of all dream levels to one split-screen movie experience.[129] While the research and reception of additional film-related information thus can be considered as a form of creative agency, actually making fan-videos, and engaging in forums in the discussions about the film, represent the collective potential of agency.

7.2.3 Summary

Personal Agency: Mastering Narrative, Choice, Action, Space

The two examples of films presented in this chapter demonstrate that narratives may be structured very differently and it is due to the specific structure whether and how agency sticks out or not. Clearly dominating in both genres is the mastering of narrative. *The Proposal* allows the audience to experience agency through the film's close correspondence with all top-down and bottom-up hypotheses and the overall goal-orientation that the audience can align to via the character of Andrew. On the other hand, the complex and multi-layered structure of *Inception* indicates that points of agency are postponed to the phase of rewatching and appropriation, or, alternatively enables the recipient to pay attention to another layer of the film and engage in the allocation of intertextuality.

Creative and Collective Agency

The Proposal leaves its audience with no questions pending. Fan engagement thus is most likely to be actor-related and not text-related. *Inception* on the other hand, due to its specific structure which has been elaborated, invites its audience to engage beyond the process of reception with the text. Discussions with friends, but also

127 A beautiful example can be found on the website: http://inception-explained.com/ (10.06.2013).

128 "How *Inception* should have ended" by HISHEdotcom, online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBAuMpOpSnA (10.06.2013).

129 "*Inception* in Real-time" by Weikang Sun, 28 November 2010. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHBlYJ-tKcs (10.06.2013).

online investigations as well as rewatching the film on DVD or via downloading are thus probable appropriation strategies for viewers. The specific classification of the film as mind-game or puzzle movie, as well as the director Christopher Nolan, known for his former films such as *Memento* (2000), *The Prestige* (2006) or *The Dark Knight* (2008), create specific expectation horizons that promise a surplus value when engaging beyond the actual film text. Like *Lost*, *Inception* asks many questions that are not always answered, thus opening a realm for further engagement.

Conclusion

Points of agency in narratives are not easy to identify, since the characters' and audiences' agency has been carved out as an underlying principle of conventional and stable genre films. The way we process information via schemata and inference making thereby can be considered as crucial for the experience and identification of narrative media agency. Yet, the experience of agency clearly depends on the concrete textual structure. Specific structures amplify agency in different ways and on different levels. One way of evaluating the surplus value, and the decision to offer any transmedial material at first hand, can therefore be to consider its possibility to provide the audience with a greater degree of agency within the processes of the postponed phase of appropriation.

7.3 Agency and Transmedia Storytelling: *Lost*

7.3.1 Format Description

Lost (J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffrey Lieber, ABC, 2004–2010) can be considered from today's perspective as an outstanding television production in many respects. With its high production value and its elaborate marketing as "high concept"[130] as well as its various elements of transmedia storytelling, it has been conceptualized as "blockbuster television" (Eichner 2013), as "mind-game television" (Wedel/Brücks 2013), as "cult blockbuster" (Abbott 2009), as a game in itself,[131] as an epic (Schneid 2012), or simply as a "great television programme" (Mittell 2009: 119). Lost *was the second-most* frequently watched programme worldwide in 2005,[132] and has been ABC's best rated programme since *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire* (cf.

130 "High concept" is used here in the sense of Justin Wyatt (1994), a practice of production culture, and indicates a highly marketable idea.

131 The theory that *Lost* is actually not a television programme but a game is elaborated, for example, by the user all_game (http://www.lostisagame.com/about.htm) (1.06.2013).

132 According to a study by Informa Telecoms and Media (http://www.informatandm.com), reported in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/5231334.stm (1.06.2013).

Eichner 2013: 58). In the course of the six seasons, the plane crash of Oceanic flight 815 on a desert island is portrayed. Soon after the crash, the survivors realize that things follow different principles on this island. A black smoke monster, a polar bear, a mysterious buried hatch, and 'the others' disclose in the first episode a network of non-linear narratives, mysteries, red herrings and cues, that unfold and enlarge during the course of the episodes. Not only flashbacks, but also flash-forwards (and later 'flash-sideways') elucidate on the back-stories of the many main characters and cause suspense and, more often, surprise. The format thereby presents a genre mix that is described by Abbott (2009) as "*Gilligan's Island* (…) meets the *X-Files*" (ibid: 12), which has been praised for its narrative complexity and its operational aesthetic (cf. Mittell 2009: 130), is now widely considered as a paradigmatic example of transmedia storytelling (e.g. Olek 2011; Piepiorka 2011), and that has been subject to much scientific effort (e.g. Abbott 2009; Askwith 2009; Mittell 2009; Eichner 2013; Rothemund 2013a; Schabacher 2010; Wedel/Brücks 2013). It would be an over-simplification to consider *Lost* as a television programme only. The core text of the *Lost* television series is accompanied by typical blockbuster franchise products such as special edition DVD sets, T-shirts, action figures, and spin-offs such as the video game *Lost – Via Domus* (Ubisoft 2008), the novel *Bad Twins*, reverse product placement with products from the fictional universe of *Lost* (e.g. drinks and food with the Dharma Initiative logo) as well as the webisode *Missing Pieces*, the alternative reality game (ARG) *The Lost Experience*, various websites for fictional brands and characters, the online encyclopaedia *Lostpedia*, the official ABC podcast and, of course, the DVDs and the various possibilities of online access via streaming or download (cf. Olek 2011; Piepiorka 2011; Eichner 2013; Rothemund 2013; Wedel/Brücks 2013). An illustration of the way different elements of the *Lost* universe are interrelated and interwoven is when an actor playing Rachel Blake, a fictional character from *The Lost Experience*, suddenly took the microphone at the *Lost* press conference at the Comic Convention in 2006, to accuse the production team of *Lost* of being in conspiracy with the Dharma Initiative. Accompanied by the applause of the fans, who soon recognized the character from the ARG, Rachel Blake, placed a hint for the audience – a website URL – that initiated the next phase of the ARG.

In fact, the ample universe of *Lost* did not catch the majority of the audience. As I have argued elsewhere (Eichner 2013), *Lost* provides diverse points and intensities of attachment for its audience. There are the dedicated fans, who are eager and willing to engage beyond the core text of the television programme and who participate creatively in the *Lost* universe, thus adding to its density and attractiveness of the format also for other audience segments. There is the regular appointment viewer who won't miss an episode and will rewatch the programme again via DVD or downloading; the enthusiastic mainstream audience, who might not stick to the format until the end; and the casual viewer, who finds points of attachment

via the mode of excitement with surprise and romance as dominant strategies, yet without following the overarching narrative arcs and cues (cf. ibid: 60).

For the subsequent analysis two aspects are of special interest and will be elaborated in more detail: the complex narration, providing contingency and enabling mind games, as strategies that induce agency, and the transmedia storytelling, enabling various forms of participation and creative engagement and expertise, thus also maintaining the potential to prompt agency.

7.3.2 Complex Narration within the Television Text

Mittell (2009) argues that the narrative complexity not only arises from a multiplicity of story arcs, but also from the particularity that *Lost*, instead of providing closure to mysteries and questions, often prompts even more questions (cf. ibid: 161 f.). Rothemund (2013) states that complexity consist of several components, namely diversity, connectivity, non-linearity (in the sense of non-causality), openness (in the sense of polysemy), and contingency (cf. ibid: 78). *Lost* features all these aspects. Multiple story arcs within one episode (they usually contains two to three storylines), story arcs that span over several episodes, story arcs that rest for some time and are reactivated on a later occasion, and the series' overarching narrative frame that spans over the entire six seasons, attest a multiplicity that Nelson (2008) has described as flexi-narrative. The manifold questions that are raised not only foster the curiosity of the audience, but also of the characters, who more than once ask themselves what is happening and why. *Lost* is characterized by multiplicity and diversity not only in terms of narrational structure and the many open questions, but also in terms of plural characters and their interrelations, plural narration times (with the present, the flashbacks, and the flash-forwards, making the present the future past), and plural locations (as depicted in the backstories of the global survivors and parallel realities), the plurality of antagonistic forces (the smoke monster, the others, the countdown in the Swan hatch, etc.), but also in terms of multiple genre signals (reality show, survivor tradition, drama, tragic love, fantasy, horror and science fiction; cf. Ndalianis 2009: 182 ff.) multiple offered modes of reception (e.g. reading it as game rather than narrative; cf. Jones 2008) and with respect to multiple transmedial offers it provides to facilitate additional comprehension. In the course of narration that spans over six seasons, all these elements add up, enriching, enhancing and complicating the text. Yet, complexity in narrational structure alone does not automatically induce the mode of agency. It is the combination of textual elements, of multiplicity and diversity that constitutes contingency, thus suggesting agency as a probable mode of involvement. The textual possibilities to induce agency via complex narration and contingency are elucidated in the following examination of the episode "Deus Ex Machina" (*Lost*, season 1, episode 19).

In this episode John Locke desperately tries to unlock the cover of the hatch he and Boone found together at the end of the last episode. In alternation with their attempts, John's past is narrated in flashbacks. Additionally, there is one larger and two minor sub plots. The larger displays Sawyer, who suffers increasingly from headaches – until Jack diagnoses hyperopia (farsightedness), the two minor plots featuring a few moments of romantic tension between Kate and Jack, and one scene with Michael and Jin building the raft. When, in the end, John brings the severely injured Boone to the camp, after he crashed with the Beechcraft they have found hanging in the trees, another narrative arc opens that will become central in the next episode.

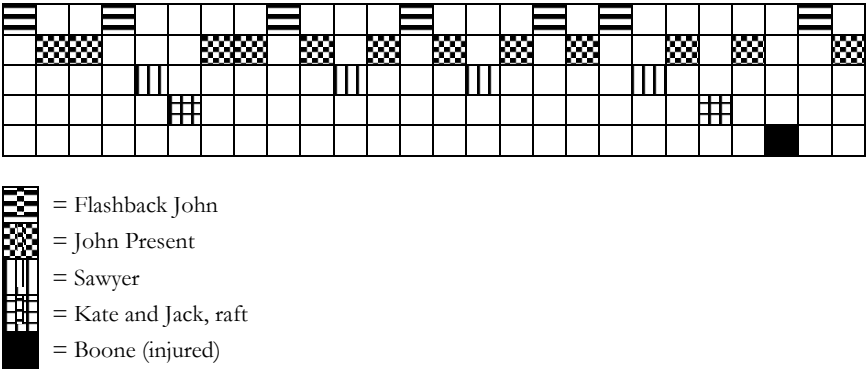

Figure 5: Storylines in "Deus Ex Machina" (overview)

This overview of the storylines illustrates the show's regular structure. Usually one to two characters are portrayed with flashbacks, with some minor storylines interwoven. In "Deus Ex Machina", it is John Locke, who is convinced that his fate is tied to the island. John is represented as an ambivalent character, sometimes inducing sympathy or pity, at other times showing another, unlikeable fanatical side. In this episode his character background is elaborated and the audience learns that his mother gave him away after birth. Raised by several foster parents, the adult John is located by his mother and finally gets to know his seemingly perfect father. Too late John has to realize that his father was just taking advantage of him, tricking him into an organ donation. As the schematic display of storylines demonstrates, the analysis of one single episode cannot reveal the complexity that unfolds over the whole serial. Yet, considering aspects other than the number of storylines, the multiplicity and complexity is revealed.

7.3.3 Open Questions, Cues and Intertextuality

Schneid (2012) is critical that most of the cues in *Lost* prove to be "Cliffhanger, Red Herring und McGuffin" (ibid: 253):

> After all, in order to unravel the constructed promise of the mystery of genesis, it usually pointless in *Lost* to fiddle with specified tracks such as the Egyptian symbols. Seemingly, many hints do exist for their own sake and are not be considered as 'riddle of all riddles', but as a mystery for the sake of red herrings, charged with a teleological destination. When retracing these questions back to their source, only esoteric, numerology and conspiracy theory are there to remain (ibid. 254).[133]

Yet, what Schneid bemoans misses the point. The pleasure arising from following the cues – be it red herrings or not – does not rely on a capacious truth nor on scientific consistency. Rather, the cues function on an intertextual level, offering the audience the possibility to engage in the transmedia universe of *Lost* and to reflect on associated and inferred meanings. Many cues refer to the diegetic world of *Lost* itself. When John and Boone first find the corpse and soon after the crashed Beechcraft, it leaves a trace that is picked up again in episode 10/2, "The 23rd Psalm": the corpse turns out to be Eko's brother and their story is revealed. A second trace that is picked up later relates to Boone putting out an SOS from the crashed Beechcraft. In episode 7/2 ("The Other 48 Days"), the audience finally learns that Boone communicated with the second group of survivors who found a radio in the Arrow Station. Until this point, the recipient might still be curious whether help is on its way or if the SOS was just a red herring. In this episode the numbers that were featured at length in the previous episode are picked up again in a subtle way.[134] The numbers 4, 8, and 15 are mentioned several times, encouraging the hyper-attentive audience to follow these hints further and investigate online their possible meanings and connections.

Another layer of polysemy is added by the extensive use of intertextual references in *Lost*. Beginning with the telling names of the protagonists (e.g. John Locke, Danielle Rousseau), other media texts are subject for discussion or placed on-screen to be discovered by the audience. For example, in "Deus Ex Machina" we see Sawyer reading a novel when Jack approaches to tell him of his farsightedness.

133 Original cit.: "Trotz allem macht es bei *Lost* meist keinen Sinn, sich mit den gelegten Fährten – z.B. den ägyptischen Symbolen – zu beschäftigen, um an das konstruierte Versprechen vom Geheimnis des Ursprungs zu kommen. Vieles scheint um seiner selbst Willen da zu sein und nicht als 'Rätsel aller Rätsel' zu gelten, sondern als Rätsel um der falschen Fährten Wille, die mit einem teleologischen Zielpunkt aufgeladen werden. Wenn man diese Fragen weiter auf die Quellen zurückführt, kommt man nur zur Esoterik, zur Numerologie und Verschwörungstheorie" (Schneid 2012: 254)

134 In the episode "Numbers" the audience witnesses that Hurley wins the lottery with a special number combination he learned from an inmate in a mental institution. In the episode's last shot, the numbers are identified on the cover of the hatch that John desperately tries to open. Much fan-writing and fan-based theory has circulated concerned with these numbers (cf. http://de.lostpedia.wikia.com).

