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博士論文

"Playing" Anime:
A Comparative Media-Theoretical Approach to Anime as
a Specific Medium

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INTRODUCTION

In order to efficiently approach the anime-manga culture that is addressing a wide audience both in and outside Japan today, it is necessary to develop a multi-faceted understanding of the media in question. The critical discourses born in Japan provide one of the most influential perspectives in this respect. The detachment from representational realism and grand narratives, observed in these media as well as in light novels, is taken up by renowned names such as Eiji Ōtsuka, Gō Itō, and Hiroki Azuma.[1] The theories developed by these three critics in relation to the narrative production, marketing, and consumption environments mostly in Japan, indeed do present the opportunity to comprehend the attraction of many elements that may seem cliché to those who are not familiar with the media in question.[2]

It can be argued that prominent narrative production and marketing strategies, along with the consumption environments, models, and the practices they have given birth to, have brought different media closer to each other. The digital technologies widely employed in the areas of communication and entertainment have surely speeded up this process. In Japan, media mix projects[3] connect anime, manga,

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[1] Throughout this thesis, Japanese names will also be given in first name-family name order, with which English reading audience is presumably more familiar.

[2] For the time being, these authors' writings remain largely untranslated into English. For a detailed comparative summary of their influential works, see Zoltan Kacsuk's article "From 'Game-like Realism' to the 'Imagination Oriented Aesthetic': Reconsidering Bourdieu's Contribution to Fan Studies in the Light of Japanese Manga and Otaku Theory," which highlights how the Japanese discourse on "AMO (anime-manga-otaku) culture" can contribute to the Western sociological discourse on fan cultures. For more on the potential contribution of Ōtsuka and Azuma's writings to the discussions of realism in animation, see Marc Steinberg's "Realism in the Animation Media Environment: Animation Theory from Japan."

[3] In Marc Steinberg's definition, "[t]he anime media mix within popular discourse refers to two intersecting phenomena: the translation or deployment of a single work, character, or narrative world across numerous mediums or platforms (also known as repurposing) and the synergetic use of multiple media works to sell other such works within the same franchise or group" (*Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*, 142). Media mix can be considered a variant of "transmedia franchising," another popular strategy of which is "transmedia storytelling." While the transmedia franchises developed in Japan can be conveniently considered media mixes, a variety of other traits (including media mixes' general preference for variation principle over continuity in storytelling) should be taken into consideration to fully compare and contrast media mix and transmedia storytelling strategies. For details, see Olga Kopylova's Ph.D. thesis, *Media Mix as Adaptation: With Maeda Mahiro's Gankutsuō as an Example*, 57-95.

and light novels to each other, often with the addition of games[4], live action movies, and TV series. Moreover, the circulation of stories and story elements may easily transcend a single media-mix project overseen by a single production committee. When present, intertextual references can form wider webs of connections across media: previous literature and adaptations may inspire media mix projects as in *Gankutsuō* (based on the anime released between 2004-2005, produced by GONZO) taking Alexander Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) and Alfred Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!* (1956) as its basis. It is also possible to talk about an extension of media relations when older media mix titles are revisited for separate projects, as in the case of the recent Hollywood live-action movie *Ghost in the Shell* (released in March, 2017), which is based on the manga mix by the same name (originally appearing as a manga series in 1989, written and illustrated by Masamune Shirō).

However, assuming that the borders of media have vanished completely due to the factors mentioned above would be far from reality, and would make it extremely difficult to contemplate the influence of media on us, that is, on their audience. While similarities arise due to the increasing number of intersections between media, it would be sensible to conjecture that no medium would like to get too close to another and become a sub-category. On the contrary, the continuity of sales, and therefore of marketing, depends on the existence of variety. The very existence of the media mix practice can also be taken as a sign that while intricate relations between media have appeared, media are also demanded separately. This leads us to think medium-specificities once again.

But what is a "medium" to begin with? Marie-Laure Ryan proposes two complementary ways for defining the term: through its functions, and through the conceptual frameworks that capture different aspects of its nature. The functions of the term can be listed in two broad categories which form the backbone for most dictionary definitions: first, medium as a conduit that transfers information; second,

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[4] Under the category of games; video games, pachinko (a Japanese pinball game) games, tabletop games, and card games can be counted as most common types. In this thesis, mainly in connection to the discussion of digitalization and the contemporary technological condition, only video games are addressed extensively in analysis.

medium as the message itself, implying that it defines the information being channeled. While it is possible to take these functions to be mutually exclusive, it is also possible to consider them the two ends of the same spectrum and consider medium the combination of both —as this thesis does. As for the conceptual frameworks that capture different aspects of medium, three items can be listed: semiotic, material-technological, and cultural frameworks. In the *living handbook of narratology* (under the title "Narration in Various Media"), Ryan describes the first one's take on medium as follows:

> As a semiotic category, a medium is characterized by the codes and sensory channels upon which it relies. The semiotic approach tends to distinguish three broad media families: verbal, visual, and aural. […] Insofar as signs extend in time or space, the semiotic analysis of media should also take into consideration their spatio-temporal dimensions. (par. 13)

In extension, due to its reliance on certain sensory channels and its possession of certain spatio-temporal traits, medium appears to be an entity that cannot be transferred without being transformed. It might be argued that medium differs from "genre" most obviously in this way. One can talk about a sci-fi novel and a sci-fi movie, for the sci-fi genre does not require visual and aural sensory channels to be employed specifically.

On the other hand, while the materiality of media may seem to refer to the concrete limitations constituting their identities, it also points at a surprising fluidity in their nature.

> Material support can be either a raw substance, such as clay for pottery, stone for sculpture, the human body for dance, […] or a technological invention such as writing (subdivided into manuscript, print, and electronic form), individual musical instruments, photography, film, television, the telephone, and digital technology. ("Narration in Various Media" par. 14)

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Despite the fact that the quote does not make the connection clear, the concreteness of materiality is by no means final precisely because it may change under technological influence. For example, as recording technologies advanced, not only did the medium of film go through a semiotic expansion by acquiring sound and color, but also film rolls have been replaced by videocassettes and eventually by digital technologies. Digital technologies have in fact radically effected the materiality of media in general: beyond recreating production tools, they have brought about a common platform for the circulation of media too. It should suffice to think about how comics can be drawn and colored entirely on the computer (without using paper or ink), read on any compatible device, and easily get repurposed for the making of other comics, animations, games, etc. In this sense, it appears that media have gained a rather fluid and transferable quality.

However, semiotic and material-technological frameworks alone cannot capture what a medium is.

> "Not all phenomena regarded as media can be distinguished on the basis of technological and semiotic properties alone. Newspapers, for instance, rely on the same semiotic dimensions and printing technology as books, but 'the press' is widely regarded by sociologists as a medium in its own right because it fulfills a unique cultural role in 'media ecology'" ("Narration in Various Media" par. 15).

Even when they use the same sensory channels and material-technological elements, we can talk about separate media depending on their conventional differences. Moreover, the cultural framework reveals how the materiality of media can linger on despite the transformations it may go through. Despite its heavy reliance on CGI today, anime (which can be conveniently defined as Japanese TV animation while its production and consumption cannot be simply limited to Japan) largely maintains its traditional 2D look. The convention becomes a constitutive factor for the medium (anime cannot be transferred without being transformed), while it is born out of the material-technological resources the medium once had.

Still, as conventions themselves are not immune to gradual change, media *tendencies* could prove a fruitful topic for research instead of fixed media identities and limitations.

In relation to the argument for the relevancy of considering media-specificities today, and to the definition of the term medium given above, this thesis aims to:

- provide a simple framework to understand

    a. contemporary media and narrative tendencies,

    b. how the audience in general engage with them;

- as opposed to the previous media, narrative, and audience tendencies,

- without overlooking media-specificities.

Here, rather than implying that contemporary tendencies have replaced the older ones, the underlying assertion is that these tendencies coexist and can only be understood in relation to each other.

With that being said, to approach contemporary media, narrative, and audience tendencies without disregarding media-specificity, it is possible to take Azuma's concept of "gamelikeness" as an entry point. In *Gēmuteki Riarizumu no Tanjō* (*The Birth of Gamelike Realism*, 2007), the follow-up of *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (*Dōbutsuka Suru Posutomodan: Otaku Kara Mita Nihon Shakai,* originally published in 2001), Azuma points to the fact that light novels feature characters dying and coming back from death repeatedly, or getting stuck in time loops to live the same day or hour again and again in a way that brings to mind the experience of playing games. While Azuma is focusing on light novels, not surprisingly this motif of "replay" is very common in manga and anime too. More importantly, this motif connects to something deeper —to a change in the environment that surrounds these media. As a result of multiple developments in information storage and sharing technologies, a remarkably extensive pool of

information has appeared. This "database" has arguably changed the face of narrative production and consumption: by revealing the most commonly used elements in the creation of   narratives (from characters to settings), it presented making endless combinations with these elements, thus endless replays, as a desirable way of narrative production.

However, what Azuma proposes as a unifying quality for several media (that is to say, a gamelikeness that can be observed in anime, manga, and light novels) goes against what is commonly acclaimed as a unique quality that sets games apart from storytelling media. The distinguishing trait of games is argued to be the underlying rule-based system that enables repetitional interaction (as opposed to a developmental teleology in, for example, movies or novels) without necessarily having a narrative function. While Azuma does not aim to discuss medial differences, his discussion may actually provide a new entrance point to reconsider the media that are compared to games, specifically to reconsider anime, which shows similarity to video games especially in the semiotic sense. In contrast to manga and light novels, anime incorporates audio elements like most video games, and possesses both static and dynamic qualities.[5] The question is, can we talk about an overarching similarity between contemporary media, that is, a gamelikeness, without disregarding media-specificities?

If games can be compared to "narrative media" in terms of their storytelling potential has been the topic of much debate. The definitions of "story" and "narrative" are central to these debates. Very briefly, Ryan explains the terms in relation to each other, stating that "[n]arrative is widely regarded by scholars as a discourse that conveys a story; story, in turn, has been defined as a mental image […] " ("Narration in Various Media" par. 17). Story, then, appears as an abstraction that takes form in narration through any semiotic means. With regard to narrative, in "Narratology and Media(lity): The Transmedial Expansion of

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[5] For a detailed chart of medial categories, see Werner Wolf's "Narratology and Media(lity): The Transmedial Expansion of A Literary Discipline and Possible Consequences," 172.

A Literary Discipline and Possible Consequences," Werner Wolf brings together previous research to offer a comprehensive account.

> [T]he fact that narratives are world-building representations that permit the recipient to (re-)experience possible worlds has become a received notion. This is also true for the insight that these representations are centred around anthropomorphic beings who are capable of conscious choices, plans and activities, and experience emotions and desires. Moreover, there is now wide-spread agreement that these representations emphasize temporal and causal, while not entirely predictable, changes and explain them in terms of causality and teleology. (159)

Based on the quote, the constituents of the narrative representation (of a story) can be listed as a setting (a world), populated by characters, who act in certain ways for certain reasons and take part in happenings (events, plot), displaying change and temporal as well as causal relations to differing extents. After these elements are listed, narrativity can emerge as a matter of degree. Media can be considered "narrative media" to the extent they lend themselves to narrative representation, or to the extent they can tell stories with the elements listed. Moreover, as media shape the information they transmit (to differing extents) in relation to the medial (semiotic, material-technological, and cultural) properties they possess, as Wolf states referring to media, "they function as empowering, but also restrictive factors in the production and reception of narratives" (173), too. Wolf illustrates the case by pointing out how difficult it is to convey temporal change in the static medium of sculpture, and how difficult it is to build a precise sense of causality without resorting to language. Similarly, one can think of how difficult it can be to tell the story of a character in exact terms through dance despite the dynamism involved.

Thanks to their reliance on the materiality and technology of computer systems and to the cultural role that they have come to play, video games can be considered a particular medium standing out among the wider category of games. In video games' case specifically, considering how they rely on a combination

of sensory channels and kinetic properties, we can talk about a high potential for narrativity. However, this potential is not necessarily activated. On the contrary, video games may opt for keeping story elements to the minimum and making it obvious that interactivity is their main priority. *Tetris* (originally designed and programmed by Alexey Pajitnov in 1984) is probably the most widely known example of the case.[6]

The concept of gamelikeness presents the opportunity to reconsider the similarities between media from a fresh angle. Instead of the storytelling potential of various media, it moves the focus to how narratives across media can be replayed repeatedly in the form of fan works or as official sequels, prequels, and so on. However, as mentioned above, as revealing as it may be concerning the similarities between media, Azuma's discussion leaves media-specificities out of the picture. In order to talk about such an overarching similarity without disregarding media-specificities, we can ask how exactly the audience play each medium. Brian Upton's definition of "play" as "free movement within a system of constraints" (*The Aesthetic of Play* 15) proves crucial to the discussion at this point. Upton argues that this concept is applicable to games as well as to narrative media, taking place within the mind in the case of latter, as interpretive/anticipatory play. The information that media provide in their own ways (be it regarding storyworlds populated by characters or interactive spaces with few narrative elements) sets the parameters for the audience's interpretation of what is happening (the outcomes of their actions or the characters') and what can possibly happen (the possible outcomes of future actions) as the process of play goes on. However, it can be argued that in this age of excessive information forming a clear understanding of causality in media products is complicated by several factors. Does the way we engage in narrative play today differ from how we handled narratives before? What kind of constraints specifically bind contemporary gamelike media? What kind of free movement do they offer? As two different forms of play, how do anime and video games differ? In terms of play, how does anime relate to manga and light

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[6] For more on the narrative potential of video games, see "Beyond Myth and Metaphor: The Case of Narrative in Digital Media" by Marie-Laure Ryan.

novels with which it crosses paths all too often in media mix projects? This thesis adopts Upton's

concept, revises it, and puts it into use in addressing these questions.

Structurally, this thesis may seem to differ from the usual. It does not introduce a variety of theories in the

beginning to challenge them later in the following parts. Instead, in each and every chapter, it interlaces

theories in fresh ways to revise them partially and to compensate for what they leave out. These theories

come from various fields —indeed from the intersection of various fields themselves. In addition to

Azuma's two books and Upton's *The Aesthetic of Play*, Jacques Rancière's *The Future of the Image*,

Jan-Noël Thon's *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, and Thomas Lamarre's

The Anime Machine are deeply braided into the discussion.

The main methodology employed in this thesis can be identified as *postclassical*, *transmedial* narratology

to the extent that it deals with contemporary narrative tendencies across selected media which may or may

not contain a narrator. It also presents an *intermedial* approach to the relation between video games and

anime, by focusing on instances in which "two or more media are overtly present in a given semiotic

entity" (Werner Wolf, qtd. in Rippl 12), or, by focusing on anime specific representations of video games

and virtual worlds. However, as the concept of play that is at the center of this thesis is applicable yet not

limited to narrative media, it should be noted that the discussion goes beyond the scope of narratology at

times. Therefore, it might be more accurate to consider this thesis under media studies, while taking note

of its narratological bent.

Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture, one of the main theoretical sources

employed in this thesis, shares a common goal with this thesis: developing a way to address media in

general without overlooking media-specificities. However, Thon's greater aim is the theoretical revision

of narratological concepts —namely the concepts of storyworld, narrator, and subjectivity— and thus to

update narratology in a sense as the contemporary media culture's effects on narratives necessitate. In

contrast, this thesis focuses on the nature of contemporary media tendencies —their coming into being in a certain historical context, how they relate to other contemporary phenomena, etc.— as well as addressing them from the perspective of narratology. A greater similarity to Upton's project can be spotted here, for he develops the basic model of play in the first place. Notwithstanding, this thesis revises Upton's model to address contemporary media tendencies and puts it into use to examine media-specific aspects of Japanese popular media.

The first chapter discusses in detail the meaning and the implications of Azuma's "gamelike realism," starting from the growing visibility of video games as a motif spawning across media. What is gamelike about the narratives that proliferate today? What kind of realism do they possess, or how do they connect to reality? Finally, if contemporary narratives are gamelike in a certain sense, how do we play them? Through addressing these questions, the theoretical basis for the following chapters will be laid.

The second chapter focuses on anime through the extended analyses of selected scenes from different works: in the order of discussion, *Gurren Lagann The Movie: The Lights in the Sky are Stars* (*Gekijōban Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann: Lagann-hen*, 2009), *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stardust Crusaders* (*JoJo no Kimyō na Bōken: Sutādasuto Kuruseidāsu,* 2014-2015), and *No Game No Life* (*Nōgēmu Nōraifu,* 2014). In this chapter, media-specific qualities of anime and games are addressed in comparison. By taking a look at how video games and gameworlds are depicted in the selected anime titles, it is analyzed how the video game medium is translated and transformed by anime in a medium-specific manner. If anime can be considered a form of play, what kind of "animetic playspace" does it produce? How exactly do we play anime? The theoretical basis introduced in the first chapter will be expanded in this chapter through the introduction of anime and cinema theories mostly.

Lastly, in the third chapter, a comparative case study is presented: certain action scenes with intermedial references (scenes mimicking video-game interfaces) from the media mix of *Sword Art Online* (*Sōdo Āto*

Onrain, first appearing as a light novel series in 2009, followed by manga, anime, and game series) are discussed from the perspective of narratology. This larger comparative analysis between the light novels, manga, anime, and games of the given media mix, as the rest of this thesis, does not simply aim to reveal the differences between the listed media. Rather, it aims to contrast their media-specific tendencies which may be emphasized, downplayed, or change over time. Moreover, these tendencies which can result in slightly or noticeably different audience experiences, are given in relation to the similarities observed across these media that are produced and consumed in close proximity to each other.

As a general note, it should be mentioned that audience engagement is interwoven in the discussion in every chapter of this thesis, and that the audience implied here is not limited to a particular fan group or nationality. But a question may arise at this point: Why is Japanese popular media picked for the discussion? In the first chapter of *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Azuma convincingly argues that the production and consumption of Japanese popular media in Japan should be considered as part of a worldwide trend. Indeed, the database model of narrative production and consumption makes itself rather evident in contemporary popular culture around the world today. In this respect, analyses of Japanese popular media and discourse on popular culture can be revealing in understanding the general media, narrative, and audience tendencies. Secondly, as Azuma discusses gamelikeness in relation to these media, in order to question the validity of his concept, it is best to stick to the same samples. Finally, if the media in question differ from other types of contemporary popular media, the difference can be revealed through an extended discussion such as this thesis offers.

