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Introduction: Playfulness across Media
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Play and playfulness are *bona fide* travelling concepts (e.g., Bal 2002; Hyvärinen et al. 2013; Neumann and Nünning 2012) with complex intertwined histories that range from anthropology and cultural history (e.g., Caillois 1961; Huizinga 1946; Malaby 2009; Sutton-Smith 1997) to developmental psychology and biology (e.g., Bateson and Martin 2013; Burghardt 2006; Lieberman 1977; Piaget 1962) and from philosophy and literary theory (e.g., Bakhtin 1981; Hutchinson 1983; Stewart 1979; Suits 1978) via art history and performance studies (e.g., Benford and Giannachi 2011; Getsy 2011; Stott 2015; Turner 1982) to the interdisciplinary field of game studies (e.g., Deterding 2014; Mortensen and Jørgensen 2020; Sicart 2014; Stenros 2015). On the one hand, then, the ludic turn in the humanities (e.g., Best and Kellner 1997; Raessens 2012; Sutton-Smith 1997) has contributed to a considerable diversification of available approaches to the question what it means for humans and other animals to think, perceive, and/or behave playfully. On the other hand, the concepts of play and playfulness are now applied to an ever broader variety of phenomena within current digital culture, which is often seen as having eroded the border between work and play (e.g., Goggins 2011; Kücklich 2005; Taylor et al. 2015), while also affording new forms of 'playful' design (e.g., Anderson 2011; Ferrara 2012; Korhonen et al. 2009) and creative as well as political participation (e.g., Abend et al. 2020; Jenkins et al. 2009; Schäfer 2011).

The present issue of *Eludamos* is thus partially motivated by recent high-level cultural diagnoses of an increasing 'ludification of culture' (e.g., Raessens 2006; 2012; 2014; as well as Dippel and Fizek 2017; Frissen et al. 2015; Walz and Deterding 2015), though such diagnoses commonly draw on older canonical work by scholars such as Johan Huizinga (1946), Roger Caillois (1961), or Brian Sutton-Smith (1997), all of whom have previously shown that play and games are a salient part of human culture. Huizinga's (1946) conceptualization of play as a 'free' activity that is different from reality and ordinary life, creates and demands order, and is not connected to any material interest or profit, Caillois's distinction between *paidia* as free play and *ludus* as the "arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions" (1961, p. 13) that structure and bind it in various forms of games, and Sutton-Smith's (1997) exploration of seven salient rhetorics of play (i.e., progress, fate, power, collective identity, imaginary, self, and frivolity) are often mirrored in current psychological and biological research on play in humans or other animals (e.g., Bateson and Martin 2013) and also remain common points of reference in the interdisciplinary field of game studies (e.g., Sachs-Hombach and Thon 2015). Yet, while the more recent proponents of the 'ludification of culture' thesis readily use the terms 'play' and 'playfulness,' they tend to be primarily concerned with games as systems affording rule-governed, structured, and constrained activities (Caillois 1961; as well as, e.g., Juul 2005; Salen and Zimmerman 2003; Sharp 2015) as well as, even more saliently, with the kind of transfer of game-elements to non-game-contexts often referred to as 'gamification' (e.g., Fuchs et al. 2014; McGonigal 2011; Walz and Deterding 2015).