For a few seconds, the title of the book is visible and the curious viewer will easily read that it is *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, a story including the Tesseract concept, a theory on the space-time continuum containing also several religious aspects. This can be read as a clear allusion to the show's general theme of spirituality and the structure of time shifts and movements of the island. Rothemund (2013) showed in her account of *Lost* that besides these obvious references several intertextual references work on a more subtle level: the general theme of *Lost* is the same as the subject of *Island* (Aldous Huxley, 1962), *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley, 1932), *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (Daniel Defoe, 1719), *Lord of the Flies* (William Golding, 1954), films such as *Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000), *The Beach* (Danny Boyle, 2000), and television formats such as *Gilligan's Island* (Sherwood Schwartz, CBS, 1964–1967), and *Expedition Robinson* (Charlie Parsons, SVT, 1997–2003) and its adaptions (cf. ibid: 194 f.).

The narrative arcs, the intertextual references and the aesthetic elements organize the information that is given to the audience in such a way that there are always (until the last episode) more questions than answers (see Appendix III). For the reasons outlined above, the narrative and dramaturgical structure of *Lost* invites the audience to become cognitively more involved. By the arrangement of narrative as puzzle and via a multitude of intertextual references, that clearly do not serve in an inner-diegetic way but as a form of direct communication between producers and audience, it represents a first entry point to the mode of agency. That is not to say that this is the only possibility to get involved in the text of *Lost*. In fact, while it has not been the subject of this analysis, *Lost* relies heavily on the mode of excitement, and is conventional in its narrative structure inasmuch as causality is the most dominant driving force behind the show's attempt to involve the spectator in a game of mind. As Mittell (2009) points out:

> Although *Lost* plays with highbrow themes of fate versus free will, and namedrops philosophers from Rousseau to Bakunin, ultimately the show is clearly lodged within the realm of popular culture, with pulpy genre moments drawn more from science-fiction and adventure tales than art cinema (ibid: 133).

The pulpy genre moments Mittell refers to are especially dominant in the structure and evocation of arousal and emotional tension. The whole aesthetic staging with cinematography, montage, sound design and the employment of special effects is frequently used to disorient and alienate the spectator. The impenetrability of the jungle is – especially in the first episode – frequently portrayed in a 'horroresque' way (for example, when Jack follows his dead father, when Claire is placed as a bait in the night-time jungle, or when the black smoke monster repeatedly attacks the survivors). Not only via visual arrangement and staging but also via sound, music and dialogue, a sensation of thrill is conveyed which is best portrayed in the heavily used quote of the famous theme tune of *Lost*.

7.3.4 Spatial Relations

Besides the structuration into a puzzle, *Lost* also subverts the certainty of space. Rothemund (2013) states that it is due to the structuring and configuration of the labyrinthine space that non-linearity in *Lost* is constituted (cf. ibid: 167). In the context of the overall narration, space as a fixed entity is questioned fundamentally, with the island moving in space (and the characters travelling in time). Spatial relations are important for the network of relationships: with the ongoing course of seasons and narrative events, the flashbacks reveal the connectedness of the characters. For instance, in episode 16/1 ("Outlaws"), Sawyer meets Jack's father Christian Shephard in a bar in Australia. As it turns out in episode 12/3, "Par Avion", Christian Shephard is also the father of Claire, making her and Jack half-siblings. In episode 10/2, "The 23rd Psalm" the connection between Eko and the dead body in the Beechcraft is revealed – the two were brothers.

Not only do the character networks unfold in an unmanageable spatially, but also the cinematographic style frequently causes disorientation for characters and audience in the jungle. Despite the restricted space of the island, the different, literal, levels of action – the beach, the jungle, the mountains, the trees and the underground bunkers of the Dharma Initiative, as well as the depiction of places all over the world in the flashbacks, add up to a confusing perception of unstable spatiality. And while the audience experiences the various locations through the memories of the different characters, we concurrently realize from episode to episode, from season to season, that the protagonists are trapped on the island. Rothemund reasons: "The double relation of isolation and being locked-in depicts the continuous uncertainty and instability which is inscribed in the narration of *Lost* causally, spatially, and temporally" (ibid: 168[135]).

Spatiality is also thematized by Ndalianis, who differentiates between *Lost* as TV show and *Lost* as transmedia text ("viral Lost"):

> The audience looks on at the characters who navigate their spaces and experience their emerging narratives. When viral-Lost enters the equation, however, players become actively involved in this spatial practice, collecting clusters of information and bringing them into their experience and understanding of the television show (Ndalianis 2009: 192).

Thus, the experience of spatiality will differ according to the specific engagement of the recipient. While the recipient with a degree of expertise is in the position to connect spaces and places according to her more accurate hypotheses, the occasional viewer of *Lost* will not experience the sensation of mastering space. More likely, she will be put in a position of uncertainty.

135 Translation by S.E.

7.3.5 Transmedia Narration and Contingency

In combination with the cumulative points of entry to agency outlined above, a second is provided by the elements of transmedia narration. Elaborated at more length in Askwith (2009) or Wedel and Brücks (2013), it can be summarized, that *Lost* provides a plurality packaged content, of textual extensions and of points of creative fan engagement. Ndalianis describes this as follows:

> Shows like *Lost*, *24* (…) and *Heroes* (…) have all played significant, even groundbreaking, roles in creating storytelling strategies that extend the fictional space of their TV universes into the media worlds of mobile phones, podcasts, comic books, novels and the Internet. (…) the conglomeration of the entertainment industry and its reliance on new communication technologies has resulted in an industry that has multiple media interests (Ndalianis 2009: 181).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it would be insufficient to consider only the television text of *Lost* when referring to its potential to induce the mode of agency. The multiplicities of touchpoints that unfold via diverse media devices across ontological different media material and across different genres add up to the rich and convincing universe of *Lost*. In sum, the multiple text elements of *Lost* build a possible world. Rothemund (2013) reasons accordingly:

> By generating narrative 'gaps' and by multiplying and linking storylines, the complexity of access has already increased. Thereby a first form of contingent narrative emerges, reducing the predictability of the plot and presenting the narration as a system of divergent fragments, which must be reassembled over and over again in the course of the episodes (ibid: 128).[136]

Thus, only in combination with the narrational complexity does the transmedia universe unfold its possibility space: when the world and its rules are questioned within the frame of the fictional diegesis, contingency (ibid: 77) and with it the "could have acted differently" (Giddens 1984: 9) emerges. While some scholars have argued the contingent in *Lost* is especially fostered by the game-like structure of the show (e.g. Jones 2008: 19 f.), I want to argue that the contingency potential lies in the hypothesis-inducing structure of the show. *Lost* is a puzzle that can be solved. Yet, it is up the recipients to decide if they actively search within the intertextual and intermedial universe of *Lost* for the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, or if they will wait for the narrative to tell them. While the first strategy triggers a stronger sense of agency, and concurrently stabilizes this mode of involvement, the second strategy allows for a selective sensation of agency – each time the textual cues are strong enough to dominate the otherwise dominating textual strategy of excitement.

136 Original cit.: "Durch das Generieren narrativer Leerstellen sowie durch die Multiplikation und Verknüpfung der Handlungsstränge wird so bereits die Komplexität des Einstiegs erhöht. Hierdurch findet eine erste Form kontingenten Erzählens statt, was die Vorhersehbarkeit von Handlung reduziert und die Narration als ein System aus divergenten Fragmenten präsentiert, die in den Episoden immer wieder aufs neue zusammengefügt werden müssen" (Rothemund 2013: 128).

7.3.6 Guided and Unguided Participation

The ARG *The Lost Experience* can be considered as one of the most intriguing strategies of the producers of *Lost* to engage their audience in the fictional universe beyond the TV text. From a marketing perspective the ARG served to bridge the time gap between the second and the third season, to 'keep the audience on track' and to create worldwide attention for the show. Yet, as outlined in chapter 4 (4.4.3), the audience also benefitted from this strategy. The ARG, maybe more than any other element of the transmedia universe of *Lost*, has a key role for the participatory culture in and around the *Lost* universe (Wedel/Brücks 2013: 332). Here is not the place to go deeper into the intriguing structure and mechanisms of the game, which has been outlined in greater detail in Askwith (2007), Ndalianis (2009) and Wedel and Brücks (2013), but its importance in relation to agency has to be acknowledged. *The Lost Experience* combines the possibilities of play with the possibilities of the rich narrative diegesis of the TV text of *Lost*. The playfully engaged gamer of the ARG thus not only achieves agency via the game structure but also within the narrative structure of the TV show. The player of the ARG approaches the TV text with different expectations and with a different and enlarged body of knowledge. Thus, *The Lost Experience* invokes the illusion for the player/spectator of being integrated structurally in the *Lost* text: due to the information available in the game, specific story clusters and genre information that is not accessible for non-players is gathered. Ndalianis (2009) explains:

> However, not only does this give the viral-*Lost* participant further levels of understanding when compared both to the diegetic characters and viewers of TV-*Lost*, but it also integrates them far more actively into the generic process in that the viral-*Lost* participant possesses blocks of generic information that is withheld in TV-*Lost* (ibid: 191).

And she goes on:

> In interviews, Lindelof has acknowledged the impact that computer games had on the original conception of the TV series: certain parts of 'The Lost Experience' operate like the Easter Eggs, or hidden messages, that are planted by game designers in many computer games – messages that reward the persistent fan for their zealous activity and engagement with the *Lost* universe (ibid: 191).

This results in the illusion that the players "are contributing to an emergent narrative and, in turn, to its generic identity" (ibid: 191), they have the feeling of influence on the text, the feeling of agency.

Beside this producer-generated and producer-controlled form of participation, *Lost* has been subject to versatile, manifold and extensive fan engagement. Fans have engaged in theorizing on the diverse meanings of *Lost* (e.g. considering *Lost* as a game), they engage in fan art such as paintings, videos, animations, posters or handcrafts, they write they own *Lost* narratives and they share and compare their creative output with other fans. The fan video "Lost in 3 Minutes" (explanation

with self-drawn pictures by nerimo[137]), the self-made animation "How Lost should have ended" (animation by HISHEdotcom[138]), fan art collections[139], or online forums, blogs and fan pages[140] are all examples of fan engagement that reach beyond the intention and control of the producers. The most popular and probably most extensive example is the fan-made wiki *Lostpedia*[141], providing not only a platform to collect all facts about the *Lost* universe, but also a platform for theorizing on the diegetic world of *Lost*, for fan art, and discussions. As Schott (2008) has elaborated, fan engagement can be considered "as a socio-structural arena (…) [that] necessitates 'agentic transactions' in which fans oscillate between producers and products of the social system" (ibid: 268). On the basis of the prescribed text *Lost*, the fans appropriate and imbibe the core text to creatively and generatively create something new. While this cultural practice is not necessarily located in fandom, the proof of having had an influence on the original text, of having performed as a creative and productive agent, is amplified by the witnessing and appreciative function of other fans. The experience of agency, then, can be considered as one important motivational aspect of fan engagement.

7.3.7 Summary

Personal Agency: Mastering Narrative, Choice, Action, Space

The example of *Lost* clearly demonstrates that narrative agency depends on the recipient's prior knowledge as well on the degree of their dedication towards the text. Only the more dedicated audience will engage over the course of more than one season with the TV text of *Lost*. Yet, the contingent potential of the show only unfolds when the multiplicity of all layers is acknowledged. The true agency potential thus only unfolds within the transmedia space that incorporates additional and enhanced material. Yet, since a single episode of *Lost* does not display a great degree of narrative complexity and uses overall unifying strategies of storytelling it also allows the casual viewer to gain control – at least for a certain time until an open question, an obvious hint, or an aesthetic strategy of disorientation, disrupts the agentic moment. But what operates disruptively on the level of passive control serves for agency at the level of intertextual mastery and narrative choice. For the recipients who perceive the TV show of *Lost* as but one (yet crucial) part of the

137 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HWECQa23Cs (04.06.2013).
138 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrcF7dYADsw (04.06.2013).
139 e.g. http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/lost; http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/User:Lynettefan2626/Fan_Art (04.06.2013).
140 e.g. http://www.lost-board.de/board.php?boardid=33&sid=5343fa15e350af74ab18e31bbce9b485 (04.06.2013).
141 http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page (04.06.2013).

whole possible world of *Lost*, open questions, cues and intertextual aspects are touchpoints for agency to occur.

Creative and Collective Agency

Transmedia texts – more than any other media texts – depend on a degree of creative and collective engagement beyond the core text. *Lost* facilitates numerous guided and unguided possibilities of participation. Here the media specificity of the television medium is constitutive for the connection of audience to the text over a long time period. Fans and excited regular viewers blogged, twittered and played on *Lost*, the principle of multiplicity and contingency allowed room to create fan fiction or fan videos, and as a result the internet is literally packed with user-generated content on *Lost*. This creative output can be considered as the manifestation of creative and collective agency that *Lost* enables its audience to experience.

Conclusion

The textual strategies that have been elucidated offer the recipients various points to engage in the *Lost* universe. Especially the ARG *The Lost Experience* can be considered as producer-guided strategy to tie the audience closer to the text. *Lost* is frequently cited as paradigmatic transmedia text. In reference to Jenkins's participatory cultures, the textual strategies that foster participation have been reflected on. I want to suggest that the power of participation is indeed extensive and reaches beyond engagement. Participation is an important aspect and sign of media agency. It is thrilling and positive not only because we are allowed to participate and communicate with like-minded people, but because it allows us to experience a strong sense of agency. Practising transmedia reception and appropriation, Jenkins's additive comprehension, enables and amplifies the mode of agency.

7.4 The Panoptic Viewer Decides: *I'm a Celebrity*

7.4.1 Format description

I'm a Celebrity … Get Me Out of Here![142] represents a television format that integrates the television audience structurally in the game of the show. Aspects of the classic game show (as elaborated in chapter 4.4) are transported into the frame of the reality show. Originally developed by the British production company Granada Television in 2002, the format has been sold to India, Sweden, France, Hungary,

142 The title of the German version is *Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus!*

the Netherlands, USA and Germany. The show has been broadcast in Germany for seven seasons, twice in 2004, again in 2008 and 2009, and from 2011 on a yearly basis. The latest season of the German version ran daily from the 11th to the 26th of January 2013, with Sonja Zietlow and Daniel Hartwich as hosts and eleven more or less famous candidates.[143] While the candidates take part in a form of game show with fixed rules, at the same time, it is staged as a reality show (cf. Mikos 2007: 213) with the audience being able to witness and observe the candidates in their jungle lives over the course of sixteen days. The episodes vary in length between 44 minutes and 140 minutes, indicating a certain degree of flexibility, and were broadcast daily in the late evening, usually at 22.15 p.m. With an average of 7.34 million viewers (29.2% of the overall audience and 41.6% of 14–49 year olds) and 8.76 million viewers for the final show of 2013, that episode counts among the most successful episodes of the German *Celebrity* show[144] and features ratings above the ordinary in German television. The 2013 show consists of eleven candidates living for sixteen days without any luxury in a jungle camp in Australia, forming a confined space, similar to Huizinga's "consecrated spot" (Huizinga 1938/2001: 18), succeeding in challenges to earn their daily food and trying to perform in such a way that the audience will vote, via televoting and internet, for them. During the first seven days, the audience is eligible to select the next candidate for a challenge, the 'bushtucker trial', until, from the eighth day on, the audience decides on who is going to stay and who has to leave the camp. The candidate who manages to win the most votes from callers will, in the end, be crowned as the jungle king or queen. The show consists of live elements and edited elements that are all commented on by the hosts, usually in a comical attitude. The show is additionally flanked by the daily magazine programme, *"Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus!" – Das Magazin* (RTL Nitro, 2013) that picks up on the show's topics, investigates in the contestants' backgrounds, thus helps to contextualize the show in its dramaturgical and aesthetic staging.