As previously mentioned, the reason why specifically anime is selected for comparison with video games is the semiotic similarities between the two media —especially the kinetic properties setting anime as well as video games apart from manga and light novels to a great extent. That is also the reason why action scenes of *shōnen* titles (mainly targeting young male audience, but practically consumed regardless of age and gender) are preferred for analysis: they would be presumably where the audience expect to see

movement. In the meantime, the discussion of video games are not limited to a certain genre or a specific point of origin. First, because systematically enabled replay, which is the core principle of gamelikeness, is observable in video games regardless of genre. Second, because media mixes do not employ a particular video game genre, which may or may not be attributable to Japan specifically. Instead, in addition to the two selected *Sword Art Online* games (*Sword Art Online: Infinity Moment*, released by Bandai Namco Games for PlayStation Portable in 2013; *Sword Art Online: Memory Defrag*, released by Bandai Namco Games for mobile devices in 2017), different titles of different genres are used to explicate various points made throughout the thesis.

Under the category of games, it is also possible to include pachinko or table top games. In fact, play in the sense that Upton defines it does not exclude such media from analysis. However, the discussion here is limited to video games for the medium connects well with the emphasis on the technological environment that surrounds media and their audience today. Although it is hoped that this work provides an impetus for researchers of game studies, the superior aim is to contribute to media and anime studies, by considering anime as a specific medium and coming up with an account of the current medial strategies it seems to employ.

CHAPTER 1 - GAMELIKE NARRATIVES AND NARRATIVE PLAY

In *Gēmuteki Riarizumu no Tanjō* (unofficially translated here as *The Birth of Gamelike Realism,* from now on referred to as *Gamelike Realism*), Hiroki Azuma defines our age as the "age of gamelike realism." As the phrase itself suggest, there is something gamelike about the end of 20th and the beginning of 21st century —maybe even something *video game*like. Contemporary popular media, from films to comics, and to all sorts of series, reflect the current technological environment we inhabit, along with the video games' big part in it. Being largely digitalized to different extents themselves, and (constantly re-)positioned within the wider framework of the internet, not so surprisingly such media tell us tales of engulfment, entanglement, interconnectedness, and constant transition from medium to medium, from world to world.

Leaving the real world and entering game worlds —the ultimate form of escapism one might say— is an interesting and quite common motif in projects spawning across multiple media such as anime, manga, light novels, and games. Since the year 2000 alone, many media-mix titles taking such experience as a theme have appeared. Among such titles, *Sword Art Online* (*Sōdo Āto Onrain,* first appearing as a light novel series in 2009, followed by manga, anime, and game series)*, Log Horizon* (*Rogu Horaizun*, originally light novels, published first in 2011, followed by manga and anime series), *.hack* (anime series and game first appearing in 2002, followed by light novels and manga), *Overlord* (*Ōbārōdō*, originally a light novel series appearing online in 2010, published first in 2012, followed by manga and anime series), *Accel World* (*Akuseru Wārudo*, originally light novel series published first in 2010, followed by manga, anime, and games), *No Game No Life* (*Nōgēmu Nōraifu*, light novel series first published in 2012, followed by manga and anime series), and *Grimgar of Fantasy and Ash* (*Hai to Gensō no Gurimugaru*, light novel series first published in 2013, followed by manga and anime series) could be given as notable examples. The first chapter starts by introducing some of these titles, in order to highlight the basics of

human interaction with the technologically enhanced media environment that touches every aspect of life in the 21st century. The brief discussion and analysis aim to create a simple yet vivid image for the technological and cultural context crucial to the understanding of Azuma's theory of gamelike realism.

The first chapter will discuss in detail the meaning and the implications of Azuma's theory, relate it to Umberto Eco, Jacques Rancière, Boris Groys, Jan-Noël Thon, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Brian Upton's writings among others, and suggest some revisions. What is gamelike about the narratives that proliferate today? What kind of realism do they possess, how do they connect to reality? And if contemporary narratives are gamelike in a certain sense, how do we play them? Through addressing these questions, the theoretical basis for the following chapters will be laid.

A. THE AGE OF GAMELIKE REALISM: LIVING IN A GAME WORLD

No Game No Life (*Nōgēmu Nōraifu*) first appeared as a light novel series in 2012 (released until 2015), followed by the manga (starting from 2013) and anime (2014). To summarize briefly, *No Game No Life* tells the story of two siblings, Shiro and Sora, who happen to be quite famous as a team in the world of online gaming. Known by the nickname "Blank," their team has an immaculate gaming history with no defeats, although in real life they are nothing else but outcasts. One day they receive a mysterious message, an invitation to another world —called the Disboard— where every individual and racial clash of interest gets resolved in some type of a game. Following their arrival in this new realm, they start playing for the throne.

No Game No Life makes the interconnectedness between life and games quite obvious on the level of plot. The two protagonists are literally thrown into a world of games, to which the title of the series applies word for word —*no game no life*: in order to live, you have to play. Still, it has to be stressed that this world is not for everyone —and it is not just an allegorical counterpart to the modern world we inhabit.

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The protagonists are social outcasts in real life, and their destination is supposed to be the perfect match for them exclusively. In line with the negative image of the alienated gamer/social misfit, Shiro and Sora complain about how they do not belong to the world in which they were born, explicitly stating their frustration with the complexity and arbitrariness of social relations. In contrast, Disboard feels like the characters' real home and proves more than a wake-up call to discover that they actually related to the real life world more than they had realized. These points being made, it would be vain to deny the escapist tone of the story.

However, instead of the all too often and quite negatively raised point of escapism, let us turn our attention to how the "gifts" of the human race are connected to various digital technologies in the series. The protagonists crash into this new world with a bunch of their electronic devices fully listed right at the outset of their adventure: two smartphones, two PSPs, a tablet PC, a solar charger, a battery, and their cables. Naturally there is no reception in the world of Disboard, for there are no phones to begin with, but the two take their phones everywhere they go, using the mystery around the device to intimidate their rivals, to make use of the cameras, and to amuse themselves. While the smartphone is labeled the "secret tool from another world," the tablet assumes a much more heroic role as the storage space for a whole world's wisdom. Comically, Sora explains that he has collected 40,000 virtual books in his tablet in order to practice for a trivia quiz.

As the previous paragraph makes clear, Disboard's technology does not correspond to ours (while the type of technology available to each race differs significantly). Therefore, it comes as a surprise when the very last challenge in the 12 episode anime series takes the shape of a video game. Shiro and Sora *enter* a virtual world through some equipment of virtual reality —only to discover that it is the "real" world. After closing their eyes to Disboard and slipping into a state of unconsciousness in separate booths of virtual reality, the characters wake up in Tokyo. At the sight of the city the siblings freeze with fear,

guessing that it won't be possible to avoid "real" social contact this time.[7] It is only after they are assured that Tokyo is just a popular setting inside the game, that the two become functional again. With this twist, *No Game No Life* presents *the audience's world also as a game world*, seen from the other end of the looking glass.

As pointed out in the beginning of this section, entering game worlds is quite a common trope in media-mix projects today. However, it cannot be considered a recent phenomenon exactly. In fact, a comparison with much earlier titles might prove helpful to emphasize certain aspects of recent narratives. For instance, earlier in the 1980s the popularity of games from table tops to home console and arcade games, triggered the production of game-inspired narratives in the form of animation such as *Captain N: The Game Master* (an American-Canadian animated TV series featuring the adventures of Captain Nintendo, aired from 1989 to 1991) and *Dungeons and Dragons* the animated TV series (a co-production of Marvel and D&D Entertainment, aired between 1983-85, with Toei Animation in charge of animation).[8] Similar to *No Game No Life*, these two titles too feature travels to game worlds. In *Captain N*, or *Captain Nintendo*, the protagonist gets sucked into Videoland through a vortex formed inside his TV, while *Dungeons and Dragons* opens up a magical portal to transport the characters to a fantasy realm, supposedly the setting for the game itself. Significantly, even as these brief outlines reveal, none of the three titles take place in the real world. Moreover, the nature of the game worlds they depict and how exactly anyone can visit them, are kept entirely fantastical.

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[7] This scene is also interesting in that it reveals that the protagonists are still socially withdrawn in real life, despite socializing with the people in Disboard all the time. A negative interpretation would support the idea that games do not help solving real problems, and are therefore simply escapist. However, it can also be inferred that it is not socializing per se, but socializing with others while being stigmatized as a misfit that lies at the center of the *hikikomori* phenomenon. The latter reading presents the psychological problem attributed to the individual as a societal problem projected on the individual.

[8] *Captain N* appeared also as a comic book, while the *Dungeons and Dragons* animated series was followed by several books, comic book and toys, etc.

While it is possible to see a trend that covers at least three decades, it does not mean that there are no noteworthy differences between such titles. *No Game No Life,* as summarized above, is about the travel of two siblings to a game world. However, it is remarkable how the two protagonists cling on to a real life element even in a land of fantasy: the technology of our age. The story presents contemporary technologies not only as mobile assets, but also as more than simple tools. While most of the technological devices (except for the tablet) have no exchange value in Disboard, they appear as integral parts of the strategies developed by the siblings to defeat enemies. It's not that Shiro and Sora try to use their resources efficiently to overcome obstacles. Rather, Shiro and Sora try to overcome obstacles in the way that feels most natural to them: by relying on the familiar technologies as extensions of their skills.

Taking the primacy of our real-life relationship with technology one step further, and in contrast to the three titles mentioned above, some titles like the *Sword Art Online, Log Horizon, Overlord,* and *.hack* series present game worlds in the shape of virtual worlds accessed through some equipment of virtual reality. The main characters of these titles simply log on to online gaming platforms, realistically in the sense that the same practice is quite common in real life today (while a full body experience is not possible yet). But unexpectedly, they end up spending a considerable span of time in there, as they get trapped in virtual reality due to some technical complications.

To clarify the point further, let us focus on one title, the *Sword Art Online* (*Sōdo Āto Onrain,* first appearing as a light novel series in 2009). A virtual reality MMORPG is released in the year 2022, thousands of people log on to the game upon its launch, only to find out that the developer of the software as well as the hardware made it impossible for the players to log out from the game. The only chance to return to the offline world is to stay alive until all the levels of the game are cleared. The protagonist, Kirito, has an advantage over the majority of the other players as a beta tester (who played the game in an early stage of development) and is determined to help the others finish the game. In the process, he gets involved in a romantic affair with another player called Asuna. Interestingly, not only do the two end up

getting married in the virtual world, but they also plan to be together when they can finally log out, and find a way to take their adopted child Yui —a system element, hence a completely virtual being— to the real world with them. But of course, first of all, the game must be beaten, and their bodies in the real world must be taken care of for the two years they spent unmoving.

This brief summary of *Sword Art Online* may reveal some significant tendencies in recent narratives. First of all, rather than fantasy lands, these titles present game worlds as full-fledged virtual worlds that people can inhabit even for years. Secondly, and consequently, the means of entrance to virtual worlds in recent texts often take the shape of VR devices, which are actually available today —like head-mount displays—, albeit in earlier phases of development. Therefore, providing a link between the real world and game worlds is no longer a problem of imagination, or of devising narrative tricks, but a path technologically *almost* established. Lastly, and in connection to the previous two points, recent narratives go into great detail about the repercussions and desires that the *in-game actions* of the characters bring about i*n real life*.

If works like *No Game No Life* suggest that games and the related technology have a more noticeable presence in our lives than we tend to think, works like *Sword Art Online* point to the unseverable connections established between game worlds and the real world, and the unstoppable flow in between them. Currently, with online interactions on virtual platforms being not only possible but also quite common all over the world, the relationship between video games and the offline life cannot be reduced to a one-directional impact one has on the other.   Originally coming from Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, the term "magic circle" is applied to digital games by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman to refer to "the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game" (*Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* 95). Today, this magic circle of games increasingly reveals its porousness, bridging "play" and "reality" through more and more true to life renderings of 3D

environments, and recently through the "mimetic interface games" (in Jesper Juul's wording)[9] of Wii and Kinect, or through virtual reality equipment such as the Oculus Rift.[10]

In "*Homo Ludens* 2.0: Play, Media and Identity" Valerie Frissen, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens give place to the following definition of "virtuality" which is apt for this discussion:

> *virtuality* […] traditionally refers to immersive experiences provided by new forms of simulation technology (think of virtual reality), as well as to metaphorical spaces created by communication networks (think of the space which comes into being when you're talking on the telephone). But, as Michiel de Lange rightly argues, these descriptions were mostly "founded on two ontologies that were mutually exclusive, the *real* and the *virtual*. Much current (mobile) media research questions this separation. Mobile phone 'virtualities' are embedded in 'real life'. Inversely, 'real life' is encapsulated in 'virtual' communication practices." (83)

As the quote above points to (and as the changing depiction of the game medium and game worlds bears witness to), the real and the virtual (or the imaginary rendered extremely pervasive by certain technologies of communication and entertainment) are so intertwined that leaving one for the other does not seem to be an option anymore. It seems like we are at a point where no one is left out of this game —it is everywhere we look. Seen in this light, "no game no life" may be an apt motto for everyone now, for we preserve the virtual in the real, the real in the virtual. Leaving the real world and entering video

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[9] In *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players*, Jesper Juul defines the term as follows: "Mimetic interface games are often three-dimensional, but encourage interaction between players in player space, and in such a way that player space and 3-D space appear continuous: when bowling in Wii Sports, the game gives the impression that player space continues into the 3-D space of the game." (18)

[10] At the present, however, we cannot talk about a complete synchronicity between the players' actions and the way they are translated into the game space by the virtual reality equipment available. For example, as Alison Gazzard puts it in the very last paragraph of her article, "[s]mall actions in the Wii or the Kinect create much larger onscreen actions between spaces. We are re-training our real world actions such as hitting a ball to the performative aspect of playing the game rather than re-creating the exact bodily experience" ("(Re-)Positioning the Senses: Perceptions of Space in 3D Gameworlds"). Gazzard's description applies (to differing extents) to other virtual reality equipment combining headsets with motion sensors such as the HTC Vive, etc.

games is a commonly employed motif, but it may not be accurate in capturing the contemporary audience experience.

Another recent title manages to come up with an even more radical, yet maybe all the more fitting image for gaming today. Making its debut as a light novel series in 2013, with the manga version appearing in 2015, and the anime version in 2016, *Grimgar of Fantasy and Ash* (*Hai to Gensō no Gurimugaru*) presents the story of a group of people suddenly finding themselves in a "gamelike world" without any recollection of their past lives. What differs noticeably from the earlier stories is that the characters do not have any awareness of being inside a game. In fact, they don't even know the meaning of the word "game." At one point, when somebody in the group accidentally uses the word, saying that they have to be careful during their attacks on goblins for it is not just a game, everyone in the group, including the speaker himself, surprisingly realize that they don't understand what he means. Judging by such bizarre occurrences, the characters understand something is off, yet they have more urgent matters to address, including avoiding death (which is all too real) and providing food for themselves. It is up to the audience to get the game-related references —such as the faint sound effects audible in fighting scenes, generally used in video games to indicate an increase in terms of money or experience as a result of the successfully dealt blow— and put the pieces together. *Grimgar of Fantasy and Ash* thus pushes the experience of gaming to such a central position that the fact that it is a game we are dealing with does not need to be articulated anymore —it is taken for granted to the extent of oblivion. As the experience *in* video games becomes the main theme of the story, and the virtual reality becomes the main setting, video game interfaces get incorporated in the visual aesthetics, along with the gaming terminology finding its way into ordinary conversations. The scene in which the characters notice how familiar they are with the notion of game on an unconscious level can be taken as a metaphor for the medium's growing ubiquity and immersive potential to the point of invisibility.

So far we have been taking a look at intermedial references, more specifically at the instances in which video games and game worlds make an appearance in transmedia narratives. The selected examples suggest that while the appearance of video games as a motif in other media[11] is not entirely a recent phenomenon, the frequency of their appearance, nature of their depiction and role in contributing to storyworlds have been changing. In contrast to earlier titles featuring video games as mere settings clearly reserved for fantastic events (as opposed to "real" world settings), newer titles problematize the intricate technological connection between the real world and virtual ones. In line with the increasing awareness and knowledge of video games as a medium, the particular experience that they provide becomes a prevalent topic in other media.

From now on, let us take a look at the tendencies for producing and consuming narratives, in order to see how narrative structures gain prominence in relation to the media environments promoting affinities between media.

B. GAMELIKE NARRATIVES

In his article "On the Ontology of Fictional Characters," Umberto Eco draws attention to the finality of characters' fate as the main source of emotional attachment for the audience. In the abstract of his paper, Eco gives a round-up of his starting point and conclusions in the following way:

> Why are we deeply moved by the misfortune of Anna Karenina if we are fully aware that she is simply a fictional character who does not exist in our world? […] [S]uccessful fictional characters become paramount examples of the 'real' human condition because they live in an incomplete world [t]hat we have cognitive access to but cannot influence in any way […] Unlike all the other

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[11] Other media, such as (but not limited to) comics, manga, novels, light novels, limited and full animation, TV series, and films. Thanks to transmedia franchising strategies employed all around the world, it is not rare to see story elements, characters, settings, and even narrative conventions being circulated around transmedially.

semiotic objects, which are culturally subject to revisions, and perhaps only similar to

mathematical entities, the fictual [sic] characters will never change and will remain the actors of

what they did once and forever. (82)

Contrastingly, throughout *Gamelike Realism,* Hiroki Azuma explores the relatively recent profusion of

repetitive elements in fiction which put the concept of "finality" in danger. Mortality wanes as lives are

easily restarted, or "*replayed,*" in original as well as in fan-made works. At first glance, this new kind of

"gamelike realism" seems to be drifting away from social realities, taking a direction that might be

criticized as escapism. Indeed, such criticism connects very well with the stereotypical image of the

otaku. Azuma describes this audience group as "those who indulge in forms of subculture strongly linked

to anime, video games, computers, science fiction, special-effects films, anime figurines, and so on"

(*Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* 3), but the otaku is commonly compared to little boys who refuse to

grow past the age of high-school, and engage with (what appears to be) children-oriented media to avoid

adult responsibilities.[12] However, this negative evaluation is too simple to account for the situation, and a

closer examination of Azuma's theory reveals more complexity.