That being said, there is a broad consensus across disciplines that the varied and multifaceted nature of play makes it particularly difficult to define (e.g., Bateson and Martin 2013; Sicart 2014; Sutton-Smith 1997), but most conceptualizations of the term seem to emphasize slightly different features than those commonly connected to various forms of games and gamification (see also, e.g., Deterding et al. 2011; Högberg et al. 2019; Landers et al. 2019 on 'gamefulness'). No less importantly, scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds—from anthropology and philosophy via psychology and biology to the interdisciplinary field of game studies (e.g., Bateson and Martin 2013; Lieberman 1977; Sicart 2014; Stenros 2015; Suits 1978; Sutton-Smith 1997)—distinguish play as an activity from playfulness as a mood, attitude, or state of mind, highlighting that games and play behavior are sometimes devoid of playfulness (e.g., Apter 1991; Stenros 2015; Mortensen and Jørgensen 2020), while also bringing into focus playfulness that takes place in systems not conventionally recognized as games and in practices not conventionally recognized as play. Usually, playfulness is then conceptualized as a 'positive' mood, attitude, or state of mind and further connected to humor, joy, and fun (e.g., Carroll 2014; Csikszentmihalyi 1975; Sharp and Thomas 2019) as well as to spontaneity, flexibility, and creativity (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Nachmanovitch 1990; Shepard 2011). Yet, as important as these connections doubtlessly are, an interest in 'playful culture' might suggest shifting the attention from playfulness as a mood, attitude, or state of mind that distinguishes "playful play" (Bateson and Martin 2013, p. 13) from the broader set of play behaviors to how playfulness may manifest itself in different (post)digital media forms (e.g., Berry and Dieter 2015; Jordan 2019; Tabbi 2020).

To this end, an approach that focuses on "that which is metaplay, that which plays with normal expectations of play itself" (Sutton-Smith 1997, p. 147), and otherwise emphasizes the metacommunicative qualities of playfulness (e.g., Bateson 1955; Deterding 2014; Goffman 1961; 1974), seems particularly promising in that it is flexible enough to address the various ways in which (post)digital media forms may play with the agency of their recipients/readers/viewers/players/users (e.g., Bódi and Thon 2020; Murray 1997; Wardrip-Fruin et al. 2009) not just by employing unusual forms of interactivity, ergodicity, or procedurality (e.g., Aarseth 1997; Bogost 2006; Kwastek 2013) but also by affording more pronounced forms of engagement, participation, and co-creation (e.g., Evans 2020; Schäfer 2011; Stott 2015). No less importantly, such a conceptualization of playfulness allows for the inclusion of (post)digital media forms' creative, innovative, de-automatizing, subversive, or otherwise transgressive play with language (e.g., Crystal 1998; Fägersten 2020; Stewart 1979) and *prima facie* medium-specific multimodal configurations (e.g., Elleström 2014; Gibbons 2012; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001), metareferentiality (e.g., Hutcheon 1980; Waugh 1984; Wolf 2009), or the distinction between fictionality and nonfictionality (e.g., Odin 2011; Schmid 2021; Thon 2019). In any case, the articles collected in the present issue of *Eludamos* are not exclusively or primarily interested in how we can conceptualize playfulness as a mood, attitude, or state of mind, but instead also explore how such a playful mood, attitude, or state of mind can manifest itself in different practices of play and in different (post)digital media forms as well as how the latter may or may not encourage playful modes of engagement. Taken together, they thus contribute to a still emerging field of research on playfulness across media that draws on and connects to current research from the interdisciplinary field of game studies, but programmatically moves beyond game-based playfulness and toward a more nuanced understanding of 'playful culture.'

The first article, Leland Masek and Jaakko Stenros's "The Meaning of Playfulness: A Review of the Contemporary Definitions of the Concept across Disciplines," systematically explores the aforementioned diversity of conceptualizations of the term 'playfulness' via an extensive literature review, identifying six salient 'themes' in how playfulness may engage with a single context ('focused'), be willing to engage with any context ('openness'), change a context to increase engagement ('framing'), prioritize engagement over external consequences ('non-consequential'), prioritize engagement over external reality ('non-real reality'), or prioritize engagement over conventionality ('unconventional'). Beyond offering a detailed reconstruction of the uses and usefulness of playfulness across disciplines, Masek and Stenros's literature review thus also "brings two elements of playfulness into focus that are normally left implied: *engagement* and *playful organization of context*" (2021, p. 23).