The show *I'm a Celebrity* has repeatedly been characterized as "disgust-television" by the German press,[145] especially in the public controversy after being

143 The candidates of the seventh season (2013) were: Helmut Berger (actor), Silva Gonzales (singer of the band Hot Banditoz), Klaus Baumgart (singer of Klaus and Klaus), Arno Funke (famous convicted German blackmailer), Allegra Curtis (daughter of Tony Curtis and Christine Kaufmann), Iris Klein (mother of Daniela Katzenberger), Georgina Bülowius (candidate on *The Bachelor*), Patrick Nuo (singer), Fiona Erdmann (candidate on *Germany's Next Top Model*), Claudelle Deckert (actor in the long running soap opera *Unter Uns*), Olivia Jones (drag act artist at Reeperbahn in Hamburg), Joey Heindle (singer and candidate on the German *Pop Idol* show, *DSDS*).

144 cf. Quotenmeter, online magazine by Quotenmeter GmbH: http://www.quotenmeter.de (25.05.2013)

145 e.g. Spiegel Online, 16.01.2013: Kakerlaken und Co.: Frauen lieben Ekel-Fernsehen (http://www.focus.de/kultur/kino_tv/media-control-erforscht-dschungel-hype-kakerlaken-und-co-frauen-lieben-ekel-fernsehen_aid_898936.html; 30.05.2013); Deutsche Welle, 27.02.2013: Wird Ekel-Fernsehen gesellschaftsfähig? (http://www.focus.de/kultur/kino_tv/media-control-erforscht-dschungel-hype-kakerlaken-und-co-frauen-lieben-ekel-fernsehen_aid_898936.html; 30.05.2013); Märkische Oderzei-

nominated for the renowned Grimme award in 2013.[146] In a study (FSF 2004) of the show's reception by young viewers the German *I'm a Celebrity* has been described as "performatives Realitätsfernsehen" (*performative reality television*) where the audience, "in analogy to the hosts, are directed from the very beginning to take on a carnivalesque perspective upon the whole narration where the usual social order is abrogated during the show" (Mikos Media Cooperation 2004: 158[147]). At the centre of the show, however, is not disgust, but gossip and comedy and related mischievousness and mockery (cf. ibid: 27). Within the frame of a reality show, the candidates are observed in their jungle life and presented to the audience either directly or enriched with commentaries of the hosts. During the game elements of the show, the challenges and the treasure hunts, the candidates have to overcome anxieties and disgust, they have to consume insects or rare 'specialities', they are showered with maggots and cockroaches, or they have to jump through walls of fire and act in vertiginous heights. The dramaturgical staging and the role of the hosts and candidates have been elaborated at length in the FSF-study (2004). Identified as hybrid of action-oriented reality soap, game show, boulevard, and comedy, elements such as the "karnevalistische Prinzip", the carnivalesque principle (ibid: 32) in the moderation as well as in the overall show, advance in knowledge (cf. ibid: 61), intervention and steering of the course of development (cf. ibid: 63), and character alignment (cf. ibid: 67) are considered as crucial and constitutive for the show. Annette Hill (2007), who calls the show a "popularity test, largely for celebrities with flagging careers" (ibid: 52), describes the show as:

> The celebrity reality gameshow is a popular format, and sits in border territory between popular factual and light entertainment. For example, in *I'm a Celebrity – Get Me Out Of Here* … celebrities live together in the Australian jungle, and are voted for by the public to face gruesome challenges and eviction. The presenters are central to the entertainment value of the series. Although the participants appear to be filmed extensively, a minimal amount of observational footage is actually shown. Emphasis is placed on the challenges, the evictions and the presenter's comic analysis of the proceedings (ibid: 52).

While the aspects of gossip and comedy can be considered to contribute to the overall success of the show[148] and induce mischievousness and mockery, I want to argue that another, hitherto neglected but constitutive aspect of the show is agency, induced firstly by the incorporation of the voting audience, but also amplified by

tung, 26.03.2013: Ekelfernsehen polarisiert (http://www.moz.de/artikel-ansicht/dg/0/1/1124079; 30.05.2013).

146 Season six of *Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus!* (2012), with the hosts Sonja Zietlof and comedian Dirk Bach, who died in 2012, was nominated together with eight other television formats in the entertainment category, but could not compete against *Switch Reloaded – Wetten dass …? Spezial* (ProSieben).

147 Translation by S.E.

148 In the following I will refer exclusively to the German edition of *I'm a Celebrity* (*Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus!*) of 2013.

other textual strategies. As outlined, the audience is an integral part of the show's structure, not only as implicit audience that is addresses directly and continuously by the two hosts, Sonja Zietlow and Daniel Hartwich, but also as contributors and decision makers of the course of events. During the first seven episodes, the audience is asked to select the particular candidate for the 'bushtucker trial', while in episodes 8 to 16 the audience decides who is going to stay in the camp and who is going to leave. The candidate with the fewest votes has to leave the camp as part of a daily routine. While the show exhibits some flexibility concerning the length and order of particular elements, they remain similar in each episode, with the first and the last episode differing slightly from the others. A typical episode consists of a preview of the actual conflicts and challenges, the introduction with the names and a typical gesture of all candidates, followed by a mix of live moderation, where Sonja and Daniel comment on the camp's inhabitants, edited segments that highlight the personal conflicts and/or other camp highlights, occasionally a treasure hunt, the daily 'bushtucker trial' (which chronologically happened the day before), the announcement of the nominee for the next challenge with Sonja and Daniel coming down to the camp, and the final decision. From episode 8 on, the decision for the next challenge is replaced by the decision of who has to leave the camp. From now on, another element is integrated at the beginning of each episode – the departing candidate, who is accompanied on her/his way back to the hotel and the welcome of friends and/or family.

7.4.2 Mastering Choice and Narrative

The most obvious form of agency that stands out in *I'm a Celebrity* is choice on behalf of the audience. While the show provides the general frame of action, it is up to the spectators to determine the outcome of the reality show – to decide who has to compete in the next challenge, who has to leave the camp, and who is going to be crowned as king or queen in the end. The signal for audience participation in the decisions is generally channelled on two levels – direct invitation or reference by the hosts, and the inserts that display either the invitation to nominate a candidate or the name and telephone number of the actual performing candidate.

The invitation to participate is prompted in such a dominant way that it becomes a structural element of the show, resulting in a perceived feeling of participation and influence for the whole audience. Even if the single recipient does not call in for a candidate, the prevailing potential to participate stages a textual marker for the audience to actually feel that it is participating. Accordingly, the FSF-study asserted that the "voting is to be conceived as direct audience reaction even if it does not occur in a personal way" (Mikos Media Cooperation 2004: 56).[149]

149 Translation by S.E.

Frequently, inserts with the candidate's names and telephone numbers are displayed, following the narrational and dramaturgical logic, and not according to equal treatment of the candidates. This stages an imbalance between the candidates that can be considered as a subtle means of intervention (cf. ibid: 65). Usually, the inserts with the voting details are displayed when the candidates comment on the camp and its inhabitants directly towards the camera, when they are invited to promote themselves in the 'jungle phone cabin' and when they are featured by Sandra Zietlow and Daniel Hartwich in a comical or ironic way.

On the level of moderation and direct address, the influence and agency of the audience is addressed regularly by the hosts Sonja Zietlow and Daniel Hartwich:

> Sonja Zietlow: "Well, Daniel, can you imagine that? Today, one of our wonderful stars will again leave the camp (…) And who is in charge? *You*, dear audience. *You* decide with your phone calls who should stay in the camp. Call us." (Sonja and Daniel briefly feature the candidates with an ironic allusion while the numbers are inserted.) (Episode 9, 19.01.13).[150]

> Sonja Zietlow: "With this [with the decision who has to compete in the next challenge; S.E.] we're not involved at all – it's the audience concern" (Episode 6, 16.01.13).

> Sonja Zietlow: "This is the last time – from tomorrow on, the audience calls in to decide who is going to be king or queen of the jungle – so who will stay" (Episode 7, 17.01.13).

Also, the frequent voice-over broaches the issue of choice and influence:

> Voice-over: "For one celebrity the adventure ends today. You decide: who has to leave the jungle today?" (Episode 8, 18.01.13).

In the final episode, the mode of influence by the audience is ironically questioned when Sonja Zietlow repeatedly alludes to the power of the recipients while at the same time adumbrating the control of the producers:

> Sonja Zietlow: "Now it is only up to the audience. It was *never* up to *us*" (ironical) (Episode 16, 26.01.13).

In the very end, the ironic and comical level is abandoned and the engagement of the audience is accredited by Sonja Zietlow as being constituent for the show, rewarding the audience with public gratitude:

> Sonja Zietlow: "Warm thanks, that you have proved to have such a big heart and elected this man [Joey Heindle; S.E.] as jungle king – that you watched this show again!" (Episode 16, 26.01.13).

The structural integration of audience participation facilitates an increasing sense of choice and influence. While at the beginning of the show the significance is only made accessible through prior knowledge of the format, in the course of unfolding events the impact of choice unfolds. The significance of prior genre and format

150 All following direct quotes of the show are translated by the author (S.E.).

knowledge is also picked up by the candidates themselves as the dialogue between Joey Heindle and Helmut Berger illustrates:

> Joey: "But why is it, that the audience can already vote?"
> Helmut: "Don't ask me, I've never watched this show – never ever in my life."
> Joey: "Me neither. I also never watched it …" (Episode 2, 12.01.13)

During the course of viewing, the audience not only perceives a sense of being able to choose between candidates, but also perceive a sense of their influence on the further development of the show.

In addition to the inscribed possibility of choice, episode seven of the show featured another element that can be considered as inducing agency: when it becomes apparent that Georgina can break a record by completing the most 'bushtucker trial' of all German *I'm a Celebrity* episodes so far, the two hosts, Sonja Zietlow and Daniel Hartwich, start to pick up on the issue, referring frequently to the audience's power:

> Sonja Zietlow: "This has been the 6th challenge in a row [for Georgina; S.E.] (…). And now it's up to you. *You* have the chance to give her a legendary record!"
>
> Daniel Hartwich: "But only for today. It's your last chance, because only up until today you decide who has to compete in the 'Bushtucker Trial'. From tomorrow on, this is decided by the candidates themselves" (Episode 7, 17.01.13).

In repeatedly referring to "Sarah Dingens" the nasty nickname of Sarah Knappik who left the show in 2011 voluntarily, and who was nominated six times in a row by the audience for the challenges, an inter-textual level for experiencing agency is provided. The audience now not only decides on the course of events within the series, but affects also the world outside the jungle setting. Together with Georgina's record of competing seven times in a row in the challenges, the audience also breaks the record – and with the media coverage reporting on the particularity of this year's show, the feeling of making a difference, of having the ability to affect – the feeling of agency, in other words – is induced. When, in episode seven, in minute 50, the two hosts, Sonja Zietlow and Daniel Hartwich, announce: "Georgina – she broke the record! Congratulations!" this was due to the audience's decisions. Even the recipients who have not actually voted take part in this experience. The voting spectators act as proxies, allowing the other spectators to feel as if it was also their doing (Mikos Media Cooperation 2004: 56).

7.4.3 The Role of Character Alignment for Agency

While this mastering of choice contains a haptic element – actually reaching out to the phone and dialling the number of the candidate, which also has a satisfying

component – at the centre of *I'm a Celebrity* is choice. Yet, choice remains meaningless unless it is related to a specific outcome. The meaning of the audience's choices and decisions has to be communicated as to amplify the feeling of agency (cf. Tanenbaum/Tanenbaum 2009). In *I'm a Celebrity*, meaning is mediated by character alignment and the staging of conflicts. This is established from the very beginning of the first episode, with the subject positioning of the audience as panoptical viewers (cf. Friedrich 1991: 55 f.) who watch the course of the event from an aerial perspective. According to Friedrich's shift of accentuation, this perspective supports the show's structure of positioning the audience neither as 'normal' viewers, nor as full participants. Instead, it is the pleasure of seemingly being in control of events, a sentiment that is also alleviated by the structuring of information: the audience always knows more than the candidates. The panoptical view of the setting, the night vision camera, the frequent editorial strategy of presenting whispered confidentialities, and the ordering of events, with the forecast of the upcoming challenge at the beginning of each episode contributing to the sense of foreknowledge and thus a controllable situation.[151]

Due to the strong suggestion of a distanced, observational perspective that is also enhanced by the comical staging of candidates by the two hosts, in addition to the frequent audio-visual alienation effects, a strong emotional closeness to the characters is regularly attenuated. For example, on day six (16.01.2013), when Georgina and Allegra clash on behalf of an inanity. The verbal fight between Georgina on the one side and Allegra, Silva and Fiona on the other is emphasized with tantalising music and sudden zoom-ins on the individual characters, changing from colour to black and white. This stylistic mode is applied frequently over the course of the show to highlight tensions and conflicts, or to ironically break a sentimental confession. These textual strategies yield a "distanced result-oriented tension" (Hallenberger/Foltin 1990: 69) where the audience experiences the pleasure of actively anticipating the games' rules by the candidates, where they are witnesses of accurate implementations of these rules, and where they experience a transformation from active player to testing observer, of being in control of the self and the others, the candidates (cf. Friedrich 1991: 55). The experience of agency is one induced by self-relating mechanisms, of being in control of the course of events.

Yet, with the ongoing unfolding of the show, another layer of character alignment is added that influences the mode of agency. The example of Georgina Bülowius, famous for being elected seven times in a row for the 'bushtucker trial' by the audience and for polarising both the audience and the camp, will serve as an illustration of the connection between character alignment, staging of conflicts and agency. It also indicates the shift from mastering choice to mastering narrative. While on one level the audience decides who is going to the challenge or who has

151 This can also be confirmed by the FSF-study, Mikos Media Cooperation, 2004, cf. pp. 61 ff.

to leave the camp, via character alignment the narrative of the show comes into the foreground and choice becomes influence on the course of events.