Azuma identifies the type of realism most prevalent especially since the 2000s in light novels, anime,

manga, and games as "gamelike realism." Basically, what brings games to mind is the repeatability of

death and therefore of lives in given storyworlds. This feature, however, seems incompatible with a great

number of works from the history of world literature. Linear narratives —typical examples of which

would be realist novels— are ideally expected to have a beginning and a development, which are fixed in

order and bound to culminate in a final phase, the dénouement, as the word "linear" implies. Such

structure does not allow for the multiplication of any of its three elements. Consequently, no extra life

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[12] The same argument also brings to mind the condemnation of fantasy as a childish and escapist form of fiction in general. Recently, thanks to the success of *Harry Potter* series and similar works across different media, it can be said that the tables have turned for the fantasy genre. Yet again, according to Ursula Le Guin, the stigma attached to fantasy persists, and shows itself in the lack of common knowledge and scholarly attention regarding the genre. See, "The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists" (2009).

(development) which would lead to an extra death (dénouement) can be tolerated —*unless* the narrative is imbued with the logic of games.

In the conclusion of the previous section it was emphasized that video games are becoming more and more familiar to everyone, even to those who do not consider it a preferable form of entertainment. In our age it is pretty easy to embrace a justification of multiple lives, ergo multiple courses of events reaching multiple ends. The secret to this lies in remembering how "players" control the repeatable fates of the "characters" while keeping their own overarching gameplay experience intact. In *Gamelike Realism*, Azuma talks about Sakurazawa Hiroshi's light novel *All You Need is Kill*[13] (2004) for example, and takes it as a metaphor for video games. The main character of the story is able to restart his day (thanks to an alien invention), but each replay resets the memory of other characters. Azuma therefore compares the main character to a game player, who can maintain the memory or the experience of an action, without undergoing any physical change. While death resets everything in-game, the player learns the controls through repetition as s/he moves the character on.

However, Azuma's understanding of gamelikeness goes beyond such partial similarity between video games and other media. What is under discussion is not a simple imitation of one popular medium by various other media, either. Although the connection is clear enough, games are hardly the sole point of origin for the creation and appreciation of multiple-end narratives. As big as it may be, the influence of the game medium merges with other significant social and technological factors, anchoring us again in reality.

So what might this anchoring in reality be, or how can it be considered a type of realism if a text blatantly denies mortality? In order to discuss this, we have to understand what realism in arts meant in the first place —or rather we have to address the paradox at its core.

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[13] Adapted to manga, graphic novel, and film in 2014.

Words are certainly as real as pineapples, but this is precisely the reason they cannot be pineapples. The most they can do is create what Henry James called the 'air of reality' of pineapples. In this sense, all realist art is a kind of con trick – a fact that is most obvious when the artist includes details that are redundant to the narrative (the precise tint and curve of a moustache, let us say) simply to signal: 'This is realism.' In such art, no waistcoat is colourless, no way of walking is without its idiosyncrasy, no visage without its memorable features. Realism is calculated contingency. (Eagleton par. 8)

To begin with, as Terry Eagleton reveals in this passage, realism in arts is not simply capturing real life —it ends up going beyond that. Paradoxically, precisely as it attempts to look objective, realism alters the reality it wants to capture: It presents too many mundane details of daily life that *seem to possess an air of reality*. In the meantime, due to the overwhelming amount of information presented, some other aspects of reality might flee the eye. As Eagleton amusingly states, "Jane Austen's novels are realist, but you could claim that the spooky Gothic fiction she disliked so much reflects more of the anxiety and agitation of an Age of Revolution than *Mansfield Park* does" (par. 1). This brief statement lays bare that we can at least come up with two definitions for realism: mimicking real life on the one hand (the common understanding of realism in arts), presenting the way we perceive life (realism in a wider sense) on the other.

'Reality changes,' Brecht remarked, and 'in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change.' In this sense, a lot of Postmodern art is as realist in its own way as Stendhal or Tolstoy. It is faithful to a world of surfaces, random sensations and schizoid human subjects. Postmodernism takes off when we come to realise that reality itself is now a kind of fiction, a matter of image, virtual wealth, fabricated personalities, media-driven events, political spectaculars and the spin-doctor as artist. Instead of art reflecting life, life has aligned itself with art. In portraying itself, then, art ends up miming reality. (id. par. 9)

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Narratives of gamelike realism obviously cannot be considered realistic in the sense that they are mimicking real life with their practically immortal characters. But such narratives could be considered realistic in a way, in a similar fashion to how postmodern narratives can be considered so, for capturing how significantly technology and media effect our lives and our sense of reality. Today, the accumulation of a massive amount of information and its unstoppable circulation seem to create a new imagery of life arguably manifest in gamelike narratives. Stretching Azuma's line of thought a little, it can be said that we are sucked into worlds of digital technologies and media, which feed us mostly haphazard bits and pieces of information that would go well beyond the experience of an individual, laying bare other individuals lives as alternatives to one's own.

To list the major elements contributing to the birth of a new realism, it may be helpful to start with Azuma's earlier book, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, which he refers to in the very beginning and the end of *Gamelike Realism.* Azuma sets off from the basic assertion that otaku culture actually exposes the essence of our era, the postmodern age, in utmost clarity (which makes it a topic of study beneficial to a larger audience group than the hardcore fans alone). In order to present a timeline of postmodernity, Azuma goes back as far as to World War I, for it was "more than anything else that first began the decline of 'grand narratives' such as 'reason' and 'enlightenment'" (72). Taking up and extending "the decline of the grand narrative," which is a concept originally theorized by Jean-François Lyotard, Azuma explicates in *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* how the void that grand narratives left behind has come to be filled with small narratives and even smaller (non)narrative units that do not form a grand totality. The transition from modernity to our current condition, starting in the early 20th century, arguably found its conclusion with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. According to Azuma, the disappearance of the last grand narrative that was able to set vast social standards in the late 20th century, namely communism, has left us with a "grand nonnarative" or a "database" that serves as the basis of our current mode of consumption.

It is not a coincidence that Azuma picks the word "database" which connects to computers, and to the internet as the largest storage of information.[14] It is thanks to the digital technologies of communication and the internet that our consumption of narratives has gained a remarkable momentum. Yet, the media environment that we inhabit today does not only produce the possibility to access a historically unmatched number of narratives almost instantaneously. It also enables categorizing, breaking down, and remaking narratives on a global scale. To clarify the process here, we can say that once narratives find their place on the same platform, they are easily counterposed to and aligned with all the others. In this way, their common traits become easier to notice, classify, and recombine in different sets at will. Narratives are dissected into settings, events, and characters, which leaves us eventually with "moe-elements" in Azuma's terms, such as sexy cat ears, bad-ass facial scars, hot-and-cold personalities, etc. In *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Azuma describes moe-elements in the following way:

> [E]ach element, with its own origins and background [that] constitutes a category that has been developed in order to stimulate the interest of the consumers. It is not a simple fetish object, but a sign that emerged through market principles. […] [L]et us call these elements, developed to effectively stimulate the *moe* of the consumers, "*moe*-elements" *(moe yōso).* Most of the *moe*-elements are visual, but there are other kinds of *moe*-elements, such as a particular way of speaking, settings, stereotypical narrative development, and the specific curves of a figurine. (42)

In most cases, moe-elements, or the smallest building units of narratives, come with little or no inherent narrative value of their own. Instead, they come with a pronounced compatibility with various sorts of other elements, and an affective value of their own. Affective value here refers to "prepersonal intensities" transferred between bodies and effecting them to differing extents —comparable to but different from feelings and emotions in that they don't require the receiver to be a socially defined

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[14] The connection is made explicit sometimes even in dictionary definitions of the word "database": "a collection of organized, related data, esp. one in electronic form that can be accessed and manipulated by specialized computer software" (*Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary*).

subject.[15] Today, moe-elements function as entry points for the audience. Once the audience have a list of their favorite ones, they can easily find narratives fitting their taste or make their own "patchwork" narratives, so to speak.

One of the most obvious consequences of the situation described above is that it deals a fatal blow to the author's (creator's) role, along with the notion of the (art)work's originality. If everyone can access the same pool of building blocks —and thanks to the internet a huge number of people can—, and if they have developed a taste for certain elements, anyone can create a narrative fitting their taste. Moreover, any narrative created in this way, consisting of equally substitutable database elements, ends up to be a possibly substitutable element itself. Eventually, the author and his "unique" perspective are proliferated to an extent that puts the modernist understanding of their uniqueness in question. "Prosumers," in this case consumers who also produce narratives, seem to have taken the place of authors.

In short, collectively formed databases, with the internet being their penultimate example and merger, work as the main basis for narrative consumption *and* creation today. An uncountable number of alternative fictional threads are being accumulated in a constantly expanding database which owes its existence to mass media, and its current pervasiveness to the scope of the World Wide Web. One more point to emphasize here, however, is that the mode of consumption in question is not limited to the online world. Just like the popular narratives discussed in the previous section reflect, the looming presence of the ubiquitous database spills over even into offline situations. As Hito Steyerl illustrates in "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?", our online actions and the information that we share with an always

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[15] Despite its vagueness, the term affect/affectation is employed here in the sense that it appears in Deleuze and Guattari's writings, defined by Brian Massumi in the following way:

> Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). L'affect (Spinoza's affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. L'affection (Spinoza's affectio) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies). (A Thousand Plateaus xvi)

This term will be further discussed in the context of anime in the second chapter.

ambiguous body of "others" prove their influence over our "real lives" in remarkable ways: they can get you rich, they can get you arrested, they can drive millions to the streets for protests, they can get you a wife, they can decide what is going to be on the billboard in your neighborhood.[16] Even more vital to our understanding of the contemporary consumption environment is that staying completely offline does not the change the database dynamics: we know that any work will just join the others in a list somewhere, and that the lists will also be crossmatched, merged, and updated continuously. This awareness of an overarching system of connections and combinations guides imagination in offline as well as online environments, merging consumption and production by awakening a potential in parts to form a whole, and in the whole to break into its parts.

Azuma's theory reveals how "narrative media" can incorporate multiple alternative developments, despite such media's inevitable linearity which seems to stand in stark contrast to games. In game studies, the term "narrative media" generally refers to media forms that are deemed to be non-interactive and story-driven as opposed to games which are interactive and system driven. While this very sharp distinction between games and other media appears in many influential works, it runs the risk of blocking the path for new and potent directions for research.[17] Azuma's theory posits that even the most linear scenario *automatically* conjures the ghosts of its alternatives. This is how a gamelikeness, or a metanarrative quality arise: with the appearance of a database that turns everything into exchangeable units, melting the difference between one ending and infinite others, between consumption and production, between human factor and automatization in an endless circulation. Each character (and each smaller unit building up a character) appear as an alternative to others. In this way, each character can be

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[16] The whole volume of articles issued under the title *The Internet Does Not Exist* by the *e-flux* journal provides a multifaceted analysis of our complex relations with the internet, and its political outcomes today. Additionally, in a separate work entitled *The Wretched of the Screen*, Steyerl herself addresses the issue in further detail.

[17] In the scope of this thesis this term will be used for the sake of convenience —not to imply that there are essential differences between games and other media, but as a short-cut to refer to the media compared to video-games here. For a more flexible understanding of narrative media (based on the understanding of narrativity as a matter of degree), see the introduction.

moved from text to text —which also appear as substitutes for each other—, *regardless of their resemblance to game players or game characters, and regardless of any open references to games*.

Reinstating a Timeline

Inextricably tied to each other in the way that they are produced, marketed, distributed, and consumed, the media of today reflect this kind of gamelikeness in general, and in a more and more pronounced manner. While Azuma picks Japanese popular media as his case study, he also claims that his findings point to the general direction the world is heading to. It can be argued that Jan-Noël Thon's *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* confirms the applicability of Azuma's argument to a larger transmedial context. Aiming to contribute to the field of narratology by developing a truly transmedial approach, Thon discusses the concepts of storyworld, narrator, and subjectivity in great detail. Underlying all three is the discussion of "metalepsis," a term "coined by Gérard Genette, who defines it as 'any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse'" (Thon 65). While metalepsis may seem too particular or peculiar a subject matter to yield much insight into transmediality, Thon further describes it as a

> […] by now largely conventionalized strategy of narrative representation—figuring prominently not only in contemporary films such as David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, David Fincher's *Fight Club*, or Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation*, but also in contemporary comics such as Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* series or Mike Carey and Peter Gross's *The Unwritten* series and contemporary video games such as Double Fine's *Psychonauts* or *Remedy's Alan Wake*—that is characterized by a metareferential play with the ontological boundaries between the "diegetic levels" or subworlds […] (65)

As Thon's brief list hints at, narratives that incorporate different diegetic levels in a similar fashion to *All You Need is Kill* are not rare these days. In fact, some of the titles —such as the first two appearing in the

short paragraph above— already date back to the 1990s. Also as the examples reveal, such titles are not limited to a specific medium. "Metanarrativity" in Azuma's wording is a transmedial trait, and can manifest in forms other than subworlds particularly nested within a video game. As Thon states in reference to Marie-Laure Ryan's works, "subworlds may encompass the whole range of what Ryan describes as 'F-universes'—that is, 'dreams, hallucinations, fantasies, and fictional [as well as factual] stories told to or composed by the characters'" (54). Basically, any "story within a story" appearing in any medium of choice presents the possibility for the characters to traverse alternative courses of action repeatedly. Similarly, while dreams or mental tricks can become other excuses to repeat the same scenario or to replay it with alterations, thanks to the introduction of new perspectives or new "information sources" such as diaries, annals, etc., stories can be revised or evolve into radically different ones. Game worlds also fall under the category of F-universes, and the motif of entering game worlds provides justification for multiple death and replays in a single story. But, as we have noted, now that we are very familiar with the mechanism, even narratives which do not incorporate a variety in diegetic levels on their own, can be imagined "as if" they were the dreams or in-game adventures of a database hero/ine.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to claim that it is the internet, as the biggest database mankind has produced so far, that has increased our familiarity with metaleptic narrative strategies. Nevertheless, contemporary communication technologies as a whole, including —but not limited to— the internet as a communication platform more than a static database, deserve some credit here. According to Azuma, actively chopping narratives down or embedding them in meta-frames —or hypodiegetic levels such as dreams or video games— is in line with the rise of communication media. Communication media have challenged the binary opposition of active creator and passive receiver, by giving birth to one actor assuming both roles: an active receiver who contributes to the content s/he receives and puts it back in circulation.

However, there is another side to the link between communication and narrative structures that we have to consider. Despite the fact that the peculiarity of the postmodern situation has been sufficiently

emphasized, the existence of some undercurrents tying our current environment to the past should be acknowledged as well. Communication can be a keyword also to build a bridge between modern narratives and the postmodern. In *Gamelike Realism*, Azuma himself mentions Shinichirō Inaba's attempt in *Modan no Kūrudaun* (NTT Publishing, 2006) to connect *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* with Ōtsuka Eiji's discussion of the manga-anime realism, through the concept of "publicness."[18] The gist of Inaba's argument can be summarized as follows: Both modern and postmodern literature serve the same social purpose, which is creating a common space for communication. The difference between the two traditions actually stems from a matter of efficiency. If modern literature preferred "true to life" depictions and portraits, it was not simply because the authors wanted to capture the mundane. It was rather because such depictions carried great informational, thus communicational value at the time, for huge groups of people shared the same ideologies or social standards which provided the key to narrative interpretation. In other words, mimicking social realities would communicate messages that a lot of people could decipher, and that was the source of interest in "true to life" depictions and portraits. Postmodern literature, on the other hand, was born after ideologies, social standards, big and universal values were tested and found unreliable. As the relativity of grand narratives came to the fore, smaller and smaller narratives —the functionality of which depended on the context— started to take their place. It can be said that this new social environment has produced its own basis for narrative interpretation: a database for small narratives —like different perspectives on the same ethical question that used to be answered in the guidance of collective values, ideology, religion, etc.—, along with the smaller data elements that form them, which gain their validity only in interrelation and combination.

But when did the database emerge? Since when have we been seeing moe-elements everywhere? Reading Azuma from the perspective of Jacques Rancière's *The Future of the Image* presents a way to revise and complement Azuma's theory. The following quote describes the nature and function of a "collective imagery" which clearly brings to mind the "database," although Rancière himself never uses the word.

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[18] *Gamelike Realism*, 61-66.

However, there is a big difference in Rancière's account, regarding when the phenomenon in question appeared.

> [I]n the nineteenth century […] a major trade in collective imagery was created […]: giving members of a 'society' with uncertain reference-points the means of seeing and amusing themselves in the form of defined types; creating around market products a halo of words and images that made them desirable; assembling, thanks to mechanical presses and the new procedure of lithography, an encyclopaedia of the shared human inheritance: remote life-forms, works of art, popularized bodies of knowledge. The point at which Balzac makes decoding signs written on stone, clothes and faces the motor of novelistic action, and when art critics begin to see a chaos of brush-strokes in representations of the Dutch bourgeoisie of the golden age, is also the time when the *Magasin pittoresque,* and the physiognomies of the student, the lorette, the smoker, the grocer and every imaginable social type, are launched. It is a period that witnesses an unlimited proliferation of the vignettes and little tales in which a society learns to recognize itself […] (16)

Similar to Inaba, Rancière points to the communicative potential of realist texts. The texts, and the mundane, ordinary, silent scenes that they depict, seem to have gained their own voice. The image —be it textual or visual—[19] can speak now, precisely because the audience have learned how to read it. In other words, realist texts were not describing the obvious and therefore were understandable to everyone. Rather than that, faces and things were *made obvious* by the mass media of the age —*Magasin*

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[19] Rancière defines "image" in the following, transmedial way:
> 'Image' […] refers to two different things. There is the simple relationship that produces the likeness of an original: not necessarily its faithful copy, but simply what suffices to stand in for it. And there is the interplay of operations that produces what we call art: or precisely an alteration of resemblance. This alteration can take a myriad of forms. It might be the visibility given to brush-strokes that are superfluous when it comes to revealing who is represented by the portrait; an elongation of bodies that expresses their motion at the expense of their proportions; a turn of language that accentuates the expression of a feeling or renders the perception of an idea more complex; a word or a shot in place of the ones that seemed bound to follow; and so on and so forth. (6-7)

pittoresque being one example—, which owed their presence to print technologies such as the mechanical press and lithography.

Obviously, Rancière does not contrast the realist and linear texts of the 19th century with postmodern texts. For him, there is a rupture between the "aesthetic regime" that appears with the birth of the collective imagery and the "representative regime" that preceded it —not between realism and postmodernism. The representative regime was based on a strict arrangement of what art *can* and *cannot* show. Too much information would only cloud reason, and that's why Corneille's *Oedipus* got rid of the chorus that stated the obvious. The aesthetic regime, on the other hand, works on the principle that everything is equally representable. Even the most trifle actions like washing the dishes can make their way into art, to be depicted in the same meticulous manner as death and torture. However, this principle of equal representability paradoxically leaves art devoid of a particular language to put the principle into use.