The second article, Bettina Bódi's "Can Playfulness Be Designed? Understanding Playful Design through Agency in *Astroneer* (2019)," applies the concept of playfulness to an in-depth exploration of the recent indie game *Astroneer* (System Era Softworks 2019), focusing particularly on the ways in which the game's designers intended the game to afford certain kinds of playfulness to its players. To that end, Bódi offers a detailed paratextual analysis of the discourses surrounding the game, identifying "two features that developers see as facilitating playfulness: *procedural content generation* in level design, which can introduce a high degree of variability to the gameplay experience and therefore encourage creative experimentation; and a *diegetic interface*, which can reduce the distance between player and game, and also evoke the feeling of playing with physical toys" (2021, p. 48–49).

The third article, Sarah Thorne's "There Is No Immersion: Critical Intervention through Hypermediacy in Metagames," moves from paratextual to textual analysis, offering a detailed exploration of how two versions of another recent indie game, *There Is No Game: Jam Edition 2015* (Draw Me a Pixel 2015) and *There Is No Game: Wrong Dimension* (Draw Me a Pixel 2020), employ various forms of hypermediacy and metareferentiality in order to offer a "playful take on the concept of the metagame" (Thorne 2021, p. 63). While Thorne largely focuses on a comparative analysis of the evolving aesthetics of *There Is No Game*'s two versions, she also takes into account how their design reflects specific production contexts and even suggests that the differences in their respective approach may be representative of a broader shift "from antagonistic and dark play […] to an approach to design that inspires a more positive outlook on the future of the industry" (2021, p. 63).

The fourth article, Daniella Gáti's "Playing with Plants, Loving Computers: Queer Playfulness beyond the Human in *Digital: A Love Story* by Christine Love and *Rustle Your Leaves to Me Softly* by Jess Marcotte and Dietrich Squinkifer," offers another set of close textual analyses that explore how the two recent indie games *Digital: A Love Story* (Love 2020) and *Rustle Your Leaves to Me Softly* (Marcotte and Squinkifer 2017) not only push the boundaries of what it means to be a 'game' but also "enable players to playfully subject themselves to desires they cannot contain and Others they cannot control, and in so doing experience queer, ambiguous forms of pleasure" (Gáti 2021, p. 88). Beyond offering two perceptive analyses, Gáti's exploration of "how queer forms of playfulness can displace the human and the subject from their privileged positions in relation to the nonhuman and the object" (2021, p. 88) also makes a theoretically valuable contribution to queer game studies.

The fifth article, Stefan Werning and Japser van Vught's "Taking Playful Scholarship Seriously: Discursive Game Design as a Means of Tackling Intractable Controversies," moves from digital to nondigital games, presenting the results of a recent one-year project that used co-design methodologies in order to develop two game prototypes aiming to explore "the contemporary discourse about the controlled legalization of MDMA and other drugs in the Netherlands" (Werning and van Vught 2021, p. 105). Werning and van Vught also show that the results of their project are relevant well beyond the specific context of Dutch drug policies and the actors influencing them, as they demonstrate how a playful approach to scholarship may more generally "help with disentangling intractable controversies and rekindling productive discourse on the urgent challenges of our time" (2021, p. 120).

The sixth article, Kieron Brown's "Play and Playfulness in Lynda Barry's *What It Is*," moves from game studies to comic studies, offering an insightful study of the ways in which play and playfulness are negotiated and encouraged by Lynda Barry's autobiographical/instructional comic *What It Is* (2008). In analyzing Barry's aesthetic strategies, Brown traces the connections between her approach to play and the psychoanalytical theories of D. W. Winnicott (1971), while also presenting detailed readings of specific comic pages that demonstrate and complicate how Barry puts her playful creative process into practice. Accordingly, Brown concludes that "the gap between purported method and realized design involves an ambiguity leverageable on the part of the author," and that it is precisely this ambiguity which allows us to consider as playful "the emphasis on improvisation and a lack of sustained intent in the face of more seemingly constructed elements" (2021, pp. 141).