From the first moment of the show, Georgina Bülowius, fifth in the German *The Bachelor* (RTL, 2011), is staged as 'bitchy' and difficult. In the introductory teaser she states: "I'm not team-minded – yes, it might clash". When the show starts with the candidates meeting on the yacht, Georgina is introduced with the characterising Icona Pop song "I don't care – I love it", and her rivalry with Fiona Erdmann, as well as the animosity between her and Silva Gonzales is indicated. After Georgina fails completely in the first challenge and returns with no stars, the conflict between her and one part of the group is further established. Finally, the conflict reaches its climax on the sixth day, when Georgina askes Allegra about the timing of the dinner. Silva, Allegra and Fiona start to harshly attack Georgina verbally, and later slander her behind her back. With Olivia and Iris coming soon in the episode to side with Georgina, the bisecting of the camp into two groups is staged. Concurrently, the situation is tapered by the audience's decision to select Georgina every day for the challenges. While her first election is either a coincidence or a subtle intervention of the producers, the next decisions can be ascribed to the audiences' mischievousness – the power to select Georgina again for the challenge and watch her fail. However, the later course of events, with Silva being punished for his wickedness by being the first having to leave the camp, soon followed by Allegra, is a strong indicator of the increasing concern with the show's candidates and the staging of events. The audience did not agree with Silva's overall behaviour, or with his attitude towards Georgina. With the capability to decide the next candidate, the audience increasingly experiences a feeling of agency that is firstly related to choice, but later also relates to other factors, such as narrative development:

- The power to show Georgina up
- The power to oppose Silva, Allegra and Fiona by "supporting" Georgina
- The power to decide who is admitted "screen-time"
- The power to influence the course of conflicts, and with it the course of events

In the FSF-study the authors argue that *I'm a Celebrity* does not invite the audience to identify with the characters due to its frequent aesthetic and carnivalesque distancing strategies. Rather, the format's textuality, with the characters at the centre, induce empathy:

> Instead of identification the mode of reception can be described as empathic with the feelings of the characters are taken on by the audience, while the knowledge of difference between spectator and candidate remains. Empathy thereby can be also attributed to persons who are evaluated negatively (Mikos Media Cooperation 2004: 145).[152]

152 Translation by S.E.

Empathy or "affective closeness" (Eder 2006: 140) as the dominating means of character alignment can also be identified in this episode. When Fiona narrates to Patrick the story of the illness of her mother that forced her to take on responsibility too soon in life (day six), when Allegra reveals her anxieties and her problems being the daughter of a renowned actor-family (daughter of Christine Kaufmann and Tony Curtis and half sister of Jamie Lee Curtis) (day two), and when Joey tells the heart-breaking story of being maltreated as a child by his father (day eight), close-ups and emotionalising music are deployed causing empathic effects on behalf of the recipients. Concurrently, antipathy is aroused when Silva (day three) boasts about having collected six stars in the challenge together with Georgia, and is starting to slander her as soon as Georgina walks off. His comments are accompanied by distancing effects and contrasted with inserts of Olivia giving statements to the camera on Silva's ostentatious behaviour:

> Olivia: "If you right now listen to Silva, that he is doing the Superman, a Tarzan for the poor, I would have expected at least eight or ten [stars]. Because, you can celebrate also a middle-rate success like a king – we have witnessed that today" (laughs) (Episode 3, 14.01.13).

No matter if the recipient takes on the suggested position of pitying Georgina, or if she sides with Silva, Allegra and Fiona, the regular audience is advised by the textuality of the program to position themselves towards the characters. Once positioned, the capability to choose a candidate for a challenge or vote for her to become queen or king of the jungle gains greater significance, since it now relates to the conflicts in the camp and thus to the narrative development.

7.4.4 The Role of Coverage for Agency

It has been stated earlier that coverage in print and television can be considered an important component of the show *I'm a Celebrity*. While the accompanying television magazine *Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus! – Das Magazin* (RTL Nitro, 2013) can be considered as part of the *I'm a Celebrity* text, other coverage, such as the repeated references in the late night show *TV total* (ProSieben, since 1999), also contribute to further knowledge of the show's and candidates' details, as well as a general enhancement of text commitment. The audience survey that was employed in the FSF-study could document that the media coverage was indeed an important aspect, not only as an initial motivation to watch the show, but also for the general text relation. Most important is the television coverage, followed by print magazines and newspapers (cf. Mikos Media Cooperation 2004: 88–90). Central for the impact of the reception of media coverage is the expert knowledge that is acquired by the audience. Askwith (2007) argued to perceive all forms of inter-textual knowledge as mastery:

> 'Extratextual information' provides viewers with background information and 'insider' access; rather than elaborating on the content of the show itself, industrial information positions the television series as an industrial product, and emphasizes the viewer's awareness of the show's creative team and cast as professionals. This category encompasses two more specific types of information: industrial information and celebrity information. Caldwell has suggested that these extratextual extensions frequently function as 'mediating texts', helping to shape both the audience's perception of television practitioners and the audience's evaluation of television programs (ibid: 72).

Accordingly, the knowledge of strategies of staging, of genre conventions, and also of the candidates' backgrounds is transported via media coverage and not by the primary text of the program. Knowledge gaps on the candidates' status – e.g. what has she achieved, why is she considered a 'star', etc. – result in a decrease in perceived control on the text. Askwith provides a production-oriented approach to identify and apply according 'touchpoints' for the audience that match the overall program strategy. The accompanying magazine produced by RTL thus stages a repackaged content (variation of the core program), while the general coverage provides a form of ancillary content (extending, enhancing, providing new information on the core program) that serves to intensify audience engagement, and thus concurrently provides entry points for the mode of agency (cf. ibid: 98).

7.4.5 Blogs, Threads, and Twitter

In an era of media convergence and second-screen usage, participation in text-related activities on the internet has come to be the new norm. According to the W3B-Report (2013),[153] more than half of the internet users in Germany (56%) use a second screen while watching television, mainly to surf the internet or e-mail. It is estimated that 76% of all Germans from the age of 14 on are internet users,[154] and with this growing tendency, it can be concluded that the majority of people already uses second screens while watching television. Hence, broadcasting television in general can be accompanied by forms of second-screen activities. In *I'm a Celebrity*, the possibility of audience participation beyond the television screen is inscribed in the show's concept. For instance, there is an official *I'm a Celebrity* Twitter account[155] and Facebook account[156], with the editorial department posting and twittering on behalf of the show's hosts, and with the audience being able to participate in the discussion or comment on postings. By quoting some of the online reactions and comments during the moderation of the show, they serve as proxies for the

153 W3B-Report "Second Screen – Mediennutzung zwischen TV und Internet", Fittkau & Maaß Consulting, 2013.

154 cf. ARD/ZDF Online Studie: http://www.ard-zdf-onlinestudie.de/index.php?id=onlinenutzung000 (25.05.2013).

155 Ich bin ein Star@IBES_Dschungel.

156 https://www.facebook.com/Dschungelcamp2011; more than 500 000 'likes'.

non-participating audience and present a touchpoint for social interaction (cf. Askwith 2007: 98).

Beyond the producer-generated touchpoints for participation, *I'm a Celebrity* – as with any other contemporary media text – is accompanied by user-generated content, by fan pages and audience-generated forms of second-screen participation. The fansite http://www.ichbineinstarholtmichhierraus.de (which only lasted until the sixth episode), the blog http://www.dschungelcamp.tv/1, and the Twitter account Dschungelcamp 2013@Buschtrommeln, and also the wiki-sites are examples of self-initiative audience participation in the media text that stages another entry point for the mode of agency. Askwith elucidates on this matter:

> At present, one of the most popular new productive touchpoints is the wiki, an online tool that enables entire communities to author and revise massive hypertextual information resources. The recent integration of show-specific wikis into a wide range of official program websites can be interpreted, at some level, as evidence of the television's industry's growing awareness that online communities represent sites of 'collective intelligence.' Applying the work of French cyber-theorist Pierre Lévy to the behaviour of online fan communities, Jenkins recently explained collective intelligence as the ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members (ibid: 51).

As the former example of *Lost* has shown, in comparison to other forms of 'collective intelligence', with deep text engagement that is characterising for the 'prosumer', the engagement of the *I'm a Celebrity* audience via the second screen is not very pronounced. However, on behalf of this short exemplary analysis of textual strategies it could be shown that specific television formats are able to induce agency on several levels with the degree and specific differentiation linked to character alignment, coverage, and use of second-screen devices. Agency works here on a textual and medial level. The possibility of participation is provided either due to producer-generated touchpoints or user-generated contend. Both possibilities stage a possible entry point for inserting the mode of agency into the course of reception and appropriation.

7.4.6 Summary

Personal Agency: Mastering Narrative, Choice, Action, Space

As the exemplary analysis shows, the format of *I'm a Celebrity* addresses the mode of agency on all levels of personal agency, with some aspects clearly dominating. Mastering choice is foregrounded in the overall concept of the show, making the audience an integral element that influences not only choice (which candidate participates in the challenge, which candidate stays or leaves), but also the course of conflict-laden narration. This is experienced and exerted mostly via character alignment. While not foregrounded, yet still effectual, the possibility of haptic action

(picking up the phone or actually participating in the online voting system) only operates on a selective basis but nevertheless stages a powerful tool for the audience's agency to influence the course of events significantly. Aspects of mastering space become relevant when considering the staged relationship between audience, hosts, and candidates. The panoptical perspective and its implications enable the spectator to employ a seemingly unrestricted view, a sensation that is not only met via cinematography, but also via sound (being able to eavesdrop whispered conversations), or the frequent commentaries of the hosts on the candidates.

Creative and Collective Agency

It could be verified that the structural integration of second-screen applications such as twitter, Facebook or blogs – which are part of the actual show – amplify the feeling of participation and thus stage further points of agency. While the time-determined structure as well as the overall format and genre are not especially suited to encouraging vast fan engagement and creative output, the expansion of the TV text into the realm of the internet nevertheless presents an entry point for dedicated viewers that has been picked up by a small group of viewers.

Conclusion

The enormous success the format could exhibit can now be re-evaluated. A reputation as disgusting television triggering mainly mischievousness and mockery does not capture the dominating mechanisms at work. As the FSF-study shows, gossip and humour are essential for the success of the 'jungle camp'. On the basis of the analysis, the various possibilities and entry points for agency can be added as further aspects that make for the great success of this format.

7.5 Agency and Video Games: *GTA IV* and *The Walking Dead*

7.5.1 Activity and Choice in GTA IV

GTA IV (Rockstar North, 2008) was the sensational game of the year in 2008. Described as a "triple-A third-person action game" (Sicart 2008), a "crossover" (Malliet 2007), and an open world or sandbox game, *GTA IV* exhibits a maximum of player freedom (though restricted by the program code) in conjunction with multiple genre signals. Employing a mixture between first-person shooter game, action-adventure, and racing game, the neo-noir gangster and mafia genre frames the actions and the course of events of the game. Calleja (2011) refers to this double coding phenomenon of genre as "the combination of traditional games' rule

systems with the fictional and narrative aspects of the media that preceded them" (ibid: 15). With estimated sales figures of more than 20 million games sold, and more than 100 million sales for the whole sequel,[157] *GTA IV* can be considered among the most successful action games in existence, displaying blockbuster strategies on the level of production, marketing, textuality, and reception (cf. Eichner 2008).

The player/protagonist is Niko Bellic, an immigrant from Eastern Europe in search of a better life in Liberty City (with clear references to New York). As Niko, the player proceeds in four chapters and over 80 missions throughout the game, facing drug dealers, the Mafia, Russian and Irish gangs, petty crooks and organised crime, while trying to battle his way in the glorified world of America. The open world aspect is constituted by the game's allowance to enter nearly every building, visit the in-game internet café, meet up with friends, roam through the city, talk to non-player characters, join the Liberty City Gun Club, steal cars, fight, shoot, visit a brothel, go shopping, use the cell phone, call a taxi, organise car races, or just take a walk through the city. The game has been praised for its genre mixing, for its intertextual references, and for its skilled interweaving of a clear narrative arc and its related missions into an open world that the players can explore extensively and freely (cf. Ouellette 2010).

The framing story that is advanced by the missions and communicated by the cut scenes features Niko helping his cousin Roman, who occasionally gets into trouble, while getting intermingled in various smaller and bigger criminal intrigues. After a series of orders that Niko complies with, he is acquainted to all-important Mafia families in Liberty City and receives an order from Jimmy Pegorino (mission 85): a lucrative drug deal where main antagonist Dimitri Rascalov is also involved. Since Niko has to settle old scores with Dimitri, the player character now can decide to either let himself in on the deal or to exact vengeance on Dimitri.

The player's decision has a significant influence on the story that further divides into two possible endings – either the "Revenge" storyline "A Dish Served Cold" or the "Deal" storyline "If the Price is Right". If Niko consents to the "Deal", he will deceive Dimitri for the drug money, and in return Dimitri tries to shoot Niko at Roman's wedding and accidentally kills Roman. Niko then chases Dimitri down in a spectacular showdown involving an exciting car race, a speed boat and a helicopter pursuit, before finally killing Dimitri in front of the Statue of Happiness (Statue of Liberty). His friend Jacob then states: "It's over. You won". A crane shot reveals the Statue of Happiness in front of a dark and rainy sky until the 'camera' is at height above the statue. The sun comes out, but a part of the statue is still in shadow and rain. The epilogue features a phone call from Mallorie, Roman's fiancée, who reveals to Niko that she is pregnant, and later a phone call from Kate,

157 According to VGChartz Ltd.: http://www.vgchartz.com (17.05.2013).

his potential future girl friend and member of the McReary family, who calls to tell Niko to keep up. The last picture reveals the night harbour of Liberty City with Niko commenting on the dark and menacing atmosphere: "So this is what the dream feels like, this is the victory we longed for".

If the player character chooses to exact vengeance on Dimitri and choses the "Revenge" storyline "A Dish Served Cold", he kills Dimitri at the cargo ship. In this case, it is Jimmy Pegorino who is furious about Niko's solo run and betrayal. Pegorino tries to shoot Niko at Roman's wedding and accidentally kills Kate. Niko then chases Jimmy Pegorino and kills him in front of the Statue of Happiness. Now it is Roman who happily shouts: "We won, man, we won!" Still, Niko wanders off in self-doubt. This time the statue is shown from underneath, in bright sunshine. The epilogue features a phone call from Packie, Kate's brother, who bemoans his sister's death, and afterwards a phone call from Roman. During the phone calls, Liberty City is displayed from above in a light and peaceful atmosphere. The last picture shows Niko walking up a bridge towards the bright sky, with Roman telling Niko that Mallorie is pregnant and that they will name the child Kate if it is a girl. Niko finishes the narration with the words: "Congratulations Roman. You'll make a good father. See you soon".