If postmodern texts differ from the realist literature of the 19th century, for Rancière that is practically a matter of intensity. The appearance of an "encyclopaedia," which made categories not only visible but also "amusing," has gradually evolved into "a boundless Shop/Library/Museum where all films, texts, photographs and paintings coexist; and where they can all be broken up into elements" (30). It is true that this "boundless Shop/Library/Museum" has brought about an additional "combinatory capacity of the sign, open to being combined with any element from a different sequence to compose new sentence-images *ad infinitum*" (30), created an environment that also mixes art and popular culture inevitably. However, the basis was and is the "collective imagery" which grants the — textual or visual— image its own voice.

Surprisingly, Eco's "On the Ontology of Fictional Characters" can actually provide us with a basic frame to combine the terms "collective imagery" and "database." Although Eco points to the fixed fate of fictional characters as the main trigger of emotional reaction in the audience, he also notes the possibility

of popular characters' clinging to life "independent of their original scores" (87) and owing to their "diagnostic properties" (89).

> Hamlet or Sherlock Holmes acquired *a sort of existence independent of their original scores*. Many fictional characters "live" outside the score which has given them existence, and move to a zone of the universe which we find very difficult to delimit. Some of them even migrate from text to text because the collective imagination has, over the course of the centuries, made emotional investments in them and has transformed them into *fluctuating* individuals. (87)

Despite the fact that Eco does not pinpoint when exactly the respective "collective imagination" appeared, he obviously acknowledges its presence and effects. Paraphrasing the quote, we can say that even characters from linear narratives can redraw their fate or embark upon brand new adventures in entirely different settings, granted that they have gained enough popularity —to ensure that they will be recognized in any different scenario— over time. In the paragraph following the quote above, it is also noted that "[b]ecoming a fluctuating entity does not depend on the aesthetic qualities of the original score" (87). Be it a bestseller or a world classic, any narrative *can be consumed* in a way that justifies alternative fates for the same character then. Those who prefer database consumption (or production) can take characters out of their original contexts and make their own stories.

More surprisingly, however, Eco goes on to point out that we imagine alternatives and that we yearn for change sometimes, even when we adhere to the model of narrative consumption that prescribes only one life for each character:

> Just think —we are watching *Oedipus Rex* and we feel sorry that this fellow did not take any other road instead of the one where he met and murdered his father, and wonder why he reached Tebes and not, let us say, Athens, where he could have married Phryne or Aspasia? We read

Hamlet asking why such a nice boy could not marry Ophelia and live with her happily, having killed that scoundrel of his uncle and gently kicked his mother out of Danmark? (96)

Eco's questions are obviously rhetorical, and they might look too obvious, but they draw attention to a noteworthy point. The imagination of alternatives as an integral part of the narrative consumption model he describes, for without imagining alternative ends, you can't relate to tragedy, or any other type of fiction. The contrast between gamelike narratives and realist fiction with its emphasis on finality might overshadow this basic resemblance in their consumption. Nevertheless, clearly, the resemblance comes with a twist: according to Eco, alternatives can be imagined, but under no circumstances do they leave a mark on the story.

> The devastating experience of discovering that, in spite of our wishes, Hamlet, Robert Jordan or Prince Andrej died, *that things happened in that way, and forever, no matter what we wanted, hoped or yearned during the course of our reading, makes us to* [sic] *feel the shiver of Destiny*. We realize that we cannot decide whether Ahab will capture the Whale or not. The real lesson of *Moby Dick* is that the whale goes wherever She wants. (96) (emphasis mine)

It is quite surprising to see how close this model actually stands to the model of database consumption, yet it is so clearly different at the same. Why can't we make the whale go another way? If we already have alternatives in mind, why don't we go ahead and take the last step? Why don't we, or why can't we allow ourselves to find pleasure in giving a new fate to the same set of characters?

It could be claimed that there is another change in perspective here that contributes to the transformation in the way we approach narratives. The model of reading/consumption explained here by Eco differs radically from the postmodern consumption of narratives on two premises. In the latter;

1. *The character is no longer a product of the social limitations,*

2. *Characters' lives can be considered particular realizations among infinite possibilities.*

In direct contrast to what social realism of the 19th century dictates, the ties between the character and his/her surroundings are generally severed in contemporary narratives. If the motto was "experience makes the man" in a given social context, the postmodern motto can be "X was born this way." If the consumer wants more adventures with the same character, it comes at the expense of the character's complexity. For only by believing that X is X in every condition possible, one can imagine multiple scenarios featuring X. In postmodern narratives, then, conditions do not slowly mold the character into its final shape. The characters are given recognizable forms from the start, through the simplified database elements constituting them, which makes it possible to imagine them in alternative scenarios. In other words, the characters owe their mobility to the database, which ensures that they are identifiable in any given condition.

19th century realism, on the other hand, did not particularly favor such a mobility for characters. In fact, the unyielding limitations it brought upon characters might be considered as this particular tradition's most distinguishing feature.

> We initially discover reality not as a simple sum of "facts." Rather, we discover reality as a sum of necessities and constraints that do not allow us to do what we would like to do or to live as we would like to live. […] This was the actual meaning of nineteenth-century realist literature and art, which presented "sober" and elaborate descriptions of the disappointments, frustrations, and failures that confronted romantic, socially and emotionally "idealistic" heroes when they tried to implement their ideals in "reality." […] Thus, the object depicted by realist literature and art was not reality itself—as described by the natural sciences—but the human psyche suffering from the shock of a failed reality test. Nineteenth-century realism was, in actuality, psychologism. Reality

was understood not as a place of "objective" scientific investigation but as a force of oppression that endangered or even crushed the hero. (1-2)

In this lengthy quote taken from "Towards the New Realism," Boris Groys defines the tradition of realism in relation to its focus on the limitations caused by social realities and their psychological effects, rather than in relation to a focus on real life per se. The reality of the 19th century realism seems to be a negative, frustrating, oppressive set of obstacles in the way of fictional characters, as well as their creators, to live as they idealized. In the most prominent works of the age, the characters are given roles only as important as the chains keeping them where they belong in society. Obviously, it is extremely difficult to imagine a compatibility between the mobility granted to characters in gamelike narratives and the constraining nature of 19th century realism. However, as the title of his article implies, Groys finds a connection between 19th century and today, in that we are currently witnessing the return of realism, or the appearance of a "new realism:"

> The return of realism means a de facto return of psychology and psychologism. And, indeed, one can see this return in the new popularity of the psychological novel, psychological cinema, psychological theater, and, in a small circle of contemporary art, the increasing presence of photography and video works that thematize the psychology of the artist who created them and/or the protagonists who inhabit them. (5)

While finding a connection between the tendencies of the 19th century and contemporary media brings to mind Rancière's theory in a way, Groys spots the main commonality in psychologism. For Groys, the oppression of real life limitations is always expressed in art, for the disappointment is never openly acknowledged as one's own. Instead, it always gets projected on the psyche of others and is necessarily pushed to the realm of fiction. Precisely here arises a paradox for realism: as it addresses a real problem, it does so through the psyche, which is never accessible to scientific introspection.

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While Groys claims that artistic realism as psychologism is back, the situation is not entirely the same as before. Again in a somehow similar fashion to Rancière, Groys points to the ubiquity of our online database, and its unignorable role within the art scene today. To put it short, the futile attempt of the avant-garde and the modernists to merge art and life seems to have been accomplished in a sense, thanks to the internet. Now, it can be said that art is consumed on the same platform that it is produced and documented. Moreover, it is consumed on the same platform along with any other non-artistic product. In other words, art does not stand out among the daily activities it is aligned with on the internet —it is as real as our social life online, beyond speculation or fiction.

However, the modernists and the avant-garde aimed to merge art and life for a reason. They expected art to turn into a tool, a technology, which would in turn enable us to revolutionize life and control technological progress. Unfortunately, it is at this point that contemporary art has failed to live up to their expectations. The art of the internet age, an art as real as the mundane tasks that we handle on the internet, has not brought us to a more favorable state. Today, the feeling that our disappointment with life persists, gives us all the more reason to feel disappointed with art too.

If we follow Groys' line of thought, we might venture to say that the realism of the 19th century expressed disappointment with real-life limits, especially those posed by the society. It would be absurdly optimistic to deny that our disappointment with life has vanished since then thanks to the progress we have made in the meantime as humankind. Mass media themselves make it clear that our problems persist on multiple different levels, by endlessly circulating crisis, terror, and disaster related news. However, it can also be argued that by bringing together all the information related to different socio-economic contexts, today's mass media make individuals' lives seem like one particular manifestation among infinite options. The database model applies to facts and fiction alike, and once all the professions and lifestyles appear side by side on the same platform, they all look exchangeable. Mass media do not only

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distribute information, they also make it possible for their audience to imagine themselves in other social, economic, historical, geographical situations, and to desire alternatives. At this point, Arjun Appadurai's definition of "mediascape" might clear the picture a little more:

> *Mediascapes*, whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets of metaphors by which people live (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) as they help to constitute narratives of the Other and protonarratives of possible lives, fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement. ("Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" 591)

Within such mediascapes, the existence of human beings looks as if it is subjected to constrictions beyond basic socio-economic conditions, as such conditions appear only coincidental. If it is equally possible to imagine ourselves in any given condition, regardless of whether we can fulfill our fantasies in real life, the only fact that remains applicable to every single condition is that there will always be other possibilities left out. As an extension of the same idea, while each lifestyle or career choice comes with its own set of promises, there is no lifestyle or career choice that can stand out among the full list as *the* most suitable choice for a certain person.

However, media cannot be credited with creating such a deep change in our way of thinking singlehandedly. As technological products themselves, it is not surprising that different media have always reflected a wider scientific transformation in their own ways. Just like the 19th century realism resonated with the theories of Darwin and Freud, the 20th and the 21st centuries have had their share of

influential scientific theories. Marie-Laure Ryan summarizes the parallel between science and narrative traditions since the 20th century very clearly in the following way:

> In 20th-century literature, the classical ontological model that underlies realism gives way to an ontology that questions its central tenet: the hierarchical relation that places a single actual world at the center of the system and subordinates merely possible worlds to this actual world. Some science fiction texts build an ontology inspired by the so-called "many-worlds" interpretation of quantum mechanics […]. In this ontology, which relies on the idea of parallel universes, all possibilities are realized in some world, and the distinction between the factual and the counterfactual disappears. This distinction is also challenged when a postmodern narrative presents many incompatible versions of certain events without singling out one of these versions as corresponding to the actual world (cf. Robert Coover's short story "The Babysitter" or films like *The Butterfly Effect*). ("Possible Worlds" par. 20)

With the popularization of the "many-worlds" interpretation of quantum mechanics, the understanding of real as well as fictional lives seems to have incorporated a multitude of alternative developments in one body, gaining a gamelike quality in Azuma's phrasing. Moreover, even when they walk the most linear of routes, real people as well as fictional characters might always be traversing a garden of forking paths in their own imagination or someone else's. While it is possible to claim that therefore we have no grand narratives but a grand nonnarrative, it may also be assumed that this awareness of possible worlds has become the grand narrative of our times.

Since the late 20th century, digital technologies and the internet have pronounced the presence of —if not produced from scratch— a "database" which has brought along a new way to engage with narratives. This database is not only a huge archive that brings together all sorts of narratives for everyone around the

world. It also makes it possible to break those narratives and list up their tiniest units of similarity. In other words, it provides a new perspective on narratives as temporary sets of substitutable units.

However, Rancière's writings point to the fact that it was indeed the 19th century that witnessed the appearance of a collective imagery which in turn gave birth to the precursor of the database —an encyclopaedia. This encyclopaedia made categories and types available for masses, and thereby more familiar and recognizable in a multitude of different contexts. Nevertheless, in the wake of postmodernity, this process has gained huge intensity. While the database revealed the exchangeable units in every story, what finally set the exchange in motion was a parallel change in perspective: social limits came to be considered in a lesser light as the discoveries in physics were popularized as the the idea of possible lives in infinite universes.

Today, as a result of the factors briefly mentioned here and more, the ties that anchored a character to a certain setting or plot have been largely severed. Now that the database has fixed the affective value of characters —along with their subunits— and set them free from their context, all we have left to do is to recombine them in different variations.

C. "PLAYING" NARRATIVES

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed a significant change, if not a total break in the way that we engage with narratives. The appearance of the database model hasn't eradicated or fully replaced the previous model of narrative production and consumption that assumed the finality of characters' fate as the main source of aesthetic pleasure. Moreover, as Rancière draws attention to, the two models are inherently interconnected, as it was in the 19th century that a collective imagery made its first appearance. However, today, the existence of this collective imagery is more pronounced than ever before.

In postmodernity, the audience grew quite occupied with endlessly breaking down and categorizing real-life accounts in addition to fictional narratives. This process is enabled by and contributes to the huge collection of affective units we have developed thanks to mass media technologies. In contemporary "gamelike" narratives, not only certain characters, but every type of character, setting, and story, along with their subunits, can break free from their original scores. Moreover, contemporary gamelike *readings* can be applied to any linear narratives.

The previous section discussed the so-called gamelikeness of contemporary narratives in this way, along with the social and technological background that has not only paved the way, but also played a significant role in shaping them. From here on, the question naturally follows, in what way do we play gamelike narratives? How can we compare and contrast the process to playing actual games?

If we are going to acknowledge a gamelikeness that applies to media in general, but nevertheless are going to discuss media specificity, Brian Upton's definition of play might give us the necessary common ground. In *The Aesthetic of Play,* Upton states that "play" is basically "free movement within a system of constraints" (15). This is a straightforward definition, based on an earlier and lengthier one offered by Johan Huizinga, diluted and repurposed in a way that makes the definition applicable not only to a wide variety of games, but also to the so-called narrative media. Right after the definition, Upton provides this brief yet illuminating explanation:

> Play is a process, not a thing. It is a series of moves, either mental or physical, carried out by the player. These moves are free in the sense that the player has control over what he will do next, but this freedom is bound by a set of constraints. These constraints limit the moves available to the player at any moment to a relatively small number. Furthermore, these constraints aren't random; they are organized into a system that is structured to deliver a particular experience. (15)

First of all, play is a process. By stating that, not only does Upton distinguish it from the general, static understanding of "game" (for example, what one can find inside the box of *Monopoly*), but he also reveals that the activity of playing is not reserved or inherently connected to a certain set of subjects.[20] Upton contributes further to the inclusive image he draws for the term, by positing that play can consist of mental as well as physical moves. This is, actually, how the notion becomes applicable to narrative media. Yet, obviously, in order to function, the definition has to exclude some things, and Upton draws the line when it comes to real life.

While the definition applies to narratives in general, Upton makes it very clear that it doesn't apply to real life. That is basically because life does not come with a deliberate set of constraints that produce only a limited number of options as the result of a given action. In other words, actions in life bear infinite possibilities as to what will follow, and they always merge with uncountable external factors when they yield an outcome. For example, one might study to enter the law school, read a certain number of books, get prepared in a traditional fashion. While the goal is clear enough, and the most promising action to lead us to the goal is carried out, getting sick on the day of the exam can spoil the plan out of the blue. Even when the student makes it to the law school successfully, one can never be sure of the role of chance in the process.

Of course, there also are situations in life which clarify the consequences of certain tasks. Imagine that you are a plumber, and you have to fix a sink. With the tools and skills you have, you accomplish the task

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[20] Gonzalo Frasca points to the implications and the significance of definitions in the field with the following words:

> Certainly, games can either be framed as activities or as objects. Games as activities are framed around the players: games are something players do. Framing games as objects shifts the focus towards the system. When that happens, games are something where players participate within. It is a subtle distinction but the consequences are crucial. Ideologically, the first approach is human-centric while the second is system-centric. As a direct consequence of this, the first approach may be more compatible with studies that favor player behavior (such as psychology, sociology or anthropology) while the second may be better suited for activities dealing with the system itself, such as game design. (*Play the Message* 41)

and get your reward as payment. However, this system gives you not so much freedom as to the ways you can deal with the situation. Efficiency being the main criteria for evaluation, it would make little sense to try out a different tool to fix the problem than your ordinary set, and creativity in addressing the problem would bring no extra benefit. At the context of a business environment, then, the system might be too strict, privileging certain actions over others to the extent that it doesn't create enough space and motivation to try out alternatives.

Taking one step according to the "constraints" —which are not simply the rules of a game alone, but rather a combination of the rules and our *understanding* of them— will make a certain set of following actions possible, while leaving some others impossible for the player. In Upton's terms, every move in a game will generate a "horizon of [possible] action," which needs to be updated constantly. In contrast to real life, by narrowing down the outcomes of our actions, and by guaranteeing that every valid action creates a change, game designers try to produce a meaningful and pleasant journey for the gamer. Therefore a strong sense of causality that we lack in our daily struggles comes to the fore in games.

However, while the "horizon of action describes the set of all the things a player can do at a particular moment" (47), it does not always match with our expectations about how the game should work. For the "set of all states that the player believes to be valid, attainable, and desirable in the near future" (48), Upton coins a different term: "horizon of intent." Right after introducing the two terms —horizon of action and intent—, Upton states that there must be an overlap between the two horizons in order for a game to be playable. For this reason one might think that clarity should naturally be the one and only aim in game design. However, without a sense of mystery, Upton claims that the experience will be gravely lacking.

In order to make the horizons of intent and action interesting, *The Aesthetic of Play* lists the following criteria along with the ways they should be met:

Choice Horizons offer a range of possible actions.

Variety Horizons aren't repeated.

Consequence Actions have outcomes.

Predictability Outcomes can be anticipated.

Uncertainty Outcomes aren't predetermined.

Satisfaction Desirable outcomes are attainable. (51)

Upton's expectations of an interesting game play boil down to having a system of constraints that produce a balance of predictability/unpredictability, and allow for a limited variety of action at a time. If possible actions are limited, their connections to each other and to specific consequences are easier to trace, and when we build causality, it helps us pick the next action which will probably lead us to the desirable end that we have in mind. Of course, while the game should keep producing new horizons, it is also important that it shouldn't follow a too predictable pattern in introducing them or introduce too similar horizons in the first place.