The seventh article, Hanna Järvenpää's "The Playful Affordances of Picture Book Apps for Children," explores the emerging media form of the picture book app "as a special case of playful digital media," aiming "to demonstrate how children's book apps draw on both the aesthetics of picture books and the playful affordances of mobile games for young children" (2021, p. 149). To that end, Järvenpää offers brief but instructive analyses of a broad selection of interestingly different case studies that include *Max & Meredith: The Search for Percival* (Move on Pluto 2016), *Heston Hogs: The Way Home* (Laitinen 2020), *Women Who Changed the World* (Learny Land 2019), *3 Red Balloons: A Cute Picture Book for Toddlers* (Jogo 2016), and *Mur* (Step in Books 2017), ultimately concluding that "using a picture book application resembles traditional reading but also exceeds its limits" (Järvenpää 2021, p. 162) by making use of the affordances of digital technology in a number of different ways.

The eighth article, Alysa Karels and Teresa de la Hera's "Playful Strategies in Print Advertising," focuses on the rather different question how advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertisements (as opposed to digital advertisements) in order "to stand out from the crowd" (2021, p. 171). Based on a qualitative analysis of a sample of 100 print advertisements from 2019 and 2020 that operationalizes playfulness mainly in terms of Sicart's (2014) conceptualization and the PLEX framework (Lucero and Arrasvuori 2013; Lucero et al. 2014), Karels and de la Hera identify "the use of playful visual design that is meant to instill a playful mindset," "the use of strategies based on a pleasurable interactive experiential logic," and "the liberation of unspoken topics of a dark, solemn, and negative nature in a playful way" (2021, pp. 175) as three overarching—and partially overlapping—themes within print advertisements' playful communication strategies.

The ninth and final article, Bobby Schweizer's "Playing Make-Believe with #homemadeDisney Pandemic Ride Videos," likewise engages with a larger corpus of material, exploring the recent trend of social media users posting videos that reenact and reimagine various aspects of the 'imagineered' experience normally afforded by Walt Disney World and other theme parks while these parks were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on Kendall L. Walton's (1990) concept of make-believe and his discussion of the construction of game worlds as a key aspect of the processes of imagination we engage in based on various representational art works and other props, Schweizer concludes that "#homemadeDisney was in many ways ephemeral—spread across a variety of networks with video that disappeared into the depths of social media timelines—but the efforts of participants and engagement of observers marked it as a significant event of social imagining" (2021, p. 212).

Again, then, the articles collected in the present issue of *Eludamos* certainly demonstrate the productivity of the concept of playfulness across disciplines and the need of moving beyond the study of primarily game-based playfulness in order to explore how a playful mood, attitude, or state of mind can manifest itself in and be encouraged by a range of different practices of play and a range of different (post)digital media forms that include, but are certainly not limited to, the kinds of digital and nondigital games that Bódi, Thorne, Gáti, as well as Werning and van Vught explore. As interestingly different as the indie game *Astroneer*, the two versions of *There Is No Game*, the 'literary game' *Digital: A Love Story*, the highly experimental game *Rustle Your Leaves to Me Softly*, and the two game prototypes developed by Werning and van Vught's project participants doubtlessly are from each other, though, Brown's exploration of playfulness in comics, Järvenpää's exploration of playfulness in picture book apps, Karels and de la Hera's exploration of playfulness in print advertisements, and Schweizer's exploration of playfulness in online videos clearly show that the scope of the still emerging field of playfulness studies is considerably broader than this, and that the latter thus cannot and should not be conflated with game studies—even though there obviously are some very productive intersections between game studies and playfulness studies. While the more than 50 submissions that we received based on the Call for Papers for the present issue of *Eludamos* were of course even more varied than the—necessarily smaller—selection of articles that ultimately made it to publication, the articles collected here still offer a rather diverse snapshot of the state of playfulness studies as an emerging field and of the many different ways in which playfulness can be designed, represented, manifested, and/or encouraged across media forms.

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