Two aspects of agency are effectual on the levels of narration in *GTA IV*. Firstly, in completing one mission after the next, the player character is proceeding continuously in the overall narration. To solve the missions, the players have to recognise the particular aporia – the problem that needs to be solved. *GTA IV* sets out aporias for the players in a straightforward manner: each mission is verbally communicated, either in writing or via the filmic cut scenes. *GTA IV* also provides the players with strategies in the form of instructions (e.g. "Get to Roman quickly"; "Finish off Darko"). Mastering narrative in *GTA IV* thus relates to the identification of aporias – either predefined by the overall storyline or by the player herself – and a strategy that is translated into player actions. In other words, only when the actions relate to a meaningful consequence does agency as mastering narrative evolve. The representation of action in accordance with the interface needs to support and match up with the affordances of the aporias. Visual, verbal and written signals cue the player into the correct micro-action. This process has been described as "computer game agency" by Jørgensen (2003b: 1).

The second aspect that relates to the overall narration in *GTA IV* is the mastering of choice. The game structure allows a small number of choices at specific dramaturgical points during the narrative. In six cases, the player can decide whether she wants to kill a certain villain or not. Twice, at specific plot points, the system allows the player to choose between two possible kills. And before the showdown starts, the player decides between the "Deal" and the "Revenge" storyline. The impacts of the different choices differ. The choice usually has no further impact on the overall storyline – only the dialogues change accordingly, thus com-

municating a degree of influence and significance. Only the last decision determines the further course of events and the displayed ending. Yet, since the probable alternatives are not displayed in either case, the recipient is not able to estimate the impact of her decision. Only when re-playing the game will the impact of the decision be related to a specific meaning. This indicates that the mastering of choice becomes mainly relevant in a downstream phase of appropriation or re-playing. Similar to the downstream phase of agency of *Inception*, the visual cues of the game initiate aspects of contingency, of the cognitive play of *what would happen if …?* The play with probable alternative endings during the phase of appropriation and the eventual reassurance and testing of the personal hypothesis when re-playing the last mission in the other mode allows for a mastering of choice, and accordingly the feeling of agency.

7.5.2 Open World and Spatial Navigation in GTA IV

The overall narrative and its points of choice are just one out of many levels of experience *GTA IV* offers its players. As mentioned above, the game is characterised by its openness, and the ability to wander around and explore the vast and detailed world of Liberty City with shops, radio stations, television channels, different districts and games within the actual game. In-games and side-missions consist of drug deliveries for Little Jacob, organised car races, different car theft missions, "Liberty City's Most Wanted" and vigilante missions (Niko kills criminals), or the assassin missions. The underlying game rules and the overarching goal consist of the progression of Niko in the course of narrational events with the ludic affordance to remain healthy and to keep the 'Wanted' level at a level so that the police do not arrest him. Simultaneously, a number of achievements (also called 'Trophies') have to be completed in order to finish the game with good ratings. While some of the achievements are necessary to complete the game, most of them affect the individual rating of the game, but not overall success. The numerous missions, the grandness of the city, the multiple characters Niko encounters, the increasing density of intrigues, family affairs, and interlinked crimes opens a realm of possibilities that concurrently enable the player to set her own goals and to seemingly experience an individual story each time the game is encountered. Since the possible actions do usually relate to a meaningful result – doors can be opened, characters react according to the situations (and not in a repetitive manner), the movements (running, driving jumping, swimming, or flying) are displayed in a realistic way and follow real world rules – actions that do not relate to the solving of aporias comprise meaning.

In an intriguing way, *GTA IV* allows for the exploration of the digital environment, which can be done in a great variety of ways and in an enjoyable fashion.

To traverse the city by car or with a helicopter becomes pleasurable in itself (provided the capability of movement control). The appropriation of space in connection with a surface reaction that corresponds directly to the user input thus stages a strong trigger to induce the mode of agency. This spatial navigation is interlinked with the experience of character movement and character action. As is characteristic with many video games, *GTA IV* allows its players to move the character through the digital environment, to shoot, to operate and to manipulate, and to see the outcomes of these actions immediately on screen. Once the haptic skills of the player meet the requirements of the game system, all micro-actions result in the experience of self-efficacy. With the right combination of the controller keys, the player/character takes over the next car she likes and speeds through the city. Being capable of the appropriate movements, the opponents in fights are defeated, and in the sniper mode Niko can clear a whole area from aggressors. For Bandura (2001), self-efficacy stages a powerful trigger for agency. Following Bandura, Klimmt (2006) highlighted the immediacy of self-efficacy that is usually not achieved in everyday life. Achieving agency via self-efficacy is thus a powerful instrument since it is not in need of recognised aporias and is not attached to a further narrative meaning. Yet, it is in need of what Mateas calls the "material affordances". Agency can be experienced "when there is a balance between the material and formal constraints" (Mateas 2004: 25). In *GTA IV* the action possibilities follow real world logic, with the visual interface and the verbal and written cues supporting the material affordances. Yet, the experience of mastering actions is not only related to the material, but also to the capabilities and knowledge of the recipients. An inexperienced player will face many difficulties: losing orientation in the vast city, being unable to drive the car properly, being beaten up by seemingly harmless passers-by, or being unable to complete a mission in the required time. Also, the recognition of the aporias and the solution strategy of the singular missions can pose a problem for players. In this sense, flow, as outlined earlier, can be considered as a prerequisite to experiencing the mastery of action and, accordingly, agency.

7.5.3 Guided and Unguided Engagement in GTA IV

While the mastering of actions requires practice and acquired skills, a common solution to overcoming problems that relate to the progression of the narrative is to solicit walkthroughs from other players and fans, or from online game magazines,[158]

158 Examples of game and game related online magazines: Computerbild.de (http://www.computerbild.de), Gameswelt.de (http://www.gameswelt.de), IGN (MediaXP GmbH) (http://www.ign.com). Examples for player/fan-made walkthroughs: http://www.gta4.net/missions/; or http://gta.wikia.com/Rigged_to_Blow_%28GTA_IV%29/Walkthrough (all accessed at 27.05.2013).

either as written or video content.[159] Through this practice, the players get detailed information about how to identify and solve any problems, where to go, and what to consider. Similar to the walkthroughs, cheats are employed to facilitate gameplay (cf. p. 121). Cheats in *GTA IV* are producer generated. They are an integral part of the game that is available for gamers who want to engage deeper in the game. Full health and armour, ammunition, additional weapons, removing or adding a wanted star, or ordering fancy vehicles such as a speed boat or a helicopter are cheats that are easily applied via Niko's cell phone. The use of cheats and walkthroughs in *GTA IV* can trigger agency, both in the moment of appropriation and in the subsequent gameplay, since the dispositions of the player changes accordingly (skills improve via cheats, and the requirements of the game respectively decrease). However, this gaming practice is not constructivist in the sense of Murray (1997); it does not stage an oppositional strategy against the authority of the producers, since the game text is not misused or reinterpreted by the players, but perceived according to the suggested dominant reading strategy.

A more empowered appropriation of the game is constituted by fan-related practices such as the creation of fan-made walkthroughs, in-game cinematics, mods, fan-made trailers, and all forms of fan art. Comparable to the engagement of *Lost* fans (see chapter 7.3) and *Oddworld* fans (see pp. 117, 170), the engaged players of *GTA IV* appropriate and imbibe the core text creatively and generatively and seek pleasure in sharing their creative output with other like-minded fans and players. The huge online community of action gamers in general and of *GTA* fans in particular fortify the impact and significance of the individual text engagement. The fans create a public sphere that acknowledges the efforts of the fan artists, the modders, and the activists. Fan created artefacts thus become a vessel for the player's agency that deprives the authored text of its control.

7.5.4 Scripted Action and Choice in The Walking Dead

In contrast to the openness and freedom of action in *GTA IV*, *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012)[160] is restricted and scripted, permitting only a very confined range of action possibilities within the predetermined and linear course of events. Based on the comic novels of author Robert Kirkman and illustrators Tony Moore and Charlie Adlard, *The Walking Dead* draws from the zombie genre that has been heavily exploited throughout the different media. Dating back as far as *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), the genre has been subject to several changes,

159 For example, the walkthrough videos of user *SSoHPKC* or *GTASeriesVideos* available at Youtube.com (http://www.youtube.com) (27.05.2013).

160 The Game was released and digitally distributed in five episodes within April and November 2012 via Steam and PSN.

with *The Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 1978), and *Braindead* (Peter Jackson, 1992) as just some paradigmatic examples of the genres' innovation. With *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007), and *World War Z* (Marc Forster, 2013) the genre experienced another revival, now staging zombies as a pandemic illness that infects all humans. Simultaneously, a number of influential and popular video games drew on the genre's popularity and characteristics, with examples being the *Evil Dead*-series (different developers, 1984–2011), *Alone in the Dark* (Infogrames, 1994), the *Resident Evil*-series (Capcom, since 1996), the *Red Dead Redemption*-series (Rockstar, since 2004), the *Dead Rising*-series (Capcom, since 2006), the *Left 4 Dead*-series (Valve & Turtle Rock Studios, since 2008), and the *Dead Space*-series (Visceral Games, since 2008), just to name a few. Prior to the release of the video game episodes of Telltame Games, *The Walking Dead* was also adapted as a television series and broadcasted successfully in three seasons at AMC from October 2011 to March 2013, with the fourth season to come in October 2013.

Considering the momentary public attention for the genre in general and for *The Walking Dead* in particular, the game cannot be conceived as standalone text, but rather has to be perceived within the broader context of its text-universe. The graphical point and click adventure features the player/character Lee Everett, a former university professor but also convicted murderer, who escapes after a car crash and finds the world completely changed. All humans transform into zombies, the 'Walkers' when bitten by a 'Walker', and, as the player later learn, also after dying. At the beginning of the narration, Lee meets the eight-year-old girl Clementine and cares for and protects her from that point on. On their way through the apocalyptic America, they soon form a core group. Kenny and Katjaa with son Duck, Lilly (who becomes the leader) and her hostile and grumpy father Larry, Carley, the news reporter, Doug, the IT-technician, and Glenn, the pizza delivery boy. Together they face the horror of a society set on fire and escape the man-eater farmer family, only to be hunted by a madmen who finally kidnaps Clementine. While the successful player/character can manage to free Clementine in the end, this is not without losses – Katjaa, Duck, and later also Kenny all die. Finally, the player/character Lee gets bitten by a 'Walker' during the rescuing and the narration ends with Lee sending Clementine off into an unsecure future (or, as a variation, being shot by her before the transformation into a 'Walker' takes place).

With the linear story progression and restricted range of action possibilities, the game can be classified as a graphical point and click adventure in the tradition of *Grim Fandango* (LucasArts, 1998), the *Monkey Island*-series (LucasArts, since 1990), and *Manhunt* (Rockstar, 2002, 2007; both games banned in Germany), as well as interactive dramas such as *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010). The player can engage in a number of actions (e.g. running, creeping, fighting, talking) and use a small collection of changing items (e.g. a hammer or a screwdriver). The interactive

objects and action possibilities are unmistakably highlighted with a white circle or, in the case of an assault, with red arrows. There is a certain degree of freedom to talk to the other characters, who are endowed with a variety of answering and chatting abilities that support the sense of meaningful conversation.

The progression of the narrative depends of the fulfilment of the right actions, and failure results in the death of the character. Depending on the concrete situation, non-acting either has no effect or will lead to the death of the player/character (in the case of an attack). Presuming sufficient genre knowledge about the possible course of events and the probable actions taking place, the player is cued blatantly and vigorously into the performance of the right actions, while the frequent cut scenes facilitate a narrative filmic experience. The mastery of action is thus confined – the player can find out where and how exactly the next event is initiated by the player/protagonist's action, but there is no possibility for alternative actions or the exploration of the environment. Each recipient has the same narrative and ludic experience of the game. The regular action performances of pointing and clicking therefore do not obtain a strong agency potential, with the self-efficacy effect remaining low, since the dominance of the linear game system imposes itself on the gaming experience.

Some game elements can, however, be identified to have a higher agency potential. The already mentioned significant dialogues and the occasional points of decisions and the possibility to play in the 'story notifications' mode support agentic tendencies in the game. The 'story notifications' give the player hints to influence her behaviour and conversations. Depending on the answers Lee gives in the dialogues (usually Lee can chose between three answers), the player receives information on the impact of the conversation and action, displayed in writings on the screen: the counterpart will keep in mind that Lee was offensive or supportive, or remember some details about Lee. Occasionally, Lee has to make a crucial decision in either rescuing one or another character from the 'Walkers'. In episode one the player has to choose to either rescue Carley or Doug. Within the 'story notifications' mode the impression is fostered that haptic and verbal actions will influence the course of further events. Thus, a sensation of influence and making a difference can evolve. In interplay with the overall ludic structure of having to solve little puzzles (micro aporias that are in need of epiphany) in order to proceed (e.g. finding a screwdriver to open a barred door), the game structure in conjunction with the audio-visual interface allows for the experience of mastering narrative, and, occasional, choice. When repeatedly playing the game, however, or when using the help of walkthroughs, the player will soon discover that her actions have no effect at all on the course of events.

7.5.5 Summary

Personal Agency: Mastering Narrative, Choice, Action, Space

A brief analysis could demonstrate that the video game *GTA IV* displays a structure that amplifies agency on various levels: on the level of narrative with the overall narrative structured in conceivable missions; on the level of choice allowing for a narrational contingency and a cognitive play of *what would happen if …?*; on the level of space, with a digital environment that is detailed and rich and allows for exploration in a meaningful way; and at the level of action, which comprises a high agency potential due to the adequate design of movement control, interface, and audiovisual response. Frasca (2003) alludes to the fact that *GTA* manages to create a consistent and rich universe that conveys the impression of meaningful actions. Dow's description (2008) thus doubtlessly applies to *GTA IV*:

> I believe a user's sense of agency in any storytelling medium is likely distributed between their own sense of control and the empowerment of story characters. In immersive and interactive stories, I would distinguish between different sources of agency. One can feel agency through the ability to navigate a world ('movement' agency) or through the ability to modify the world ('object' agency) or through interaction with characters ('character' agency) (ibid: 32f.).

According to Dow's statement, agency in *GTA IV* thus works in conjunction with all possible levels – it can be considered as the dominant and suggested mode of involvement. Still, agency relies on the prior knowledge and the skills of the user. As reasoned, a premise for mastering action is the sufficient capability of movement control and the resulting state of flow. When the demands of the game system exceed the skills and expertise of the player, action related agency cannot evolve.