Fleshed out in this manner, it becomes clear how Upton's brief definition works in practice. Moreover, according to Upton, with little adjustment only, the criteria listed above can also be used as a guideline to create an interesting "narrative play." The key change, however, lies in taking the interaction with a narrative as a process of mental, more specifically interpretive action first: "Choice in narrative is interpretive choice. We aren't able to choose what words appear next on the page, but we are able to choose the meaning that we assign to the words that do appear" (240). Seen in this light, our engagement with narrative media appear as active as our engagement with games. The way we interpret and understand a text might differ radically from how another person interprets and understands the same text. Moreover, a second or a third encounter of the same person with the same text might yield different interpretations too.

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However, interpretation as such does not form the totality of our experience with narrative media. It is clear that we can't change the course of events narrated in a book or a movie, which might create the impression that narrative play arises only in retrospect, as the freedom to choose whatever interpretation that explains or increases the pleasure of whatever happened in a story. Described in this manner, the experience might feel too limited to be comparable to our experience with games. But a closer look at Upton's understanding of interpretation exposes its other, future oriented side: "As each beat is resolved by an interpretive move, our accumulated interpretations structure our expectation of future beats" (222). As we proceed with a narrative, we interpret every new twist in a way to fit in with our general understanding of the narrative, and in ways to provide us with a basis to expect what's coming next. In other words, lead by the texts themselves, we "move from beat to beat, seeking out ways to understand what has come before and to predict what will come next" (280). Here the audience can be considered active in the sense that they need to keep processing the information they acquire step by step. More importantly, this quote clearly reveals that for Upton there are two fundamental elements of narrative play: interpretation and anticipation. In the light of the information provided in sequence, not only do we gain an understanding of *what happened* in retrospect, but we also keep guessing *what will probably happen* as we proceed. Then it can be said that Upton's assertion takes imagining alternative routes for narrative development as an organic part of our engagement especially with traditional works of fiction. Despite the "finality" of their endings, even linear texts keep opening (and closing) horizons of anticipation in the mind of the audience, which brings to mind Umberto Eco's model of narrative consumption introduced in detail in the previous section.[21]

According to Upton, not only a combination, but a balance of predictability and uncertainty is necessary for narrative play —in fact, for any type of anticipatory play such as in the case puzzles, turn-based

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[21] The connection between the two authors is not limited to this similarity. As a matter of fact, Upton openly refers to Eco's *The Limits of Interpretation* and *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Seimotics of Texts* in two chapters of his book.

games, etc. As for the creation of an *interesting* case of narrative play, one needs to follow the six criteria applicable to any sort of games as we have previously mentioned. Luckily, Upton provides the readers with a table of additional and very specific instructions this time:

Choice Leave gaps to be filled by the readers' interpretive moves. Don't tell too much.

Variety Continually develop your plot, characters, and themes. Each narrative beat should offer a fresh horizon to explore.

Consequence Avoid gratuitous elements. Each narrative beat should influence the beats that follow.

Predictability Avoid plot holes. What comes before should guide the reader toward what comes after.

Uncertainty Avoid clichés, stock characters, formulaic plots, and on-the-nose writing. The reader should never be completely certain what will happen next.

Satisfaction Avoid loose ends. As the story winds down, resolve the reader's chains of anticipatory play. (253)

While Upton thus reveals the secret recipe for successful narrative construction, it becomes clear how important he thinks it is to create a balance between predictability and uncertainty —not only because he names two heuristics simply after them, but also because each and every heuristic contributes to the balance somehow. For example, while it is strongly advised under **choice** to avoid giving too much information, hence to create a certain amount of uncertainty/unpredictability, **consequence** and **satisfaction** pronounce the necessity to clarify connections between events and actions, helping the audience to interpret the course of action and to predict what is to follow.

Interestingly, this model of careful calculation and balance shows a striking similarity to "a specific regime of art that exclusively merits the name of the *representative regime*" (117) (emphasis mine) in

Jacques Rancière's words. "This system adjusts the relations between what can be seen and what can be said, between the unfolding of schemas of intelligibility and the unfolding of material manifestations" (117). Although this brief definition leaves a lot in the dark, it does posit the representative regime firstly as a system that requires connections to be made between what is visible, sayable, and knowable, and secondly as a system of balance that acknowledges the existence and requires the banishment of the *in*visible, *un*sayable, and *un*knowable from art.

In order to discuss the concept in detail, Rancière resorts to the example of how Corneille composed his *Oedipe* by adjusting Sophocles' *Oedipus* according to the ideals of the representative regime. Rancière summarizes the main alterations Corneille made on *Oedipus* as follows: "He places off-stage the undue visibility of the blinded eyes, but also the excessive knowledge of Tiresias, whose oracles are only reported. But above all, he subjects the *pathos* of knowledge to a logic of action by palliating Sophocles's third 'defect': the lack of love interest" (215). The removal of the visual depiction of a violent action (gouging-out of Oedipus' eyes) and the introduction of a love story might be seen as simple tricks to address the sensitivities of the age and to render the play appropriate to be staged in 17th century France. However, Rancière claims that Corneille's adjustments tackle with a deeper issue of representation at the core.

> The blinded eyes, the excessive obviousness of the oracles, and the absence of love interest pertain in effect to one and the same imbalance. On the one hand, there is a surplus of the visible, which is not subordinated to speech, which imposes itself. On the other hand, there is a surplus of the intelligible. The oracles say too much. There is too much knowledge that arrives prematurely and overarches what the tragic action should only gradually unveil […]. Between what is visible and what is intelligible there is a missing link, a specific type of interest capable of ensuring a suitable relationship between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, the expected

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and the unexpected; and also of adjusting the relationship of distance and proximity between

stage and auditorium. (212)

Corneille's understanding of art is based on the following three: first, the counterposition of the visible/invisible, sayable/unsayable, knowable/unknowable, and the expectable/unexpectable; second, the interconnectedness of these four aspects; and third, the necessary banishment of "excess." In Sophocles' text, the scene of blinding shows the audience too much violence to succumb to meaning and to be put into words, while the oracles reveal too much information about the course of events and leave nothing to expectation. Therefore, getting rid of the blinding scene does not simply produce a less offensive story; coupled with the trimming of the oracles, it helps building a causal connection —the missing link— between *a limited number of interpretable actions*. The love interest devised by Corneille serves the same purpose: it increases the number of people to whom the prophecies might apply, and thus adds to the air of mystery counterbalancing the decidedness of the fate foreseen. In this way, the central question that Sophocles' *Oedipus* was built upon —is there a point in knowing the fate that you cannot change?— or its "pathos of knowledge" gets "subjected to a specific form of intelligibility: the causal connection between actions" (116). Constrained by a "rationality peculiar to fiction" (120), each narrative beat, each significant event is given a consequence, and the accumulation of knowledge is rewarded with a better chance of interpretation and anticipation.

In light of the above, hopefully the similarity between the representative regime and Upton's model of narrative play has become clear. To put it shortly, it can be said that both systems favor a primacy of —diegetic, as well as interpretive and anticipatory— action through a balance of predictability and uncertainty, and an emphasized sense of causality. Therefore, the "do"s and "don't"s that Upton lists for the creation of an interesting narrative ("Don't tell too much", "Avoid plot holes", etc.) are directly applicable to Corneille's understanding of an ideal narrative, while Corneille's example strengthens Upton's claim.

However, Rancière announces that the representative regime has already been replaced with a newer one, namely the aesthetic regime which came into existence in the 19th century. The aesthetic regime stands in stark contrast to its predecessor, mainly in that it does not require a process of careful selection to ensure artistic representation. In the 19th century the budding technologies of mass media laid the groundwork for making all sorts of information accessible. Consequently, once the world's knowledge stood in reserve, anything and everything, no matter how mundane, gained the potential to speak for themselves in a given artwork. Everything, then, has become equally representable without recourse to a balance of visibility/invisibility.

Paradoxically, though, while the aesthetic regime is marked by an abundance of information, it is also maimed by it: "Contrasting with the representative scene of visibility of speech is an equality of the visible that invades discourse and paralyzes action" (Rancière 121). While the aesthetic regime does away with the hierarchy of representability, it does not simply produce a more informative picture. In fact, precisely because of the excess of information, the resulting picture might get too ambiguous, which is detrimental to diegetic action and the possibility of its interpretation.

> The new novel —the novel called realist— is criticized for a primacy of description over action. The primacy of description is in fact that of a form of the visible which does not make visible, which deprives action of its powers of intelligibility —that is, of its powers of ordered distribution of knowledge-effects and *pathos-effects*. This power is absorbed by the apathetic *pathos* of description that merges wills and meanings in a succession of little perceptions where activity and passivity can no longer be distinguished. (Rancière 121)

The quote above helps us see the realist novel in an entirely different light, positing that it has actually ushered in a new set of criteria for artistic creation that work against Upton's notion of play. The

increased visibility of the trivial clouds reason, cuts the ties between knowledge and tragedy, or in better words, changes the assumption that a lack of information should lead to pathos. How are we to "play" then —without a guiding sense of balance—, if any form of play needs to privilege action either physically or mentally?

If the aesthetic regime embraced an ambiguity by making everything —from trifle details to matters of extreme importance— speak, postmodern technologies exacerbated it by taking away the decisiveness of social limits in exchange for infinite possible narratives. Instead, texts started to rely more and more on the decisiveness of recognizable affective elements, and on the database that brought them together, even if that necessarily means that at some point contradictions will arise.

Today, as Thon points to and takes up as his main point of discussion in *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, more and more narratives —Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* being one of the first examples— refrain from emphasizing or purposefully avoid setting temporal, causal, or even ontological connections.

> I readily concede that contemporary films, comics, and video games conventionally, commonly, and comparatively unproblematically represent impossible situations and storyworlds, as there are many forms of impossibility that are not quite violating the law of noncontradiction on which the preceding argument has primarily focused. Apart from mere physical impossibilities, […] what could, perhaps, be described as representational impossibilities appear to have become increasingly common in contemporary media culture. (64-5)

Contemporary narratives mostly remain at ease not only with representing impossible situations —as commonly observed in science fiction and fantasy genres—, but also with representational impossibilities —such as the re-appearance of a presumably dead character in the same work or an adaptation.

Nevertheless, this development does not signal the crumbling down of the narrative tradition altogether. In fact, ambiguity lends itself to consumption just as well, when there are efficient strategies available to help the audience navigate across (what seem to be) narrative inconsistencies. Such strategies, on the one hand, are provided abundantly by popular media themselves: "[C]ontemporary films, comics, and video games employing various (post-hoc) strategies of plausibilization, which, in turn, allow the recipients to 'naturalize' or, rather, plausibilize the mental models they have constructed of the initially impossible-seeming storyworld" (63). On the other hand, the audience themselves also develop, or internalize similar strategies to deal with inconsistencies when they are present: "[W]hen dealing with contemporary films, comics, and video games, recipients not only 'fill in the gaps' (as it is described by [Marie-Laure] Ryan's principle of minimal departure) but also routinely 'ignore' some aspects of narrative representations in order to intersubjectively construct the represented storyworlds" (62).

It does not naturally follow from Thon's account that the audience today don't care about massive plot holes, or are more tolerant. In fact, the historically unmatched availability of texts correlates with an increase in meticulous analyses offered by the audience. If textual contradictions are not met with harsh criticism immediately, that is because the audience recognize the ever present possibility of future justifications, or because they can already come up with them themselves, in a way that increases the pleasure they receive from any element constituting the work.

> [W]hen encountering an apparently contradictory, logically impossible arrangement of situations, recipients will usually attempt to find reasons to locate the represented situations within different subworlds or on different "diegetic levels" of the storyworld as a whole instead of immediately accepting the possibility that the narrative representation in question is meant to represent a contradictory, logically impossible storyworld. […] [L]ocating the problematic situations within the "private domains" of a character's memories, hallucinations, dreams, or fantasies is not the

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only option—instead, inconsistencies may also be located within ontologically disconnected subworlds that are created by an intradiegetic narrator or an intradiegetic narrative work, and they may even be attributed to an extradiegetic narrator (or even just the narrative representation) telling (or representing, as it were) different versions of a story(world). (64)

What Thon lists up here as common strategies of contemporary narrative consumption, however, appears to stem from shortcomings in storytelling that also influence narrative play according to Upton. "[T]he author can start in the middle of the action, without any introductory exposition, and leave it to the reader to puzzle out the identities and situation of the characters as he goes," (256) or "[i]nstead of building in a rising arc, the incidents of the plot can be arranged as disjointed episodes, or in a long, slow decline from an initial crisis" (256) both of which, for instance, apply to Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. In any case, each of such approaches, "interferes with the reader's ability to play in some way —either by disrupting anticipation, or by eliminating consequence, or by denying satisfaction" (257). In contrast, Upton advertises two plot structures that lend themselves to narrative play: *Freytag's pyramid* —which consists of an introduction, a development that builds up the tension until it reaches its peak at the climax, followed by a conclusion—, and *kishōtenketsu* —which inserts an incongruous plot twist (*ten*) right after the development, to be integrated with the previous sections in the conclusion. In addition to the inclusion of an extra stage between development and conclusion, kishōtenketsu significantly differs from its counterpart with regards to the nature of its development phase too: after the introduction, rather than forming a chain of events and actions escalating in pace and leading to a certain direction as the story progresses, "the story moves into a section of extended elaboration on the topic (*shō*)" (257). In fact, that is what helps this narrative structure accommodate the incongruous twist that Freytag's pyramid wouldn't allow.

In *kishōtenketsu* form, the development of the topic resembles the rising action section of the Freytag pyramid, but without its directedness. […] The reader is still encouraged to engage in

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anticipatory play, but his anticipation is directed less toward particular future events and more

toward a broader understanding of the potentialities of the current situation. This sets the stage for

the large disjunction of the *ten* section. So large a crux would feel like a major plot hole if we

encountered it in a more directed narrative. But because our expectations are less specific, the

appearance of an incongruous beat is less jarring. Since the reader isn't occupied with a central

problem, the ten section can more easily open up a much broader field of play for him to explore.

(257-8)

On the one hand, the development phase in kishōtenketsu produces a potent field that doesn't display

quick or radical change. Because it is better explored, it has an increased set of potential connection

points to a seemingly irrelevant next step which cannot be anticipated but can be slowly put in

perspective. On the other hand, in Freytag's pyramid, the development introduces a string of steps that

advances the story in a certain direction. As these steps follow each other, causal and temporal relations

are built, which establish the foundation for anticipatory process. However, as this string extends, its

compatibility with irrelevant chains of events that bear no organic relationship with the main line of

development or are not explainable by the available temporal and causal relations is lowered

considerably.

Presented in this way, the two structures look incompatible. However, a great number of contemporary

narratives, as Thon's discussion also reveals, seem to bring the two together. It is not difficult to find

narratives building a sense of direction by creating a string of actions and events, only to defy the

emerging causal and temporal relationships in-between by throwing in "random and bizarre plot twists"

(252) and incongruities that Upton tries to banish from a successful field of play. What is to be lost if the

two models are collapsed into one? In narratives possessing such a hybrid structure, despite the

abundance of actions and events lined up in succession, because of major incongruities, it gets very

difficult to build an informative link in-between actions and events, and to set things into perspective by

restoring causal and temporal relations. Consequently, the process of anticipation is crippled.
Nonetheless, by relying on metaleptic strategies, and on the audience's familiarity with such strategies, these narratives can remain functioning and interpretable. After all, in a dream or in a parallel world, anything is possible —even the most horrid inconsistencies. Coherence can always be found in the end, or better yet, it can be found elsewhere: in official prequels or sequels, spin-offs, related narratives provided by overarching media-mix projects, fan-works, or just in the imagination of the recipients. As long as there is enough attraction in the main text, or as long as the elements constituting the main text —such as settings, characters, or smaller database elements— arouse enough interest or affect, it may not matter if inconsistencies or logical gaps abound. While the audience's interest might be triggered by the originality of available elements, affective reactions occur if the audience have previous experience with, and a fondness for these elements. If such qualities are present, the audience will be stimulated to simulate alternative combinations outside the text, in whichever ways they would like in the absence of strong relational system.

Now, if there is a balance in contemporary narratives, we might say that it is a balance of extremes: too much ambiguity due to the breaking up of causal connections (of spatial, temporal, causal, or ontological kinds), mixed with too much information provided by the database. As this new type of balance seems to signal the end of anticipatory play in Upton's understanding, we might be witnessing the birth of another form of play.

Combinatory Play

Whereas Rancière limits his discussion of the representative and the aesthetic regime mainly to art, Azuma and Thon focus particularly on contemporary works of popular culture, without leaving any particular medium out of the narrative environment that they describe. It necessarily follows that video games should display gamelike qualities, which require theoretical attention. Indeed, many recent video

games advertise their interactive elements, as well as the multiple ways players can interact with these elements, as a general selling strategy. Especially open world games of various genres, such as the *Grand Theft Auto* (action-adventure, appearing first in 1997, primarily published by Rockstar Games) series, or the last game of the equally well-known *Final Fantasy* series, *Final Fantasy: XV* (action roleplaying, released in 2016 by Square Enix), offer a remarkable variety of tasks to the players and *open a wide range of alternative routes for action*. On the other hand, recent titles such as the *BioShock Infinite* (most recent title of the *BioShock* series, and a first person shooter, published by 2K Games in 2013), and *The Stanley Parable* (exploration-interactive fiction, developed by Galactic Cafe in 2013) question the point of following different trails of action in the first place, paradoxically by opening alternative routes for action and at the same time implying that the result of those actions may never change. It can be argued that a similar attitude is present very appropriately in the last LucasArts adventure game, *Escape from Monkey Island* (published by Lucas Arts in 2000), as briefly discussed in Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone's "Self-Reflexivity and Humor in Adventure Games": "Though parody has the ability 'to create new works from the old' […], the game seems reluctant to offer a 'new' direction" (9). The self-reflexive humor of the game lays bare the redundancy of postmodern serializations, spin-offs, remakes, etc., with the game itself being a "fresh" title not putting much novelty on the table in terms of gameplay. Such understanding of *Escape from Monkey Island* brings to mind the alternative routes for action that postmodern narratives imply or provide, both fresh and exchangeable, hence redundant. As these titles reveal, Azuma's reading of *All You Need is Kill* as a message from its author stating the pointlessness of postmodern storytelling —due to how easy it is to come up with replays of the same scenario and how difficult to settle for one particular end among infinite possibilities—(*Gamelike Realism* 95) is applicable, in a certain sense, to games too.