The Walking Dead displays another strategy with respect to agency. Assuming a high degree of genre knowledge and expertise, the course of events do not stage a mystery for the players and are thus similarly predictable as the events in *The Proposal*. However, since the genre convention follows to a large extent the strategy of surprise, the concrete manifestations of menace are hard to be foreseen. The dominance of excitement, of a general menace, based on surprise and sometimes on suspense, is the dominant textual strategy that affords the according mode of involvement. Yet *The Walking Dead* also operates with textual structures that allow for a sense of mastering action and choice. The obvious constraints of the action possibilities and significant influence are veiled behind the textual cues that imply influence on the course of events and significant choice (though, as the analysis showed, there is neither freedom in action, nor significance of choice). Specific textual cues such as the 'story notification' mode thereby can fortify the sense of agency.

Creative and Collective Agency

Players and fans of *GTA IV* and *The Walking Dead* engage heavily in activities that allow for agency to occur. Searching for a helpful walkthrough or a usable cheat, creating their own in-game films, creating mods, conducting fan videos, or engaging in fan art of all kinds stages a versatile multitude of guided and unguided participation beyond the actual core text of the game. The big online fan base of action games supports the engagement of the individual player since this 'counter-public' assigns meaning to the players' activities. The fan artefacts thus become vessels of the player's agency.

Conclusion

Video games have the potential to fully exploit the medial and textual possibilities of agency. They can afford agency at the level of narration, choice, space, and, most outstanding, action. Yet not all video games automatically foster the mode of agency. Certain textual structures such as the relation of actions and conversations to a meaningful response are crucial for agency to occur. The example of *The Walking Dead* demonstrates that mastery of action is not always the first priority for a successful gaming experience. Other textual signals and dominant structures can support a specific text more adequately than the agency potential. However, *GTA IV* disposes a well-designed action sphere, were all actions, micro-actions and narrative-related actions are meaningful. Agency here could clearly be identified as dominating textual strategy, triggering the mode of agency at the level of textual involvement. Thus, this strategy might serve as an explanation of the huge success of the game.

8 The Quality of Agency in the Media

At the core of this work has been the *impact and significance of agency throughout the processes of media reception and appropriation*. The main aim has been to *identify the concrete textual qualities and specific points of agency that facilitate the emergence and the mode of agency in different media texts*. This required a broad-based literary review spanning different disciplines. Agency is not only at the heart of social action theory, but also fundamental to pragmatism, object-related approaches to social action, psychology, and certain strands of anthropology. Due to the internationalization of research and the popularity of *Akteurstheorien*, such as Actor-Network Theories and the like, *agency*, as a scientific concept, has progressively established itself in the German speaking academic context.

Most basically, action and agency have to be recognized as distinct from each other, with *action referring to the actual process of acting and agency to the general ability to perform these actions* (e.g. *Handlungsermächtigung*). Within agency lies the potential to transform, and to form a creative capacity that depends on individual and sociocultural resources. It is the merit of practice theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault or Hans Joas that they locate human agency within the broader context of society. Agency is thus always context related, either understood in terms of Bourdieus's *habitus* and the *practical sense* or Giddens' *stratification model*. Agency is thus neither free will nor resistance, but is dynamically linked to structure. This implies concurrently that agency is not something that is possessed automatically, but is aquired over the course of a lifetime, and distributed disparately across society. Giddens emphasizes the "could have acted differently" (Giddens 1984: 9), indicating the *contingent aspects of agency* that become relevant in narrative aspects of media agency. While situationality and processuality are consensually recognized characteristics of agency, the notion of intentionality has been widely contested. The paradigmatic shift towards the *homo symbolicus* has emphasized *meaning making* and *influence* rather than intentionality. *Situationality, processuality, influence* and *meaning making* have thus been marked as core aspects of agency. It is due to George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman that the impact of agency in the course of identity formation has been further elucidated. Accordingly, agency can be conceived as a contextual mode of action that fortifies and advances the formations of our identities. *It is thus via agency that we perceive ourselves as subjects and construct our identity/ies.*

While these insights and conceptualizations from the social sciences form the basis for further investigation of agency, recent object-related approaches to

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agency, e.g. the *Actor-Network Theory* coined by Bruno Latour, the *theory of attribution* of Raymond Werle and the *acteur-fiction* of Andrew Pickering have emerged. However, after reviewing these approaches, only Werle's theory of attribution proved to be compatible with the basic premises of social action theory, adding a valuable insight: similar to the processes of parasocial interaction, artefacts can be treated *as if* they were capable of agency, though in fact, due to their lack of self-consciousness, machines and other objects cannot truly maintain social agency. Also, the anthropological approach of Gell has been rejected in the course of this work, for reasons similar those for rejecting ANT. However, Gell's notion of agent/patient relations proved useful for a better understanding of the general principles of pleasure in playing video games and media use in general, where the recipient only seldom becomes the patient.

The outlined theories contributed many fruitful perspectives which have been incorporated into a multidisciplinary concept and understanding of agency. From the field of psychology, Albert Bandura suggested a differentiation between distinct levels of agency – *personal agency, proxy agency*, and *collective agency* – a partitioning largely followed in my outlined concept of media agency. Bandura also introduced the aspects of *self-efficacy* and *control*, both key components of agency that have been picked up by other scholars considering video game experiences. Often used somewhat indiscriminately, self-efficacy and control can now be considered properly as central features of agency which are especially salient within 'interactive' media texts.

Having laid the cornerstones for a closer understanding of agency and further development of the specific understanding of media agency, two aspects were in need of clarification: the relationships between agency, interactivity and play. Both concepts have repeatedly been equated with agency, or have been conceptualized as prerequisites for agency. I argue, however, that neither interactivity nor play are equivalent with agency. While play is defined as a specific form of social action that is constituted through processes of framing which induce counterfactual 'let's pretend' and 'as if' modalities, interactivity has proven to be an ideologically overloaded concept, falsely linked exclusively to specific media. However, interactivity has the potential to elicit the role of play in media texts since it specifies a specific form of participation. In order to purge the concept of interactivity of its ideological burdens, more contemporary approaches to interactivity (e.g. Kiousis 2002; McMillan/Hwang 2002) are considered that distinguish f*eature-oriented interactivity* and *perceived interactivity*. Feature oriented interactivity articulates the technical potential of interactivity, while perceived interactivity describes the actual practices of media recipients. Likewise, play does not necessary lead to agency, but the ludic mode does have the potential to influence modes of agency, though it does not do so automatically, as my analysis demonstrated.

After the key concepts and relevant approaches to agency have been outlined and discussed, the field of media communication with respect to film, television and video games were elaborated from a pragmatist, action-oriented perspective. While the conception of the active audience, promoted by cultural studies scholars, by ethno-methodological perspectives, and culture-oriented approaches generally can be considered fundamentally agentic, some treatments do in fact address notions of audience influence, play and interactivity within the concrete processes of media reception which can also be linked to agency. In the field of film studies, points of contact are detected in the preoccupation with aspects of play in film (e.g. Anderson 1996; Ohler/Nieding 2001; Plantinga 2009; Wuss 1993, 2009), the concept of cognitive control as elaborated by Peter Wuss (in terms of 'passive control'), and treatments of puzzle films or mind-game movies (e.g. Bordwell 2002; Elsaesser 2009; Jahn-Sudmann 2007). In the field of television studies a preoccupation with game formats (e.g. Friedrich 1991; Hallenberger/Foltin 1990; Holmes 2008), interactive television (Bleicher et al., 2010), and transmedia storytelling (e.g. Jenkins 2006, 2008) can be linked to agency. Finally, in the field of game studies, the variety of recent agency approaches are reviewed and evaluated with regard to their cogency (e.g. Dow 2008; Jørgensen 2003a; Mateas 2004; Schott 2008).

Those conceptual aspects that could be identified as convincingly contributing to media agency are incorporated into the specific mode of agency as media experience. Yet, conceptualizing agency as a mode of experiencing media requires clarification of the actual phases of media experience more generally. My model of *First and Second Order Involvement* is designed to accommodate both agency and the processes of media experience in general. Media experience is regarded as engagement with any media text involving both cognitive and emotional activities by recipients. First and second order involvement are meta-categories with procedural and regulatory impacts relative to the intensity and amplitude of possible modes of reception (following e.g. Donnerstag 1996; Hasebrink 2003; Mikos/Eichner 2006; Suckfüll 2004; Vorderer 1992). The model specifies degrees of closeness and distance, personal interest and the points of attachment and modes of information processing employed during the process of reception, emphasizing the interplay between a recipient's disposition and textual mediality, composition, aesthetics, and form. General involvement, however, does not account for the different, specific modes of involvement that can occur during media reception. I therefore conceptualized involvement as a two staged process of media reception: in the process of *first order involvement*, a media text is recognised according to the recipient's access to schemata and organizing clusters of knowledge. This constitutes a general form of text recognition and emotional attitude. This first order involvement is identified as necessary to all processes of media reception. The *second order of involvement* entails the specific modalities invoked in the reception of a particular media format, beyond general reception activities. On the basis of prior theoretical and empirical research

I identified nine distinctive modes of involvement, namely *immersion/presence*, *character involvement*, *ludic involvement*, *excitement*, *spectacle*, *analysis*, *inspiration*, *habitual involvement* and *agency*. I further assumed that the divers modes of second order involvement evolve, depending on medial, textual and recipient based factors. These modalities are thus considered flexible in terms of occurrence and stability. That is to say that, during the course of a concrete act of media reception, recipients employ a number of modalities that can either pervade the whole process of reception or occur in alternation with other modes, while the general first order involvement ensures stable text recognition and alignment.

Against the backdrop of the concept of first and second order of media involvement, agency is elaborated as a manageable concept that can be identified on the basis of formal-aesthetic textual analysis, providing the foundation for further audience research. I argue, following Bandura (2001, 2006), that agency can be differentiated according to three categories: *personal*, *creative* and *collective agency*. Evidence from research in film theory, television studies and video game studies suggest the further differentiation of personal agency in terms of *mastering narrative, mastering choice, mastering action*, and *mastering space*.

The *mastering of narrative* includes Wuss' conception of *passive control*, the mental play at work when watching mind-game movies, and the goal oriented progression in video games focused on the overcoming of aporias (cf. Jørgensen 2003a). Throughout the different media, mastering narrative refers to the interplay between contingency and notions of cognitive control.

Mastering choice refers to staged moments of significant, starkly divergent choices, regardless of their actual pragmatic impact. Deciding via phone call or via internet between two possible candidates in *The Voice of Germany*, making the right (or wrong) guess in *Millionaire*, or saving one character in a video game instead of another, are strategies of choice that the media text presents its recipients with. In terms of analysis, it is therefore of no significance whether the choice indeed makes any difference, but the subjective feeling of having influence and making a difference nonetheless establishes agency.

Mastering action has been considered as particularly central to video games (and interactive applications such as the WWW). It is indeed a preferred mode in digital environments since it allows, via haptic actions, self-efficacy and the experience of control, accompanied by an immediacy effect. Mastering action is the most obvious form of media agency since it involves a *visualized analogy of human action with the incorporation of the bodily movement via mouse or controller*. Some games, such as *Tetris* or *Subway Surf* rely almost exclusively on the power of mastering action and the pleasurable media experience derived from this form of agency. But mastering action is not ontologically restricted to video games. In converging media environments the direct feedback channel that allows for mastering action is potentially available in all media formats. For instance, the reality show *I'm a Celebrity* structurally integrates

media recipients into the show by requesting frequent text-influencing actions from the spectators.

As Murray (1997) and Manovich (2001) have suggested, the pleasures of navigation constitute another subform of agency that I call the *mastering of space*. Many video games enable the exploration of a virtual environment, and when this activity is coupled with significant results, agency can emerge. The construction of space and its mastering is also at work in linear narratives, as the analysis examples showed.

Following Bandura (2001, 2006) and subsequent adaptions of his ideas (e.g. Schott 2008), agency is also conceptualized at the levels of creativity and collectivity. *Creative agency* refers to a recipient's capacity to creatively subvert the producer-intended use or meaning of a media text, or to produce something new on the basis of the original text. *Collective agency* refers to fan-related activities, including the products and artefacts of creative agency and the collective process of assigning new meanings to them.

Having sketched out my methodological approach, the aim of this work – *the identification of concrete textual qualities, the specific points of agency that facilitate the emergence and the mode of agency in different media texts* – can now be examined and validated. The selection of media texts I have chosen to analyze is intended to provide useful methodological illustrations of the various levels of agency, along with evaluations of the impact of these forms of agency on the processes of media reception and appropriation. Predictably, classical film reception allows for only a limited scope of agency, although I have identified several points of agency at work in film audiences, and demonstrated that genre and textual structure in general largely determines the specific modes of agency. The close correspondence between narrative progression in *The Proposal* and the audience's developing hypotheses clearly displays points of passive control and agency that are nonetheless hard to capture. The canonical mode of storytelling, which surmises the formulation of very strong hypotheses, is so common that it is perceived subconsciously. Only when the fluent mode of control is disturbed do the mental activities necessary for the film's reception come into focus. The experience of character agency via the protagonist Andrew, however, provides a more recognizable potential for agency. The analysis also indicates that some forms of agency are more potent at a meta-level than on the concrete level of reception. Achieving agency 'second hand' does not evoke strong moments of agency during the process of reception, but does enable the audience to actively identify with the film through engagement on the level of general sentiments from everyday life. The audience is left empowered by the complete text control and by the outright agency of the main character Andrew. The mind-game movie *Inception,* on the other hand, does not allow for identifiable agentic moments at the level of narration during the actual process of reception due to its demanding textual strategy. While the ludic mode of involvement is clearly fostered, the agency

potential is postponed in the phase(s) of appropriation or established via intertextuality. This suggests that – especially with regard to audience practices such as rewatching – the downstream phases of appropriation require more focus.

The example of *Lost* reveals the need to consider not only the core text of a format, but also external producer-generated and fan-related texts. *Lost* in fact stages a paradigmatic example of transmedia storytelling, offering many points of attachment for engaged recipients and dedicated fans. The potential for viewer agency in *Lost* thus unfolds on the creative and collective level, though notions of mastering narrative in terms of contingency and mastering space come into play as well.

Perhaps most outstanding among the media examples analyzed is the reality program *I'm a Celebrity,* which has been bashed and written-off by the press and public for its explicit evocation of sentiments such as mischievousness and disgust. Yet, the analysis shows that the textuality of the format suggests that agency is a dominant mode of audience involvement. While the mastering of choice is foregrounded by the regular decisions choosing who takes the challenges and who gets expelled from the camp, the mastering of narrative via character alignment is also fostered. The construction of space puts recipients in a position of panoptical perspective, suggesting their control not only over the course of events but also over space. Additionally, the two hosts frequently and exhaustively refer to the agency of the recipients as well as to the expansion of the text via the internet, while related media coverage adds to the overall dominance of the mode of agency. Thus, to understand the huge success of the show, agency is considered as the explanatory factor.