However, even if contemporary narratives can be considered gamelike in that they incorporate alternative routes for action in one body or encourage recipients to imagine alternatives on their own account, it can still be argued that the ways that games accommodate alternatives in one body differ from the ways of

other media. In *Newsgames: Journalism at Play*, the authors Ian Bogost, Simon Ferrari, and Bobby Schweizer identify a type of documentary games that seems radically different from narrative media in how it relates to real life events:

> [A] procedural documentary does not weave a path through evidence like a film or an article does, telling a story the viewer or reader grasps through empathy with its characters. Instead, a video game models the behavior and dynamics of a situation, treating character, setting, and events as side effects of an overall logic. (71)

Shortly after the above paragraph, the authors present their claim in further detail:

> Explanations of *how something works* can be described in written or visual argument, by mustering explanations and examples. This is precisely what Schlosser does in *Fast Food Nation*, and most documentaries and investigative reports do the same. But *models* can also address how things work, not through explanation or example, but by showing the operation of a source system directly. If writing and film best realize their potential when they tell stories, then computers realize theirs when they model behavior, when they depict worldly processes through computation. (71)

The authors claim in this way that games fix the relations between narrative elements —such as setting, events, and characters— to make in-game actions meaningful and their outcomes simulatable. It is claimed that narrative media, on the other hand, tend to rely basically on descriptions of setting, events, and especially characters. Obviously, it does not seem likely that Upton would agree with such a simple and clear cut separation of games and narrative media. But in fact he too acknowledges that characters are left a bit hollow in games for the sake of action:

When we play a game, our sense of the protagonist's identity is a product of the actions we perform. […] The more freedom the game affords us in choosing what to do, the more fluid the identity of the protagonist becomes. This is problematic. If we want to tell a story with much depth or subtlety, the personality of our protagonist must mesh with the other constraints of the plot. *Hamlet* isn't just a story about some random individual thrown into the midst of court intrigue. It's a story about a very specific character, whose particular quirks cause the plot to unfold in interesting and meaningful ways. (277)

As the quote makes clear, a well-built character, with a meticulously described personality takes away from the player's freedom in action, and vice versa. Nevertheless, taking our cue from precisely what Upton says here and altering our perspective on narratives only slightly, we can accommodate this special reliance on character building in narrative play. Surprisingly, this particular type of narrative play can be observed in "traditional" linear narratives, despite the above presented claims.

Firstly, linear narratives can be considered gamelike in the sense that they engage the reader or the audience in narrative play. Upton's understanding of narrative play, as it was explained previously, assumes that we move along one straight path in a narrative. However, Upton claims that as we also have to interpret what is going on and predict the next phase that will unfold constantly, there is plenty of interpretive/anticipatory freedom in this process. This specific combination of freedom and constraints allows for a kind of play that is in line with the narrative consumption style Eco describes. We may not be able to change Hamlet's grim fate, but we can enjoy guessing what will happen to him as we hear his story, and find a satisfaction in putting the narrative pieces together to come up with our own interpretation for what has happened.

Secondly, and more surprisingly, we can also find a gamelikeness in how the personality of a protagonist is "meshed" with the plot, especially in narratives of the realist tradition. As characters were tied closely

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to social classes and economic conditions in 19th century literature, or in better words, as characters turned out to be who they are *precisely because they were tied closely to social classes and economic conditions*, it was basically impossible to imagine alternative courses of action for them other than what would be eventually provided by the author/narrative. In fact, the decisiveness of the environment is so important for this kind of works that, as introduced in detail above, Boris Groys describes them as stories of "conditions and limitations of human action" (1). While empathy follows as we relate to the struggle of the characters against the environment or the conditions that constrain them, it should be acknowledged that such empathy is born out of the clear depiction *of the conditions as well as the characters*. In this light, the emphasis on "the behavior and dynamics of a situation" seems to be a common trait of games as well as a particular type of narrative, instead of a distinguishing feature of games against narrative media as Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer argue. This way of thinking reveals how realist novels may surprisingly display a gamelikeness in relation to their most distinguishably narrative aspect.

However, as claimed in the previous section, today's gamelike narratives sever the strong connections between the characters and the conditions that constrain and shape them in the realist tradition. Therefore, in order to understand narrative play in case of gamelike narratives, we need to make adjustments to Upton's model.

A very popular point of contrast between games and narrative media is how the former arguably radically annul the narrative function of death. Another well-known researcher of game studies, Jesper Juul, for instance, points to the fact that Mario has three lives in *Donkey Kong* (1981, Nintendo), and then asks why. The answer he provides is that "with only one life, the game would be too hard" (qtd. in Wesp, par. 13). The implication in Juul's statement is that games reduce death to a purely functional element serving gameplay. In "A Too-Coherent World: Game Studies and the Myth of 'Narrative' Media," Edward Wesp introduces Juul's argument, only to challenge it by finding a possible narrative value even in repeated

death. Wesp simply suggests that we consider every single death as a termination point for one story. If we try out his suggestion, games appear as a string of multiple linear stories.

Upton too prefers to downplay this overly expressed point of difference regarding the treatment of death, by highlighting the overlooked but inevitable linearity in engaging with cyber-texts or interactive fiction to begin with:

> [W]hy should the existence of unexplored pathways in a cyber-text matter so much? Whatever choice I make within a work of interactive fiction, my own path through the narrative will always be linear. Why should the knowledge that alternative unexplored storylines exist affect my experience within the particular storyline I have chosen? It's as though all the books left unpicked on a library shelf had the power to change the book I am actually reading. (79)

However, interestingly, the exact opposite of Wesp and Upton's strategies, in other words, drawing attention to how narratives may also treat death as a repeatable element, proves useful to understand gamelike narratives and the form of play they offer better. An unorthodox example can prove useful to clarify this point.

A caricature (by the Turkish caricaturist Özer Aydoğan) coincidentally gives us a very clear explanation of the case.[22] According to its caption, the panel presents a "man who reads detective novels the wrong way." As he throws a book away while reaching for another, the man says with relief, "[f]inally the bastard has died," referring to the victim. From out of the panel, presumably with surprise, somebody asks him if he is not curious about the end of the novel. The man answers negatively, asking the invisible person to pass him another book. The surprise element here is that the reader prefers to skip the part which is supposed to unravel the mystery of the murder, to reveal the motives and the identity of the

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[22] Due to copyrights concerns, this thesis does not include any figures.

murderer. Hence the caption labels him as "the man who reads detective novels the wrong way," to point to his misunderstanding regarding where to find narrative pleasure.

The caricature indicates two different types of narrative consumption with great clarity. One, represented by the person out of the frame, assumes that the main satisfaction of narrative consumption comes from the completion of a story, from finalizing the interpretive/anticipatory process that Upton calls narrative play. The man inside the frame, on the other hand, finds satisfaction in relation to what happens to a character that triggers affect. Despite the caption, this man does not read detective novels the wrong way —there is no misunderstanding on his part. Rather, he just reads them with a different eye. Above everything else, his interest is drawn by a particular character, or rather his interest in the story is driven by his dislike of that character.

As long as the reader/audience is affectively engaged with a character, the reader/audience can find the motivation to (re)draw the fate in a way s/he finds befitting or rewarding. By being listed and categorized on a mass scale and for a while now, character types, and even character building elements have gained enough affective value to become sources of attraction on their own. But this is only a part of the transformation. Almost paradoxically, by being typified and *fixed in their clearest and simplest contours*, characters/settings/events have also grown *exchangeable*. By turning into database elements, they have become *recognizable* in any combination of multiple elements, *as recognizable as every other element*.

Instead of fixing the relation between the parts that form a story, or clarifying the relationship to the story in line, gamelike narratives clearly define database elements while leaving the dynamics organizing them under-defined or loose. Understanding the characters as mobile elements which can be taken out of contexts, severed from their conditions and constraints, the audience is free to make a new narrative combination. This process, we might call "combinatory play," for alternatives in this form of play are infinitely imagined in different combinations with each other outside the main texts.

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CHAPTER 2 - ANIME AS A FORM OF PLAY

Given that contemporary forms of narrative often display a "gamelikeness," and that we are "playing"

different media, how should we address media-specificities? Following Brian Upton's definition of play

—as "free movement within a system of constraints" (15)— requires us to take a look at what tends to be

under/determined, or how and when un/predictability arise within the fields of potential action, that is to

say within the particular *playspaces* that media tend to produce. Considering the semiotic similarities

between video games and anime —i.e., being pluri-codal, and combining static and dynamic qualities—,

the two media appear to be a good match for comparison regarding the playspaces they tend to produce.

In order to address anime as a form of play, focusing on how video games appear in anime could prove a

useful strategy, because it may reveal how anime transforms video game playspaces in an attempt to

depict game worlds and the experience of gaming.

A. A BALANCE OF EXTREMES: TOO MUCH UN/PREDICTABILITY

Calculability, Causality and Predictability: Games vs. Gamelike Narratives

In *Gēmuteki Riaruzumu*, Azuma Hiroki most famously develops the concept of "gamelike realism,"

which differs radically from the understanding of literary realism developed in the 19th century in

replacing the uniqueness of death with multiple deaths and the possibility of replays. He analyzes light

novels featuring such "game-like" narrative traits, for example with characters entering time loops and

repeating a period of time over and over even if it ends in death each time.

Another game-like motif that many gamers and non-gamers alike are familiar with is the "boss battle" or

"boss fight." In multiple genres of video games, especially in role playing games, characters gain

"experience points" through practice and develop new skills. As the game progresses, acquired skills are

generally combined to take down "bosses," that is, strong opponents to test the character before reaching the next level. Whether a certain character can beat a boss and how much power (in points) must be used are estimable to a great extent by his/her skills and level. Also cyclical in nature, this pattern resembles a time loop, but with an emphasized sense of progress. Nevertheless, eliminating a boss might require several attempts of the same kind, with each boss fight echoing all the other boss fights of the past and the future, and with every victory paving the road for yet another one.

In gamelike narratives of Japanese popular culture, especially in shōnen titles conventionally targeting a young male audience, main characters often get caught up in series of "boss fights." For example, in many mecha[23] titles —two notable examples being *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shin seiki Evangerion*)[24] and *Full Metal Panic! (Furumetaru panikku!)*[25]— on multiple occasions the protagonists face the challenge of an enemy unparalleled in power. With the fall of the enemy, however, only a stronger one appears. As this cycle is repeated, narratives seem to resemble games. Yet, it can also be said that right at this point some media-specific features are revealed. Let us discuss such features in detail, firstly through a comparison between video games and gamelike media (here the set of anime, manga, and light novels), using the example of *Gurren Lagann The Movie: The Lights in the Sky are Stars* (*Gekijōban Tengen Toppa Guren Lagann Lagann-hen*, 2009).

Taking place in a dystopic future with exaggerated elements of fantasy, the animated movie (parallel to the TV anime series *Gurren Lagann* [*Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann*] from 2007) tells the story of how a group of people struggle to reclaim life on the face of earth after the human race got trapped underground for years. Led by one eccentric leader and his protégé who will replace him eventually, the group finds

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[23] A popular genre featuring war machines and big robots generally operated by human characters.
[24] While the anime series were released between 1995 and 1996, the manga of the same title actually started a year earlier to promote the anime series. The manga series ended in 2013. The gigantic franchise includes several animated movies, video games, pachinko games, and more.
[25] Originally appearing as light novels published from 1998 to 2011, followed by multiple manga and anime adaptations, and various spin-offs.

out that the reason why humans were exiled underground in the first place was paradoxically the same uncontrollable potential that makes it possible for them to break free. That potential, it was thought, would definitely bring harm, not only to the human race, but to each and every universe, to existence in its entirety.

In *Gurren Lagann*, what comes to the fore as a frequently repeated motif can be described as follows. At first, the hero claims he won't be able to defeat the enemy, and the first round of the fight proves that it is indeed beyond his powers to do that. Nevertheless, eventually he becomes victorious anyway, after understanding that there is no option but to fight wholeheartedly. At points of despair, he suddenly experiences remarkable outbursts of willpower, and displays a set of skills or attacks mostly unheard of until they appear. Not only in terms of quantity and quality, but also in their timing, such skills or attacks can be deemed supernatural. Therefore, to the *Gurren Lagann* universe, calculability seems to be inapplicable.

Only in comparison to games can we grasp the implication of such lack. In the case of video games, calculability comes to the fore as a prevalent element, pervading the gameplay especially through visual design. As already stated, in certain types of video games, the character gains experience step by step, upon which the possible actions for the rest of the game are defined (i.e., only through reaching A, you can reach B; without acquiring certain skills, you cannot beat certain enemies). In line with the progress, the amount of accumulated experience is quite often represented in points. Power bars, skill trees, collectible items directly contributing to stamina or dexterity in points, introduce and visualize calculability in the case of games.

It needs to be clarified, however, that what matters is not the numerical value per se, but what it connects to or enables in games.

Suppose you are playing a classic two-dimensional "platformer", such as *Donkey Kong*. The current level consists of a set of platforms that you can reach by jumping. As you move around within the level, you are tracing a path within the game's phase space. At any moment there will be some platforms that you can reach in the near future and others that are inaccessible to you. Whether a particular platform is accessible or not is governed by the architecture of the level and the jumping abilities of your character—these are the external active constraints that define your horizon of action. (46)

In this passage from *The Aesthetic of Play*, Upton clearly shows how games keep enabling certain sets of actions while disabling certain others in relation to the characters' abilities over time. But what is left unsaid in here is that in order to act within the range of possibilities, the players need to get a hint of them:

The term horizon of action describes the set of all the things a player can do at a particular moment. But often the set of things we *believe* we can do is more important for analyzing gameplay that [sic] the set of things we *can* do. For example, if I believe that a platform is too far away, I will not try to jump to it even if in fact it lies within my horizon of action. Similarly, if I believe that a platform is close enough to jump to, then I might try to jump to it even though in fact I will not be able to reach it. (47-8)

In order to be playable, games must enable a horizon of action —or present a set of possible actions at a given point defining the near future—, as well as helping the players form a *horizon of intent*, that is "the set of all states that the player believes to be valid, attainable, and desirable in the near future" (48). In both cases, calculable features play a crucial role. Through them, games provide the players with an abundance of clues —from obscure ones to those which are manifest in the form of power bars— regarding what they can do at a given moment and the directions they can pursue in the near future.

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Moreover, such calculable features are also necessary to predict outcomes, not only in the short, *but also in the long run*. But why are long-term predictions also crucial for gaming?

> If every configuration of a game's state is equally desirable, we may be satisfied with executing a random walk through the phase space. But if some configurations are more desirable than others, then our sense of having freedom of movement depends on our ability to steer our trajectory toward the more positive outcomes. In order to do that, we need to be able to connect cause and effect. We can't work toward a goal if we don't have a clear sense of which actions will move us closer and which will move us farther away. (62)

If every action was merely a substitute for another, choices would not matter, neither would predictions. However, in video games choices do matter, as they simulate outcomes for players' actions. That being the case, games themselves lead the gamer on, with all sorts of hints —such as but not limited to calculable features—, towards short term and long term goals. Still, contrary to the common expectation, one cannot do everything she or he likes in a game and can never write one's own story in absolute freedom; the gamer has the freedom to play with the already inserted range of possibilities. Moreover, even within the open possibilities, it goes without saying that there are considerably less rewarding ones. The priority of a good game design is to make the gamer play the game in a certain way to explore the provided possibilities to the greatest possible degree. Taking precisely the centrality of making choices in games as its theme, *The Stanley Parable* offers not only a skillfully crafted experience, but also an excellent opportunity to consider the so-called "freedom" provided to gamers. *The Stanley Parable* presents gaming as a meta-struggle between the game and the player to decide what is going to happen. While the player can seemingly defy the guidance of the narrator and "break" the game, the narrator points to the fact that the only way to actually break the game is not playing it —otherwise, no matter what the player does, s/he will end up reaching an ending within a pool of possible endings.

Thus, causality —the connection between actions and their outcomes— in relation to both the short and the long term range of actions should also be emphasized to offer an interesting gaming experience. A sense of progress is preferably (if not strictly necessarily) created through the combination of various elements, such as narrative hints and visual indicators of calculability like power/health bars and all other sorts of meters.

Along with these elements, the game space itself is generally considered a manifestation of causality. One of the most well-known scholars in the field of game studies, Espen Aarseth, describes the space in a real-time tactics game from 1997 with these words: "The landscape in Myth, for all its initial beauty, and as all computer game landscapes, merely looks like a landscape, but is really a three-dimensional scheme carefully designed to offer a balanced challenge to the player" (168). Such carefully designed gamespaces require great attention for they enable only certain actions, but on the other hand they also give the player indispensable hints as to what s/he should do next. In "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" Henry Jenkins also emphasizes this important role of space in guiding the action in a medium-specific manner:

> As they move through the film, spectators test and reformulate their mental maps of the narrative action and the story space. In games, players are forced to act upon those mental maps, to literally test them against the game world itself. If you are wrong about whether the bad guys lurk behind the next door, you will find out soon enough -perhaps by being blown away and having to start the game over. The heavy-handed exposition that opens many games serves a useful function in orienting spectators to the core premises so that they are less likely to make stupid and costly errors as they first enter into the game world. Some games create a space for rehearsal, as well, so that we can make sure we understand our character's potential moves before we come up against the challenges of navigating narrational space. (8)

According to Jenkins, then, space becomes a huge hint revealing how to play the game and what to expect from it. Moving in space contributes to the understanding of causality by producing immediate outcomes

for certain actions, and it reveals the limits of action in the meantime by producing no outcomes for

certain others. Keeping causality and limits of action in mind (in addition to taking other hints into

consideration), the player forms expectations regarding the possible actions which may lead him/her to

the desired stages sooner or later, and moves further through space and in the game. In this sense, moving

in space, and thereby interacting with the space, goes beyond an end in itself, becoming the process and

the end combined.[26]

However, the very much emphasized connection between space and causality does not mean that

narrative randomness can never pop up in games. For example, in an imaginary scenario, while the gamer

is least expecting, a sorcerer may manifest and give the character a magic skill. This example simply

proves that the predictive value of calculability can be suspended in games on the level of story through

the introduction of narrative elements that seemingly defy calculability and its predictability. Which may

come as a bigger surprise is that even on the so-called structural level, calculability might be downplayed.