The two video games provided as examples – *GTA IV* and *The Walking Dead* – demonstrate that agency is less dependent on forms of mediality than on aspects of textuality. Of the examined media examples, *GTA IV* can clearly be considered to be the most 'agentic' media text, allowing and affording agency on all denoted levels. The great potential of the multiple levels of agency is ascribed to the game's capacity to assign meaning on all levels. Thus, the haptic actions executed in playing the game result more often than not in the mastering of action, in the sense of agency. The game exposes many moments of mastering action, choice, narration and space, and, due to its large online community and integrated options to create mods or in-game films, the potential for creative and collective agency is – on the side of the producer – well developed. Agency is a mode that is continuously suggested by the textuality of the media text. *The Walking Dead,* on the other hand, features only occasional points of agency. Structured in a very linear way, the limited possibilities for action and significant influence are veiled behind textual cues that imply influence over the course of events and significant choice. Specific textual cues, such as the 'story notification' mode, can fortify a sense of agency. However, the existence of only occasional agency points at the level of mastering action and choice clearly reveal that agency is not the dominant mode of involvement.

On the basis of analysis, the following points of agency can be summarized:

Personal agency
Mastering narration: the way information is staged influences the points of agency. The more information given to recipients, the stronger the sense of passive control. Genre films that have a stable viewing contract with their audience are suitable for narration mastering points of agency. Yet, since agency is only one out of a number of possible reception modes, providing too much information always risks boring the audience. Withholding information, on the other hand, impedes the mode of agency (allowing more ludic involvement), but fosters agency in the phase(s) of appropriation. The organization of information has similar effects in video games, where players must be able to recognize aporias and strive for an overarching goal.

Mastering choice: binary decision possibilities can support agency points. It is irrelevant whether the text is truly influenced by recipients, but the feeling of making a difference has to emerge. *The Walking Dead* is a good example of how the textuality of a game is able to support this feeling. Also the dramaturgical organization of many reality shows invoke agency via choice through visual signs (inserts with scales), verbal signs (the moderator announce who has been selected by the audience), and via timing (significance is increased through dramaturgical pauses and temporal extensions).

Mastering action: the possibilities video games provide for interaction must be linked to significant results. The brief comparison of *Shenmue* and *GTA* demonstrate that textually meaningful responses to user actions are a prerequisite for agency points relative to mastering action. Points of agency can also be created by treating television audience members as proxies: individual callers encourage the audience in general to feel empowered by the sheer possibility that they too could pick up the phone and make a significant contribution to the outcome of the ongoing events.

Mastering space: experiencing mediated spatiality has been described as an agentic pleasure in itself. Space can be constructed either verbally (e.g. *Zork*), or visually. Video games allow their players to traverse and explore a digital environment via movement (of characters and/or mouseclicks). Restriction of movement is opposed to the feelings of spatial agency. It thus is a compositional decision whether to enable free movement or to restrict movement (thus strengthening other points of attachment). The organization of space and its cognitive reconstruction is also central to the reception of linear media. The control of spatial relations can provide points of agency, while the deconstruction of space (e.g. *Run Lola Run*) can decrease agency.

Creative Agency
Points of creative agency can be both, producer-generated and user-generated. These include all possibilities for engaging creatively with the original text by, for example, creating mods or walkthroughs, or cheating by traversing a game with the help of walkthroughs. Points of creative agency are also ambivalent cues that foster alternative or subversive reading strategies – 'reading against the grain'.

Collective Agency
When the creative potential of a text is used conjointly by producers and recipients, collective agency emerges. There is thus no clear boundary between creative and collective agency, and collective agency can be considered a continuation of creative agency. Platforms that allow for social interaction thus entail points of collective agency. *I'm a Celebrity* ingeniously integrates collective agentive potential into the text by making comments made on the show's website and Facebook profile part of the show itself.

9 Conclusion

As with Foucault's famous quote that "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1998: 95), I would argue that agency is a similarly prevalent feature, permeating our lives, actions, and societal structures, including how we 'do media'. However, media agency differs from 'real life' agency. Media experiences can induce feelings of omnipotence, framing recipients as agents rather than patients, implying inherent abilities to project immediate and efficacious responses with our media doing – whether through direct moments of agency or via general sentiments of empowerment after watching a movie. As I stated at the beginning of this work, media agency is not a novelty. There are many approaches and sophisticated theories addressing specific aspects of media reception relative, for instance, to cognitive activities, to the productive and generative output of fans, to the empowered audience, or to interactive formats. Yet, when viewed from the perspective of agency, these disparate approaches coalesce around the concept of agency as media experience.

While the main aim of this work was to consolidate approaches and theories from different disciplines in order to extricate the concrete textual qualities that entail points of agency and facilitate the emergence of modes of agency across different media texts, I queried some hitherto uncontested assumptions. From a games studies perspective, agency instantiates a distinctive quality, constituting a specific media experience exclusive to video games (and some related media). In fact, video games, at first glance, seem to be ideally suited to induce experiences of media agency since they afford player action and player participation. Tavinor (2009) describes this special quality as follows:

> (…) videogames are played rather than merely watched as television programmes are, and the player is in a constant state of physical interaction with the gaming hardware and peripherals. The closest television comes to this kind of interaction is channel surfing, a practice driven by the usually forlorn hope that there might be something actually worth watching on another station (ibid: 54).

Brown and Krzywinska (2009) similarly claim: "yet what defines games generally, distinguishing them from other media, is that a game has to be played" (ibid: 86). Video games do indeed overtly combine medial representation with interactivity, thus potentially enabling mastering of action. In combination with the spectacular staging of the results of user input, video games allow for a special media experience and present a favoured realm for agency to occur. Video games are, according

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to Tavinor, "strongly interactive" (Tavinor 2009: 56), because they often allow not only choice of the order of the representational structures that occur, but also allow influence over the course of a game's event.

Yet, having argued at length in the course of this work that the experience of agency is in fact not restricted to particular media, I want to pick up on some pivotal aspects in more detail. Central to these flawed assumptions about agency seems to be the conflation of agency with interactivity and interactivity with play. As the foregoing review of theories and treatments of agency shows, many scholars employ a novel active/passive binary, differentiating between new media and video games on the one hand, and classical, linear media on the other, a distinction that has helped consolidate a tendency among game scholars to link agency with a specific medialty. This is why it is crucial, in my opinion, to clearly differentiate between agency and interactivity. While "[i]nteractivity means that the user/player is able to change the visual appearance of a computer screen (and/or sounds from speakers) by some motor action via an interface" (Grodal 2003: 142), this is not equivalent to experiencing agency. Considering agency as a feature distinguishing video games from television and film falls short. In other words, media experiences of agency are not reducible to a few mouse-clicks and key-strokes, but arises as a comprehensive sense of influence. "Agency is not about selecting between options," but it is "more important to provide the player with the ability to take a single, meaningful action than a dozen trivial ones" (Tanenbaum/Tanenbaum 2009: 8). Darley states that video games, due to their interactive structure, allow haptic participation and thus enable effects in an immediate way that he calls 'hands-on-control': "The player expects to be able to make things happen, s/he expects to be able to change and affect the course of the action" (Darley 2000: 157). Yet, direct 'hands-on-control' involvement, the physical interactivity that results in moments of apparent self-efficacy, as I have argued, should not be equated with the concept of agency as a whole. Approaches to video game agency tend to equate agency with self-efficacy and interactivity. While the haptic dimension in combination with the immediacy effect undoubtedly comprise important elements of a specific mode of agency, this kind of physical interactivity is only one out of a range of possibilities that induce agency.

The second pivotal flaw in game studies' treatment of agency concerns the linking of video games with modes of play as reception strategy. While video games do usually exhibit a strong feature-based interactivity that allows for many moments of self-efficacy (though not necessarily agency), they do not automatically afford a ludic mode of involvement, and when they do, it is not necessarily the only mode of reception evoked. Conversely, supposedly 'narrative media' can in fact – as the analysis of *Inception* demonstrates – suggest a ludic mode of involvement. Surprisingly, while film studies and game studies have increasingly large areas of research overlap comparing the two forms of media, television has not been involved to the

same degree. But in fact, television stages an interesting point of transition since it exhibits a range of formats and generic groups that do not present narratives. Sportcasts, live-events, reality shows, magazines or sales shows cannot be subsumed into typical play/narration dichotomies.

My point here is to suggest an overarching, comprehensive understanding of processes of media reception and appropriation. Recourse to models of general information processing (the triggering of schemata and knowledge clusters as has been forwarded for instance by Bordwell 1985, 1989; Ohler/Nieding 2001; Ohler 1994; Wuss 1993, 2009) enable an integrated conception of media experience. By conceptualizing agency as a specific form of media experience, located at the second order of media involvement, allows for a systematized investigation of agency across the different media. As a specific mode of involvement, agency integrates a variety of possible modes of media involvement, grounded in general, first order forms of textual alignment and media involvement.

The analyses show that certain media texts facilitate the whole scope of agency to become effectual, while other media texts only allow agency to occur punctually, or displace it to the phase(s) of appropriation. The scope of agency is not necessarily tied to a certain mediality, but to the specific textuality of media texts. Conceiving agency as an emancipated concept alongside already established modes of reception will enable a more precise understanding, evaluation, and lastly production of media texts. Scholars and producers are well aware of mechanisms such as character closeness or the emotional involvement of recipients. When points of agency are recognized as such, and skilfully integrated into the production of a media text, both the analytic understanding and the production of films, television formats and video games will be enhanced.

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11 List of Media

Films

28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002)
Braindead (Peter Jackson, 1992)
Cast Away (Robert Zemeckis, 2000)
Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941)
Cloud Atlas (Tom Tykwer, Andrew and Lana Wachowski, 2012)
Dawn of the Dead (George A. Romero, 1978)
Dreamscape (Joseph Ruben, 1984)
Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1920)
Earthquake (Mark Robson, 1974)
eXistenz (David Cronenberg, 1999)
Polyester (John Waters, 1981)
Inception (Christopher Nolan 2010)
I Am Legend (Francis Lawrence, 2007)
It Happened one Night (Frank Capra, 1934)
Lord of the Rings-Trilogy (Peter Jackson 2001–2003)
Lost Highway (David Lynch, 1997)
Matrix Revolutions (Wachowski Brothers, 2003)
Memento (Christopher Nolan, 2000)
Notting Hill (Roger Michell, 1999)
Pretty Woman (Garry Marshall, 1990)
The Beach (Danny Boyle, 2000)
The Blair Witch Project (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999)
The Boss of it All (Lars von Trier, 2006)
The Dark Knight (Christopher Nolan; 2008)
The Matrix (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999)
The Night of the Living Dead (George A. Romero, 1968)
The Passenger (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975)
The Proposal (Anne Fletcher, 2009)
The Prestige (Christopher Nolan, 2006)
The Sixth Sense (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999)
The Trueman Show (Peter Weir, 1998)
Run Lola Run (Tom Tykwer, 1998)
Sensorama (a multi-sensual cinematic machine developed by Morton Heilig)
Shutter Island (Martin Scorcese, 2010)
Sleepless in Seattle (Nora Ephron, 1993)
Total Recall (Paul Verhoeven, 1990)
When Harry Met Sally … (Rob Reiner, 1989)
World War Z (Marc Forster, 2013)

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Games

Alone in the Dark (Infogrames, 1994)
Angry Birds (Rovio Entertainment, 2009)
Call of Duty: Black Ops (Treyarch, Ideaworks, 2010)
Counter-Strike (Valve Corporation, 1999)
Crysis 2 (Crytek, 2011)
Dead Rising-series (Capcom, since 2006)
Dead Space-series (Visceral Games, since 2008)
Doom (id Software, 1993)
Enter the Matrix (Shiny Entertainment, 2003)
Evil Dead-series (divers, 1984–2011)
Far Cry (Crytek, 2004)
Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar North, 2001)
Grand Theft Auto IV (Rockstar North, 2008)
Grim Fandango (LucasArts, 1998)
Halo (Bungie, 2001–2010, Ensemble Studios, 2009, 343 Industries, 2011–present)
Heavy Rain (Quantic Dream, 2010)
Portal (Valve Corporation, 2007)
Portal 2 (Valve Corporation, 2011)
Left 4 Dead-series (Valve, Turtle Rock Studios, since 2008)
Lost – Via Domus (Ubisoft Montreal, 2008)
MAnhunt (Rockstar, 2002, 2007; both games banned in Germany)
Monkey Island-series (LucasArts, since 1990)
Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee (Oddworld Inhabitants, 1997)
Painstation (Volker Morawe, Tilman Reiff, 2001)
Quake (id Software, 1996)
Red Dead Redemption-series (Rockstar, since 2004)
Resident Evil-series (Capcom, since 1996)
Shenmue (Sega AM2, 1999)
SimCity (Will Wright, Maxis, since 1989)
Subway Surf (Kiloo, SYBO Games, 2012)
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the Kings (Electronic Arts, 2003)
The Lost Experience (Hi-ReS!, 2006)
The Sims-sequels (Maxis, since 2000)
The Walking Dead (Telltale Games, 2012)
Tomb Raider-series (Core Design, 1996–2004, Crystal Dynamics 2006–present)
Ultima Online (Origins Systems, 1997)
Wolfenstein 3D (id Software,1992)
World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, since 2004)
Zork I (Infocom, 1980)

Television

Der Goldene Schuss (ZDF, 1964–1970)
Expedition Robinson (Charlie Parsons, SVT, 1997–2003)
Gilligan's Island (Sherwood Schwartz, CBS, 1964–1967)
Gute Zeiten – Schlechte Zeiten (RTLplus, since 1992)
How I Met Your Mother (Carter Bays, Craig Thomas, 2005)

Hugo Show (Kable 1, 1994–1997)
Ich bin ein Star – Holt mich hier raus! – Das Magazin (RTL Nitro, 2013)
I'm a Celebrity … Get Me Out of Here! (Granada Television (now part of ITV Studios), 2002)
Lost (J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffrey Lieber, ABC, 2004–2010)
Missing Pieces (J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffrey Lieber, ABC, 2007–2008)
Mörderische Entscheidung (ARD, Oliver Hirschbiegl, 1991)
Star Trek (Gene Roddenberry, 1966–2005)
Sopranos (HBO, David Chase, 1999–2003)
Tatort Plus: Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget (SWR, 2012)
Tatort Plus: Spiel auf Zeit (SWR, 2013)
The Voice of Germany (John de Mol, Roel van Velzen, prosieben 2012)
The Bachelor (Mike Fleiss (USA, ABC, 2002) RTL, 2011)
TV total (Stefan Raab, ProSieben, since 1999)
Twin Peaks (ABC, Mark Frost, David Lynch, 1990–1991)
Who Wants to be a Millionaire? (David Briggs, Mike Whitehill, Steven Knight, 1998)
Wünsch Dir Was (ZDF, 1969–1972)

Books

Bad Twin (Gary Troup, 2006)
Brave New World (Aldous Huxley, 1932)
Island (Aldous Huxley, 1962)
Lord of the Flies (William Golding, 1954)
Neuromancer (William Gibson, 1984)
The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe, 1719)

Appendix

I: Modes of Involvement – Synthesis

Eichner: Modes of Involvement	**Askwith: Logics of Entertainment**	**Suckfüll: Modes of Reception**	**Odin: Modes of Attention**[161]	**Calleja: Game Involvement**	**ARD/ZDF Study**[162]
Immersion & Presence Involvement via diegesis: Being here and being there	Logic of Immersion (textual)	Presence Narration	Fictional mode	Narrative Involvement Spatial Involvement	-
Character Involvement Involvement via identification, parasocial interaction, affective closeness	Logic of Identification	Identification	-	(Performative Involvement)	-
Ludic Involvement Playing with probabilities	Logic of Mastery	Play (Aspects of Narration)		Ludic Involvement	
Excitement Involvement via Excitement, Suspense, Thrill	Logic of Entertainment	Commotion	-	Affective Involvement	„because it's fun"; "because I can relax"; "to forget about everyday life"

161 The documentary mode and the persuasive mode were considered as too broad to be conceptualized as modes of involvement.