Despite the fact that such examples evoke heated discussions regarding the definition of video games,

"exploration games"[27] almost do away with the necessity of calculation by eliminating goals altogether

and making every move as contributive as any other. For example, *Dear Esther* (developed by

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[26] Michael Nitsche briefly lists the major academic works on space in video games in the introduction of his own book, *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds,* in the following passage:

> Space has been a central issue for the study of digital media since the introduction of cyberspace (e.g., Benedikt 1991) and Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs) (e.g., Anders 1998). It has been a defining element of—at times opposing— studies in games research. Murray argues that spatiality is one of the core features of digital media (1997), Aarseth starts his discussion of Cybertexts with a look at labyrinths (1997), Ryan writes about narrative aspects of virtual spaces (2001b), and other studies of video games include often substantial chapters on space (e.g., Wolf 2002). Qvortrup edited a trilogy of books on different aspects of virtual spaces (2000, 2002; Madsen and Qvortrup 2002), and more recently von Borries, Walz, and Böttger published a large collection of short essays about spatiality in games and related issues (2007). Most of the work in this area has been discussed in numerous articles, theses, and conference papers. Jenkins's influential essays on game spaces build up from the mid-1990s (Fuller and Jenkins 1995) to a more rounded view almost a decade later (Jenkins 2005) and are only one example. (4)

Additionally, in "Playing the World: Computer Games, Cartography and Spatial Stories," Sybille Lammes summarizes the discourse on how some RTS (real time strategy) games such as *Age of Empires* and *Civilization* make space the central element of the gameplay experience. While some researchers go so far as to claim that space emerges as the main hero in such titles, Lammes argues that it is the emergence of the *player as a cartographer* that we witness.

[27] Video games in which the exploration of virtual space is the central means of interaction and source of attraction.

Thechineseroom, first released in 2008, commercial release followed in 2012) can be basically defined as the exploration of a virtual world with relatively limited interaction, providing an accentuated experience of its atmosphere. It is played in first person and includes neither a task nor a puzzle. But even in this game, the player is encouraged to wander around and get to know the area, yet not to swim, for example, because this action brings about just a black screen. You can swim and observe the blackness multiple times, mimicking suicide if you like, but then the other parts of the island will be unknown to you. Similarly, you can stay at the base camp or a safe point forever in an RPG, playing a coward character, let's say. No one can deny that this is an equally valid role-play. But game spaces are designed to induce certain actions, a certain type of interaction with space, to incite further exploration of the game space, through the game itself. You can play a game without fully unraveling it, or unraveling it to the minimum extent even. But only through the instructions can you play a game in the way it can fully unravel. In other words, games do present predictability in one form or the other, and generally emphasize this to a great extent.[28]

Conventions and Predictability in Gamelike Narratives

To sum up the discussion so far, we can briefly state that for the couple of reasons explained above, causality and predictability are accentuated in games (and often through calculability). In gamelike narratives such as anime and manga this is not necessarily the case. In fact, such narratives seem to understate calculability, causality, and consequently predictability.

As we pointed out, on the level of story, *Gurren Lagann* doesn't provide a valid and clear sense of calculability that could point at any limits of action. Rather, the decisiveness of numbers is undermined by

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[28] With regards to "easter eggs" ("a bonus or extra feature hidden inside a website, computer game, or DVD, that is only revealed after repeated or lengthy viewing or playing," *Collins English Dictionary*), games may not provide many hints regarding their locations. But purposeful ambiguity does not put the main progress in danger. Even in instances where crucial clues might be withheld from the player, today it can be said that games are created with the assumption that gamers will have access to online walkthroughs created collectively. Lack of information therefore is never a real threat, but a mere meta-reference.

the unlimited potential of the characters' willpower. In more than one scene, the characters refer to an amount of power of men and machines, which is supposedly estimable, by using adjectives like "full," "half," "low," etc. However, because there are no numbers given to begin with, such definitions stay relative and vague.

Visuals also back up un-calculability when they are available. For example, display screens estimating the power of battleships appear multiple times in both the movie and the series. Nevertheless, although the amount of the power used and spent should be increasing exponentially as the battleships grow bigger and the enemy gets stronger, the display screens remain the same, while no numbers get visualized although they are verbally referred to. Arbitrarily replenished powers and amounts of power appear in the same way.

Narrative media like anime obviously don't mobilize the audience in the same manner games do. Gaming gives the player the opportunity to personally test the limits of action for the character, and encourages one to apply one's deductions to the game in turn. Anime, on the other hand, do away with such concrete feedback mechanism. They do not simulate outcomes for actions, but they offer interpretive choice or imagining alternatives. While obviously not a game, by Upton's definition, *Gurren Lagann* is a form of play. How, then, does it suffice as a form of play with such a radical difference from video games?

Actually, as forms of play, neither do games consist of clear and predictable material solely, nor are anime purely ambiguous. As it was discussed quite extensively in the previous chapter, in *The Aesthetic of Play,* Upton comes up with a "good definition"[29] applicable to both anime and games, namely play as "free movement within a system of constraints" (15). In consequence, it follows that not only do we have

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[29] A definition that is "computationally convenient —in the sense that it structures a discursive field that makes it easier to say interesting or useful things" (*The Aesthetic of Play* 12).

ambiguity in games, we also have interpretive constraints in anime, despite the absence of direct interaction with the narrative through the use of commands.

But what exactly is free movement, and what is a constraint? To put it very crudely, Upton takes up "constraint" as a substitute for the notion of "rule," mainly due to the limited scope and inflexibility of the latter. By constraints, he seems to refer to the invariables set by the medium, as well as the invariables invented by the players/audience based on the information that the medium provides. In contrast to the common expectation from rules, the totality of these constraints are constantly updated as one engages with a medium. In the end, Upton's formula boils down to a binary formation of determination vs. underdetermination, and thusly of predictability vs. unpredictability. On the one hand, the player/audience is guided by what s/he knows that a character can/cannot do in a world that does not allow certain actions; on the other hand, s/he is free to pick any of the possibilities born in this field of potential and limits (a field whose borders are known), as well as any of the possibilities that the constraints don't relate to at all.

As Upton puts it, "choice in narrative is interpretive choice" (240) as opposed to a choice that is fed back into the medium as in the case of games, and "narrative play relies particularly heavily on the pre-existing knowledge of its participants" (217). Among the sources of narrative constraints that guide the audience's constant endeavor to interpret the story and pick the most satisfactory future possibilities, Upton counts the knowledge of canon and genre, the study of apocrypha (or annotations given in the form of footnotes or separate guidebooks, etc.), the audience's position in a certain cultural environment, and general life experience (220). This is by no means an exhaustive categorization, but the listed items are almost always heavily relied on in narration as Upton states, along with minor sources of extratextual constraints[30].

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[30] One such example that Upton gives is "paratext" in Gérard Genette's terminology, meaning the supplemental context surrounding the text (*The Aesthetic of Play* 220).

In gamelike narratives in general, fans and frequent consumers know what is most probably going to happen to the main characters —thanks to the "database" that defines their crude outlines. Anyone familiar with at least shōnen titles, for example, would expect the protagonist to prove a tough rival and succeed against his worst enemies in a spectacular way. In this sense, it can be said that there is a sort of calculability present in works of Japanese popular media as well. But of course those who are familiar with the media in question would also point out that conventional limits are by no means final. Most (in)famously, in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the whole cycle of boss fights breaks with the protagonist diverging completely from the conventional pattern by failing to prevail against his enemies. In *Gurren Lagann*, the character who is supposed to be the protagonist judging by the shōnen genre standards, dies all of a sudden in the midst of series. However, while it is true that conventions are challenged at times, the current environment of consumption and production ensures that the emerging forms are also conventionalized instantly by being added to the database. Not only new character traits and story elements, but elements of the visual style and production techniques too get sucked into the reservoir for making new (patch)works. For example, the animated movie and the anime series of *Gurren Lagann* feature sequences that bring to mind the once so shocking original finale of *Evangelion* series, which showed the characters disintegrating into lines of drawing.

Japanese popular media, most notably light novels, anime, and manga, feed from the same database and mostly share the same database units. That means, at the very least, that depending on characters' verbal or visual depictions, the audience can predict to differing extents how they are going to act, what they are going to say, what kind of adventures await them and so on. Moreover, on top of such conventions concerning story development and characterization, conventions of serialization and broadcasting can also act as medium-specific constraints, and guide the audience in interpretive play in Upton's understanding. In the mecha genre, for example, the protagonists almost always prove tough rivals and succeed against their worst enemies in spectacular ways as mentioned above. More specifically in anime, it can also be predicted when these heroic feats will be accomplished. In *The Anime Paradox*, Stevie Suan argues that

the episodic structures of anime series can be mapped out in three basic parts which can be extended with the insertion of subdivisions and repeated with small variations. The system of *jo-ha-kyū* that Suan borrows from Noh Theater, places action in the *kyū* stage, and according to Suan, in a typical anime series consisting of 26 episodes, that stage coincides with the 20th to 24th episodes (followed by a conclusion in character development in the 25th and 26th episodes). Such *somehow* anime specific conventions (for Suan points at the Noh Theater as *jo-ha-kyū* system's origin), also contribute to predictability.[31]

Nonetheless, as discussed in detail in the first chapter, another feature of gamelike narratives is that while characters are fixed as database elements, the connections between them and the other story elements are looser than before. Temporal, spatial, or social contexts that should keep everything in place are no longer privileged. Consequently, characters can break free from their original scores and make unlimited appearances in the continuation of the original works or in fan works, even after they are "officially" killed. Narratives become gamelike, for they either incorporate different diegetic levels in one body of narrative, or are embedded in meta-diegetic levels later on in serialization. In both cases, causality and predictability are undermined or even openly manipulated. Sticking to the same example of the mecha genre, we can say that even when the audience is promised a victory, the amount of power that will bring the victory, and how exactly it is produced remain vague. In a nutshell, this is how we can compare and contrast the treatment of video games and gamelike narratives towards predictability and unpredictability.

Temporary Limits of Action and Predictability in Anime

While the above discussion concerning gamelike narratives' tendency to combine extreme predictability and unpredictability directly applies to anime, the play experience that anime offers in particular can only be understood through taking its medial properties and technicality into consideration. Looking specifically at how anime depict computer systems and video games, and which features of these games are exposed to transformation in the process, it might be possible to grasp the specificities of both media.

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[31] See *The Anime Paradox*, 48-91.

For example, at one crucial point for the story development in *Gurren Lagann,* we see Lord Genome, who is a previous enemy later turning into an ally of the protagonists, "hacking the system" of the ultimate enemy of the human race, the so-called "anti-spirals." Interestingly, the act of "hacking" is visualized in a style reminiscent of video games and computer programs. Here, however, the audience don't have the chance to discover the limits of action themselves. To put it simply, the audience cannot lead Lord Genomu into other rooms, or force him to fight with the enemy. All the same, while the character keeps moving, he also keeps making some repetitive sounds, as if in answer to the commands of a player. Verbal responses in games actually carry out an important function. They articulate and confirm the data transfer between the player and the character. In this case, however, coming from a character completely detached from a player, such sounds are reduced to a reference to another medium, or maintained only as a simulacrum.

However, although the communicational function of such verbal responses is lost in anime, right after the "computerized" part of the scene (that is, the part visually presented in a way that brings video games to mind), Lord Genome starts giving a lengthy explanation of what just happened. It is this type of explanation which forms a quite strong, if not the strongest informative bridge between the viewer and the character in general in anime. In *Gurren Lagann*, as in gamelike narratives in general, such explanations are given significantly often. They not only may accompany or follow the scenes that are hard to interpret, but also may make up for omissions in the storyline which are quite frequent. For example, in the movie, through Lord Genomu and the protagonist's girlfriend/wife Nia, the audience learn about the plans of the evil anti-spirals, and their whereabouts. Again, it is only through "the scientist" among the group the pseudo-scientific facts about the spaceships and robots become accessible. I would suggest that explanations as such can be considered the expressive means of indicating limits of action for characters which act as interpretive constraints for the audience in gamelike narratives in multiple ways.

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It also should be noted that these explanations have a diegetic function too. As in the scene with Lord Genomu, the explanations are addressed, inside the narrative, to the other people appearing in the same diegetic space. In this way, the protagonist, and the rest of the group, decide their next strategy for attack. It is also noteworthy that in all these examples, it is not an external narrator explaining the situation. The important point here is, popping up in conversations, explanations necessarily become an important element in characters' interaction with each other, creating relationships, and strengthening them with each articulation. Another point as important as the first is that such explanations are so fused with other elements of anime that it is not possible to take them out of the whole work. Even if the audience wants to skip them, switching off the volume in order not to hear the explanations would necessarily mean missing out other parts of the conversation, sound effects, and so on. In the way they are presented, explanations merge with certain scenes, settings, time and characters. Skipping conversations in manga or comics too can result in a deficiency of information. However, being spatio-temporal yet static media, manga and comics do not bring together such a variety of narrative elements in a fixed point/period in time. A good example to that would be sound effects. While the reader takes the sound effects to be simultaneous with the action, the action that is visually or verbally described is seen in succession. Moreover, because it is a common strategy in printed media to give the narrators' and the characters' speeches separately for the sake of clarity, it becomes easier to skip them at will. In anime, it is impossible to avoid audio content without hearing them first. In other words, such elements don't stand side by side, but *overlap*. As a combination, they play a huge part in forming the plot. Therefore, it can be argued that explanations take the place of calculability in pointing at some limits of action at times, while they also move the focus from action itself towards character relationships.

Yet, it is not at all difficult to remember a million different occasions in anime (and in other media circulating gamelike narratives) that explanations don't make any sense, or at least don't necessarily clarify any limits of action —what exactly lies beyond and within the powers of a character. In addition to the vagueness of numbers and of the information related to the amounts of power spent or required, most

of the character lines following especially the miraculously developed attacks and skills, sound merely descriptive or blatantly obvious. For example, quite often names for different techniques of attack are shouted out loud at the same time the techniques are displayed: "Burst spinning punch!" Although such names may describe the move made by the characters while dealing a certain blow (in other words, articulating the obvious), they definitely do not explain how the techniques were developed in the first place, or the extents of their destructive powers.

In such cases, it can be said that the discourse does not necessarily explain the true nature of events, but mostly takes the opportunity to dazzle the audience. But, what certainly requires attention here is that, even when they are not explanatory in terms of limits of action, explanations are always functional in terms of building and strengthening the understanding of character relationships. In other words, the mystery of what a character can do serves as a means to reveal more about the ways that characters relate to each other, bringing them closer in the eye of the audience, or making their hostilities towards each other more obvious.

The vagueness in terms of the calculability of power and the role of explanations in building temporary limits of action can be observed in gamelike narratives in general without being limited to any specific media. In this age, separate media get closely interrelated to each other through computer technologies and market relations. Therefore, while it is quite difficult to talk about media-specificities, predominant narrative structures and their possible effects have become more visible. In contrast to the "potential-to-be-developed" appearing in games, *Gurren Lagann* as an exemplary gamelike narrative seems to present a notion of unpredictable and unmeasurable potential. It does not incorporate calculability as a necessary structural or narrative element. In *Gurren Lagann,* which can be compared to a great number of others in this respect, explanations become an important means of indicating limits. However, they are not necessarily explanatory in terms of limits. From time to time, they just dazzle the audience in their arbitrariness. Nevertheless, even if not always explanatory, they are always functional.

Generally given in the shape of conversations instead of external narrations, they form and strengthen relations in between characters. Specifically in anime's case, though, it can be said that explanations get fixed at particular points of space and time, and merge with the totality of a work. In the way they are combined with the other expressive means of the medium, not only do they set temporary limits for action at times, they also move character relationships to a rather central position. Let us delve further into anime specificities in relation to unpredictability in the following section.

B. FINDING FREEDOM IN LIMITED ANIMATION

Unpredictability and Dynamism in Anime (Part I): Stillness That Functions

As discussed extensively in the previous chapter, Hiroki Azuma argues that the database allows characters to gain a metanarrative quality enabling them to move from text to text. The immediately recognizable units that constitute characters grant them a safe pass to travel to different texts without losing their essence.

But previously in 2005 Gō Itō theorized about such stylization and arising metanarrative quality specifically in the context of manga. In *Tezuka izu deddo: Hirakareta manga hyōgenron e* (*Tezuka is Dead: Towards a Widened Theory of Manga Style)* Itō argues that manga characters have a duality in nature: a *kyara* and a *kyarakutā* side, the presence of which can be suppressed at times. The former is close to the understanding of a flat character with rather uncomplicated features, not prone to displaying radical changes and not strictly bound by real life limitations such as the laws of physics. Kyarakutā on the other hand are defined by relative depth, invoking real people in their complexity. For example, Tezuka Osamu's *The Mysterious Underground Men* (*Chiteikoku no kaijin*) features a humanoid rabbit named Mimio as its protagonist. Mimio is depicted in ways like a rabbit with a pair of long ears, however, has the intelligence of a human being thanks to a series of scientific experiments he has been exposed to. While he walks, talks, and acts like a human throughout the story, Itō finds it most interesting that he is

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able to pass for a real human twice towards the end of the story. Mimio disguises himself once as a female engineer and once as a street urchin by using just a wig and a cap. What deserves attention here is that such a successful transformation is made possible only because of Mimio's iconic form. Thanks to his partial resemblance to a real life rabbit, and precisely because he is not given the photorealistic image of a rabbit with facial fur, nobody —including the reader— can tell the true identity of the protagonist while he is under disguise. In this way, Tezuka plays with the ambiguous nature of the iconic bodies' relationship with reality: while it is the kyara form of Mimio as a talking rabbit that we mostly see, the revelation of Mimio's emotional complexity and vulnerability at the end makes him look like a kyarakutā all along.

Engaging with fiction in general requires a person to fill the work's inevitable gaps in his/her own mind and create storyworlds. In her seminal work *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory,* Marie-Laure Ryan explains the process through what she terms "the principle of minimal departure" in the following way:

> It is by virtue of the principle of minimal departure that readers are able to form reasonably comprehensive representations of foreign worlds created through discourse, even though the verbal representation of these worlds is always incomplete. Without the principle, interpretation of verbal messages referring to APWs [or alternative possible worlds] would be limited to the extraction of strict semantic entailments. The reader of a fiction containing the sentence "Babar the King of the elephants went to a restaurant" would be entitled to reconstrue the proposition "at the time tn Babar was at a restaurant" but not to draw the pragmatic inference: "Babar was hungry, and he went to the restaurant to eat." To come to this conclusion, we must assume that in the anthropomorphic world of Babar, where elephants have kings and are able to talk, they are attracted to restaurants for the same reason we are. (52)

While the example Ryan employs here is a verbal statement, her theory is not limited to literary fiction. There is no reason why the slightest similarity to real life should not trigger such a reaction in case of the above manga too. Indeed, it is natural for the reader to imagine that Mimio should enjoy eating vegetables depending on their real life knowledge of rabbits, and that hopping around in fields most likely is not his only pastime activity now that he has the mind of a human being.