162 ARD/ZDF Langzeitstudie Massenkommunikation.

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Spectacle Involvement via Effects: Audiovisuallly overwhelming	-	(Analysis)	Dynamic mode Spectacle mode	-	-
Analysis Distanced involvement & reflection	Logic of Immersion (extratextual)	Production (Analysis)	Artistic mode Aesthetic mode	-	-
Inspiration Learning via Involvement	-	Looking for ideas	Home/private mode	-	"in order to get thought-provoking impulses"; "because I want to be informed"; "because it helps me to cope in every-day life"
Habitual Habitually getting in-volved	-	-	-	-	"because it belongs there out of habit"
Agency Involvement via control, mastery and influence; Participation	Aspects of Logic of Mastery Logic of Social connection	Aspects of Play	-	Aspects of Ludic In-volvement (Incorporation) Kinesthetic Involvement Shared In-volvement	"because I don't feel alone"; "being able to take part"

II: Plot structure Inception (overview)

1	Limbo Saito	Cobb wakes up at the beach and meets the old Saito in his House.	**Main mission: Inception**
2	Level 2 Dream Saito	Cobb meets the young Saito in the same house together with Arthur; Cobb explains how "extraction" works, and how to defence it.	**Initial Missi-on: Saito's test**
3	Level 1: Dream Saito	Apartment in an Arabic city. Cobb, Arthur, and Saito are sleeping.	
4	Level 2: Dream Saito	Back in Saito's house. First appearance of Mal, Cobb steals a document, then Mal betrays him.	
5	'Reality' – Train	We realize that the apartment was in a dream level. The train is the reality level.	
6	Level 1: Dream Saito	Saito realizes that he still is in a dream (wrong carpet).	
7	'Reality' – Train	Saito wakes up in the train.	
8	'Reality' – City	Cobb talks to his children on the phone, We learn that Mal is dead; when Arthur picks up Cobb we learn that Mal keeps visiting Cobb in his dreams.	**Cobb's past**
9	'Reality' – City	Instead of the pilot, Saito is in the helicopter. Saito only tested the quality of Cobb's work in the beginning scenes. He hires Cobb and his team and promises to arrange that Cobb can return to the USA. The reason and target for the following inception is introduced.	**Main mission is initiated**
10	'Reality' – Plane	On the plane to Paris, Cobb admits to Arthur that he already did an 'inception'.	**Cobb's past**
11	'Reality' – Paris	Cobb visits his father, a professor in Paris, because he needs an 'architect' for his team. The father tells Cobb to come back to reality.	**Preparation Main Mission**
12	'Reality' – Paris	Introduction of Ariadne, a student, who will be Cobb's architect.	
13	'Reality' – Paris	Factory floor: the team prepares for the job.	
14	Dream – Ariadne	Cobb explains to Ariadne how dream architecture works. She realizes that she is in a dream.	
15	'Reality' – Paris	Factory floor: we learn about the origins of 'dreamshar-ing' and the differences in time.	
16	Dream Ariadne	Back in the dream, Ariadne can show her talent, until they meet Mal.	**Cobb's past**

17	'Reality' – Paris	We learn that 'Totems' are good to distinguish between dream and reality.	**Preparation Main Mission**
18	'Reality' – Mombasa	In search for more team members Cobb travels to Mombasa and first meets Eames, who joins the team.	**Side Mission: finding the new team**
19	'Reality' – Mombasa	Cobb is being persecuted by some man and escapes with Eames only with Saito's help who surprisingly turns up.	
20	'Reality' – Paris	Ariadne and Arthur: we learn more about paradox architecture and about Cobb's past.	**Preparation Main Mission**
21	'Reality' – Mombasa	Cobb meets the chemist Yusuf who joins the team.	**Side Mission: finding the new team**
22	'Reality' – dream cave	Cobb is in Yusuf's dream cave. When his dream is interrupted, he tries checking on his reality-status but is interrupted. From here on his reality status is uncertain.	
23	'Reality' – Mombasa	Tactic talks on the roof top.	**Preparation Main Mission**
24	'Reality' –Sydney	Eames at Maurice Fischer.	
25	'Reality' – Paris	Ariadne makes herself a totem. We learn that Cobb is accused of having murdered Mal.	**Cobb's past**
26	'Reality' – Paris	Tactic talks at the Factory floor. The team has to travers three dream-levels in Fischer's unconsciousness to place the inception. Since this would take 10 years they want to speed the process up by 'kicks' with musical notice, that catapult them one level up again.	**Preparation Main Mission**
27	'Reality' – Paris	Minute 50: when Fischer travels from Sydney to Los Angeles with his dead father, they want to place the inception.	
28	Cobb's dream	Ariadne sneaks herself into Cobb's dream and learns about his past, his children and Mal.	**Cobb's past**
29	'Reality' – plane	Minute 60: Finally, the mission starts.	**Main Mission: Inception**
30	Level 1: Dream Fischer	Fischer is kidnapped by the team, but since he is trained in self defence against extraction, the team is threatened and persecuted by projections of Fischer's unconscious. In flashbacks, we learn the whole past of Mal and Cobb.	
31	Level 1: Dream Fischer	Minute 79: the switch to the next dream level is prepared and all get in the white transporter.	
32	Level 2: Dream Fischer	Minute 80: hotel lobby: Cobb is doing the "Mr Charles" trick: he pretends to be part of Fischer's self defence and thus makes Fischer trust him and work with them.	
33	Level 2: Dream Fischer	Minute 92: Level three is prepared.	

34	Level 2: Dream Fischer	Cobb keeps seeing signs of Mal and his children.	
35	Level 3: Dream Fischer	Team arrives at level three a winter landscape with a James Bond-like building construction in the mountains.	
36	Level 3: Dream Fischer	From now on continuing cross-cutting between the three dream levels (level 1 with the white transporter, with Yusuf as driver; level 2 in the hotel with Arthur taking care of all team members, and the third level, where the inception is supposed to happen).	
37	All dream levels	Minute 98: the kick is prepared: Arthur has 3 minutes in level two the others 20 in level three.	
38	All dream levels	Minute 100: the kick starts: the transporter rushes down a bridge, the hotel has no gravity, and in level three, there is a snowslide.	
39	All dream levels	They missed the kick and now have time until the transporter hits the water (the next kick). Again, Arthur has a few minutes, and the others 20 minutes left.	
40	Level 2: Dream Fischer	Arthur tries to get the whole team to the elevator, where he will cause the next kick.	
41	Level 3: Dream Fischer	In this level the team still tries to bring Fischer into a building where the inception is supposed to happen.	
42	Level 3: Dream Fischer	Fischer is inside the building in front of the locked room when Mal appears and shoots him. Cobb, who is supposed to shoot the opponents with a sniper rifle is not able to shoot Mal.	
43	Level 2: Dream Fischer	Meanwhile, Arthur has nearly reached the elevator.	
44	Level 3: Dream Fischer	Ariadne suggests to go into the Limbo together with Cobb, while Eames and the wounded Saito stay in level three, trying to prepare everything for the kick when the transporter hits the water.	
45	Limbo Fischer	In minute 110 Cobb and Ariadne reach the Limbo (which for some reason is identically equipped as Cobb's Limbo).	
46	All dream levels	Cross cutting between transporter (still flying), Arthur in the elevator (still crafting), and the snow mountains, where Eames is severely attacked and the wounded Saito is dying.	
47	Limbo Fischer	In minute 115 Cobb and Mal are discussing about the real reality. Cobb confesses that when they've been to the Limbo, he incepted Mal with the idea that reality is not real and she has to do suicide in order to return to reality.	

48	Level 3: Dream Fischer	Eames still tries to get rid of the offenders (Fischer's mental security system).	
49	Level 2: Dream Fischer	In minute 122 Arthur is finally finished his preparations and blows the elevator.	
50	Level 3: Dream Fischer	Eames used the defibrillator to give Fischer the ick from Limbo to level three. Fischer now enters the locked room, talks to his father and finds a proof in the safe that is father truly loved him. Since he still believes that Cobb and his team are his own mental security system, the inception has been successful. Eames blows up the building to initialise the kick from level three to two.	
51	Level 1: Dream Fischer	The transporter now hits the water, level two and level three are exploding and Ariadne, still in Limbo lets herself fall off to slide through all levels.	
52	All dream levels	In minute 127 all protagonists except Cobb and Saito (who died in level three and is in Limbo now) and Cobb (who couldn't leave Mal) return to level one.	
53	Limbo Fischer	We return to the initial scene. Cobb finally found Saito, already an old man, in Limbo, and reminds him to return to reality. In a last shot we see Saito's gun.	
54	'Reality' – plane	Minute 13: Seemingly shaken, all wake up in the plane and Saito makes the important phone call that will guarantee freedom for Cobb in USA.	**The End: The mission has been successfully completed and Cobb can return to his children**
55	'Reality' – arrival USA	Cobb passes all control posts without trouble, is picked up by his father and returns to his home. Yet, since the children have the same clothes and the same positions as in his dreams, and since his totem, the roundabout, does not stop spinning (minute 134), the audience is left in doubt about the realness of this reality.	

III: *Lost* season 1, episode 19: "Deus Ex Machina"

			Questions	**Answers**
A	Flashback John	John works in a store and is studied by an elder woman	Who is the woman?	
B	John Present	John and Boone try to destroy the cover of the hatch with a self-built Trébuchet; Johns leg is pierced by a metal splinter which he does not sense	What's inside the hatch? Who built it? Why is it there?	
B	John Present	Next try to destroy the cover		
A	Flashback John	The woman reveals herself as John's mother and tells him that he has no father and is special, a chosen one. We learn that John was brought up by several foster parents	Is John special? In what ways? Is his mother telling the truth?	The woman is his mother.
~~C~~	Sawyer	Sawyer admits to Kate to have sever headaches	What is the matter with Sawyer? Is it related to the island?	
~~D~~	Kate and Jack	While talking about Sawyer there is a sense of romantic tension between Kate and Jack	Will the two get together?	
B	John Present	John's dream: He sees the small plane crash near the hatch and watches Boone covered in blood repeating a sentence	What is the meaning of the dream? Is John loosing his mind? Why is Boone covered in blood? Why is the plane important? Is the island truly communicating with John?	
B	John Present	John wakes up Boone and they start looking for the crashed plane from John's dreams.		
A	Flashback John	John hired a detective to check on the identity of his parents. He learns that his mother has schizophrenia and spent some time in the psychiatric hospital. He decides to visit his father and meets a wealthy gentleman who welcomes him warmly and invites him to go hunting together.	Was his mother lying? Why didn't the parents raise John?	The detective confirms his mother's identity
B	John Present	John and Boone at the hatch. He convinces Boone to believe his plan when he quotes the sentence Boone repeatedly said in his dream: "Teresa falls the stairs down – Teresa falls the stairs up"	Is the plane real or just a dream? Who is Teresa?	
~~C1~~	Raft	Michael an Jin are building the raft	Will they soon escape the island?	
~~C~~	Sawyer	Although Jack offers his help, Sawyer is not ready to accept		
B	John Present	John's legs get worse. When he stumbles, they find an old corps in a tree	Who was the dead man? How did he come there?	
A	Flashback John	When visiting his father to go hunting together, John learns that his father has a kidney disease and waits for a transplantation.	Where is this story going to? Can John trust his father?	
B	John Present	John and Boone examine the corps: he is dressed like a Nigerian priest but has a gun	Why has a priest a gun?	

C	Sawyer	Kate finally drags Sawyer to Jack who examines him		Saywer's head-ache is caused by hyperopia
B	John Present	John admits that he was in a wheelchair until the plane crashed. He fears that he will be debilitated again if he cannot manage to open the hutch. Boone carries him.	Is there a connection between the hutch, the island and John? Has the island really healed John?	
A	Flashback John	John and his father go hunting together and have a very intimate father-son moment.		
B	John Present	Boone tells the story of Teresa who was his Nanny. She stumbled down the stairs and broke her neck after Boone repeatedly plagued her to come up to his room. Finally, John and Boone find the plane and Boone climbs up.		The identity and story of Teresa is revealed.
A	Flashback John	John has decided to give one of his kidneys to his father. They are in hospital prepared for the kidney transplantation.		
C	Sawyer	Finally Jack tells Sawyer that he got hyperopia and after some tries, Sayid crafts a proper set of glasses out of two other glasses.		
B	John Present	Boone climbs up to the plane. He finds a map of Nigeria, many Virgin Mary statues with heroin inside, and functioning radio equipment and sends out an SOS that is answered. He is able to communicate that he is a survivor of Oceanic flight 815, when the plane slides from the trees and crashes down with Boone inside.	John says: I don't understand this – and neither does the audience. What is this all about? Will Boone survive?	
D	Kate and Jack	A brief moment of intimacy and romantic tension between Kate and Jack, before John turns up with the injured Boone.		
E	Boone	Boone is unconscious. John lies and tells Jack and Kate that Boone fell down a rock. After that John runs off.	Why is John lying? Why does he run off?	
A	Flashback John	John wakes up in hospital. His father is gone. The nurse tells him that he is back home and is cared by private personal. John is perplexed. His mother turns up and admits that she received money from John's father to subtly motivate him to find his father. From the very beginning it was his plan to get John's kidney. John furiously leaves the hospital (bleeding) and drives to his father's estate, where he is not allowed entrance. He drives off exasperated.		John should not have trusted his father; it was all a stitch-up.
B	John present	John kneels on top of the hatch, bouncing his head on the cover – when suddenly light appears inside the hatch – End of episode.	What/who is inside the hatch?	