In his discussion of narrative play, not only does Upton acknowledge the principle of minimal departure, but he also states that "narrative play relies particularly heavily on the pre-existing knowledge of its participants" (217). Although one's pre-existing knowledge is not limited to the knowledge of real life itself (i.e., one's knowledge of fiction, and media conventions also contribute to the sum), the understanding of real life proves essential for the interpretation of a text, and furthermore for making predictions as to how things will unravel as we keep engaging with a story. However, as Tezuka's example proves, in manga the connection to real life is already problematic: to what extent does the real life apply to storyworlds? It is also most natural for the readers to expect Mimio to have the furry face of a rabbit, and to consider that it is omitted from visual representation only for the sake of convenience. As Itō points out, this ambiguity, this similarity to and difference from real life is itself conventionalized in manga.

In the previous section we discussed how gamelike narratives create a balance of extremes: too much predictability and unpredictability. As a medium feeding from the same database as the other popular Japanese media, anime too supports predictability to an extent that would probably displease Upton through the use of what might be considered clichéd characters, plot twists, etc. As for unpredictability, anime lends itself to the same ambiguity that manga seems to contain, thanks to the same visual (as well as narrative) conventions it shares with manga. But as a spatio-temporal medium depicting events in a fixed duration, of course it has its own attitude towards building as well as breaking

spatial/temporal/causal relations. Let us turn to another famous shōnen title to discuss the specificities of anime in comparison to both manga and to games.

JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stardust Crusaders (*JoJo no Kimyō na Bōken Sutādasuto Kuruseidāsu, 2014-5*), as the title makes clear, tells the bizarre story of Kūjō Jōtarō, a high school student who gains superpowers all of a sudden. With the appearance of his grandfather, Joseph Joestar, Jōtarō learns about the mysterious past of his family, which is both blessed and cursed by strange powers. Soon after the revelation, Jōtarō's mother falls sick due to the same family legacy. To save her and to end the curse, Jōtarō teams up with his grandfather and a pack of other characters, and altogether they hit the road in search for Dio, a vampire with malicious intentions who seems to be the source of all the evil. As they move from place to place, the team gets involved in a series of battles. With the battles proving more and more deadly (with more than one fake death, making it hard to judge what it takes to actually kill a character), this anime series too can be categorized as a boss battle type production.

Three successive episodes depicting two different challenges made against one enemy, D'Arby the Player, could prove useful for the comparison between video games and anime, in terms of the particular relations they build with causality and predictability. In the 40th and 41st episodes of *Stardust Crusaders,* the battle takes the form of a racing game, for the enemy tricks Jōtarō, along with his grandfather and another member of the group by the name Kakyōin Noriaki, to playing video games with him while wagering their souls.

D'Arby challenges Kakyōin in the first round, and Kakyōin picks a racing game. The game is to be played on a console, and is described by Joestar as an ordinary video game that can be found everywhere in the world. Judging by the looks and by Joestar's further investigations, it seems safe to play. Due to the fact that every character in the series has some kind of a supernatural power that they keep hidden till the last moment, Jōtarō's group wants to make sure they are not stepping into a trap. However, D'Arby

announces that he does not cheat, and that he intends to use his powers only after Kakyōin's loss. The game-console looks like an ordinary machine which may also be found in our world (just a little old-fashioned), and it is connected to multiple monitors. The game is played by controllers, without physically entering the gameworld, and without any magical enhancement directly influencing the game system.

Except for the indicator of race laps which stay always the same despite the progress made by the two characters, the representation of the video game stays loyal to real life equivalents on the level of interface depictions. A "Select your car" announcement is followed by the appearance of two rotating car displays, and the selection process ends with blinking lights to signal completion. The race track and the cars are rendered in 3D in contrast to the 2D world inhabited by the characters. There are power bars, indicators of speed, and a crude route map on the screen, all of which are functional in so far as they display change in line with the progress made in the video game. It can be said that the anime stays quite loyal to game interfaces in appearance.

Starting the game successfully and leaving his opponent behind in the first seconds of the game, D'Arby announces that he is going to win, for it is not possible for Kakyōin to get ahead of him anymore. Regardless of the fact that this may be an unreliable interpretation, the announcement matters in that it might give the audience some hints about the rules of the game. For example, when D'Arby adds that he never makes mistakes with controls, in addition to the possibility that he might be right, we infer that mistakes with controls should effect the result.

But it doesn't take long until this inference loses its validity, for it is revealed that supernatural powers can also be used to win the game. Kakyōin proves his opponent's guess wrong by letting his "stand" (a ghostly embodiment of each character's supernatural powers) take the controller, who can click on the buttons extremely fast and bring the game to a halt in his master's favor. As this instance shows, in

addition to both players' undeniable mastery of the game which is revealed pretty quickly after the start, both have their stands guaranteeing precision even if they are to err. In other words, control misses are impossible in this game. Ergo, controlling skill is not a factor that can effect the result in this case, which makes the game feel like a strategy game rather than one of racing. If this occasion proves anything, it is the necessity to pay attention to the players' strategies for predicting the course of events.

After restarting the game, Kakyōin spices up the tension by giving some interpretation based on the values shown on the speed meter that the audience can also check out. His words sound somehow reliable, yet, just like in the case of *Gurren Lagann*, we do not know anything about the complete scale of speed (with the maximum and the minimum points, as well as how they can effect the game) to actually confirm the interpretation's validity. Therefore, it can be said that Kakyōin's words underline his mastery once again, while seemingly explaining the possibilities of winning according to objective reasoning. Still, at the very least, when the characters are reminding themselves of what they should do to win the game, we also get to know about their strategies.

In sum, the system of constraints (or rules) that should bind the game and the factors effecting the result are never made clear. In fact, on the contrary, at times they are even treated arbitrarily. Although there are some stat indicators on the top the screen, till a character refers to them, the audience does not know if and how the numbers may alter the competition. This irreversible disadvantage in reading the game leaves us dependent on the characters' readings of it. In other words, in order to learn about the game, we have to listen to what the characters' say and think, which reveals temporary limits at best. The audience is guided and later on revealed to be misguided by the explanations given by the characters. This process creates a very shaky ground for interpretation and anticipation.

However, in addition to the pronounced function of verbal explanations, the racing episode also deserves special attention because of its rather peculiar treatment of space and time. In order to make a

comprehensive analysis, let us take a comparative look at the manga and the anime, and examine one particularly interesting scene that is found in both. In this scene of high tension, both players say that who enters the tunnel on their way first will have the utmost advantage over the other. As the audience don't have any previous experience of the game, and neither have full access to the rules or to accurate indicators of gameplay, this claim that both characters seem to agree upon constitutes the basic knowledge of external constraints. While the entrance looks very close, D'Arby starts talking about his and his opponent's strategies. Everyone expects or fears that D'Arby's going to come first as he predicts, but with a last second twist Kakyōin enters the narrow tunnel at the same time as his rival by driving the car on the wall.

The manga depicts the scene in question over four pages (64-65-66-67 in volume 25, *D'Arby the Player*). In the first page the entrance of the tunnel appears up-close; in the second page consisting of six panels D'Arby first announces that the tunnel is two seconds away in the second panel, then that it is only a second away in the fourth panel; the third page shows Kakyōin's car unexpectedly standing on its side; and the fourth page shows both cars entering the tunnel at the same time, one of them riding on the wall. The sense of dynamism built over these four pages is impossible to overlook.

In manga, it is a common technique to use speed lines to impart a sense of dynamism. In the scene described above, too, it is used extensively. Indeed, in most of the panels the background consists solely of speed lines. However, this technique is far from being the sole origin of the sense of dynamism. The scene owes its impact to the processes it triggers in the mind of the reader, through its particular treatment of space and time.

The discussion of space/spatiality in manga (as in the case of comics in general) goes beyond the representation of space in a frame. In fact, as far as stories are concerned in general, the understanding of space is inherently connected to the understanding of time. As Marie-Laure Ryan states, "most

definitions, by characterizing stories as the representation of a sequence of events, foreground time at the expense of space. Events, however, are changes of state that affect individuated existents, which are themselves bodies that both occupy space and are situated in space" ("Space" 1). Scott McCloud has been one of the first and most well-known theorists of comics to emphasize the connection between space and time —and in a rather strict equation. According to McCloud, panels in comics can be considered to represent individual, unconnected moments. As they are given in a sequence, they require our attention one by one, and thus get imbued with a sense of temporality. In this sense, it can be said that space equates time (based on which McCloud comes up with the term "temporal map" for comics). However, what provides the sensation that time flows smoothly between these separate moments is another process that McCloud names "closure": "Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (*Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* 67). Closure, in other words, is the interpretive process of filling the gaps between and inside the frames, and placing them in a temporal and spatial frame in a meaningful order.

Despite their undoubtable influence in comics studies, McCloud's arguments do not go without criticism. For example, in *The System of Comics*, Thierry Groensteen broadens the range of panel relations by asserting that they relate to each other not only in a linear sequence, but also in larger groups on a page, on double spreads, and in the totality of the work, through the thematic similarities they display. While acknowledging the importance of Groensteen's contribution to the discussion, as well as the importance of McCloud's concept of "closure," Neil Cohn criticizes both theorists for being too caught up in their understanding of comics as a language. Coming from a background in cognitive science, Cohn gives more credit to the mind's role in the meaning making process, and claims that McCloud and Groensteen's theories fail to account for some of the complex panel relations that the readers' minds can easily deal with even when there is no textual hint. According to Cohn, complex panel sequences can be understood by the readers, for there are mental structures which do not allow panels to be linked simply based on the

order of their appearance on the page or based on vague thematic relations. Instead, he argues that "panels representing the same time and character should be grouped first, followed by panels at the same time but different characters, then finally with panels in other times" (142).

One point that Cohn makes against McCloud's reading of comics is particularly helpful to discuss the dynamism of the *JoJo* episode in question. Although McCloud takes panels as separate moments or units of time, he also notes that a contradiction might appear in the case of panels with speech balloons, as speech can occupy a longer period of time than the rest of the action depicted in the same panel. Even if that is not the case, including more than one speech balloon in one panel obviously brings together more than one speech act taking place at different times. Cohn points at the fact that this kind of complexity is not limited to the intrusion of speech into panels. In fact, "polymorphic panels" which show the same entity in different positions challenge the space and time equality too. In conclusion, Cohn comes up with the following description of his own version of closure:

> Panels as units do not stand for moments or durations in fictive time, but direct attention to depictions of 'event states' (Cohn 2007) *from which* a sense of 'time' is derived. Images are just significations made meaningful through cognitively based concepts, while 'time' is a mental extraction from the causation/change between them. Indeed, nothing about two images next to each other demands that each represents a moment in 'time'. The entire sense of 'time' is pulled from the content of what the panels have in them. (134)

To put it simply, what Cohn seems to suggest is that there is no "time" inside the panel. "Time" is the mind's creation based on the interpretation of the contents —more specifically, based on the causality that the mind finds inside the panel. Taking Cohn's argument just a little further, we can say that it is possible for the readers to develop a sense of temporality based on the panels' contents *precisely because the panels lack fixed temporal attributes*. In the ensuing freedom the mind can stretch out the duration of

certain depictions while taking others to be shorter or instantaneous. In addition to the duration of depicted actions, if and to what extent these durations overlap (if the depictions are sequentially occurring or simultaneous) are also inferred. Slightly differing from the previous consequences, in such freedom the mind can also grasp the relativity of time for different agents.

Let us go back to the *JoJo* manga and take another look at the racing scene in light of the theories summarized above. In the racing scene, while the first page shows the tunnel for the first time at a close distance, the last page shows it for the second time as the two cars have just entered it. Thus, the reader infers that all the action depicted in between the two panels showing the tunnel takes place in a matter of seconds that it should take the players to cover the short distance shown in the game. In other words, visual cues regarding the distance serve also as temporal cues for interpretation. Moreover, D'Arby's statement in the second page reveals that the whole action takes place in exactly two seconds, which shows how the verbal content also helps to situate actions temporally and spatially in the mind. With every aspect of the narrative combined —including the shapes, sizes, and positions of the panels—, and despite the scarcity of spatial depictions —for the background is largely abstracted or reduced to speed lines—, we can understand where the action takes place and how much time passes, that is, perform closure.

Closure is crucial to our experience of anime too —not only because the two media share the same visual style to a great extent, but also because manga had a great impact on the development of anime's narrative techniques. In *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan,* Marc Steinberg gives a clear picture of the connection between the two media from the origins of anime. As they were attempting to animate Osamu Tezuka's *Tetsuwan Atomu* for the TV screen, due to time and budget constraints, the Mushi Production team and Tezuka himself had to develop new strategies opting for an economy of motion. While they came up with a variety of strategies such as three-frame shooting, stop-images, pull-cels, repetition, sectioning, lip-synching, dual use, short shot length (15-6), the proper

functioning of all was based to an extent on one central element: "Tezuka and his associates began exploring the extensive use of still images to economize on the number of drawings and lengthen the on-screen duration of each drawing. Dialogue and sound, he conjectured, could be used to cover up the immobility of the image" (13). As Tezuka and his team were trying to realize their project with limited resources, they ended up incorporating still images in the animation extensively, along with some manga techniques developed to create a sensation of dynamism. Although it has been decades since Tezuka's experimentations, he has left a visible mark on the medium. The anime of *Stardust Crusaders* presents a perfect example of the case. The racing scene previously analyzed contains images that are almost directly taken from the manga —with the speed-lines and facial close-ups of stressed characters already conveying a very strong sense of dynamism and urgency. It is true that these images are animated only partially (i.e. only parts of the face, the eyes, the mouth, etc.), minimally (i.e. simply tilting bodies or smaller parts of body such as the eyes, or even the pupils of the eyes), or just by sliding the cels laterally (or creating the same effect by digital means). Interestingly, in a rather unorthodox fashion, the anime of *JoJo* keeps even the visualizations of sound effects that manga commonly employ to bring sound into the picture. However, as Steinberg points out, it is the use of actual sound that contributes most radically to the temporal extension of anime. Dramatic voice acting, music, and sound effects all too often accompany the visuals, transmitting an almost tangible dynamism of their own. As the audience keep their eyes on the still screen, such audio elements prove to them that even if the action is not visually depicted for some reason, it is still taking place —both in story time (action continues in the storyworld) *and* in discourse time (the anime has not come to a halt). In the racing scene of the anime of *JoJo,* we see that the motion depicted can be minimized at times to the point of utmost stillness even, thanks to the combination of music, sound effects, the dramatic monologue given by D'Arby, and the conversation taking place between Kakyōin and Joester. Amazingly, the endless weaving of sound into the scene manages to hold everything together on one temporal plane. This crucial structural function of voice also is in line with the narrative importance it holds in providing predictability and causality to an extent.

However, in addition to the point about the similarities between the two media, it also has to be noted that precisely because the *JoJo* anime adheres to the manga so strictly —*despite the differences in their media-specific qualities*—, it imbues the same scene with an inconsistency, or a paradoxical temporality. As mentioned before, the manga depicts the scene over four pages. In the second page consisting of six panels, D'Arby first announces in the second panel that the tunnel is two seconds away, then in the fourth panel that it is only a second away. In this case, obviously, a second passes over one panel. The remaining one second till the tunnel, however, is depicted over four panels. As the readers jump from panel to panel, their minds *regulate* the pacing based on the information: "If all the action happening over the four panels occur within a second, they must be very quick and mostly simultaneous." Unless the possibility is refuted by a visual or verbal indication, this is the most likely interpretation a reader would make of the given information. However, in the anime, after it is announced by D'Arby that the tunnel is only two seconds away, a twelve second-dialogue between Kakyōin and Joestar follows suit, with high-tempo music constantly playing in the back. Even after the dialogue comes to its end, it takes an extra four seconds before the racers finally reach the tunnel, stretching the action over sixteen seconds in total. Here it also has to be noted that the scene is *not* given in slow motion, for the conversations taking place in the same scene do not slow down. Unlike internal monologues which may correlate with the characters' subjective/relative perception of time instead of reflecting the passing time on objective terms, conversations in general *should* reveal the diegetic flow of time given that there is no indication or hint to prove otherwise. Therefore, it can be said there is an inconsistency of the temporality related information in this scene. While this inconsistency helps creating the sensation that this critical part of the game feels especially long to everyone because of the tension, in other words, *while the scene remains interpretable*, by bringing together incompatible temporal elements *it nevertheless hinders the formation of a reliable interpretive basis for anticipation.*

Based on this comparison, it is possible to argue that anime, as Steinberg seems to imply, doesn't fill the gutter in manga with movement. Instead, it merges the implication of movement in a (series of) still

image(s) with the mechanically fixed duration of the moving images. However, this duration hinders the mind from regulating the pace of the action with ease, for it presents new and contradictory information.

The passing of time creates the expectation of spatial change and results for actions. However, as an extension of time, anime distorts spatial cues too. In the racing scene, even the somehow realistically drawn image of the tunnel turns into an abstraction. Although the tunnel looks very close, the extended duration of narration creates the impression that it is further away than it looks. Although the race cars should be approaching the entrance in full speed, with the appearance of the tunnel unchanging, space turns into a decoration, devoid of any guiding value, or any effect on the course of events. As a result, mystery and tension ensue, for space loses its referential value too.

Another outcome of the paradoxical temporality in the same scene is the abstraction of the depicted movement (in contrast to the movement implied through stillness that is by nature abstract). While the dramatic monologue of D'Arby as well as the conversation between Kakyōin and Joester keep extending in temporality, movements also extend, albeit without bringing any real change to the situation. Particular movements, such as the cars' ramming each other repeatedly on the road, lose their meaning and decisiveness to a great extent. In this case, it can be argued that the representation of movement turns into a bare spectacle while we wait for the turning point. In other words, as the duration of a scene increases simultaneously with the stillness of the images constituting it, it threatens the causality that binds events, and hence the formation of an anticipatory basis for the future.

To sum up, *Stardust Crusaders* presents functioning indicators of speed, power, etc., in the frame, and therefore recalls the calculability presented by video games. Still, in contrast to their visual counterparts in games, the fact that such indications are not shown all the time, give them more of a decorative value. Moreover, with the complete scale of points not being available to the audience, these indications remain uninterpretable.

Similar to *Gurren Lagann,* in *Stardust Crusaders*, too, the pronounced role of voice comes to the fore. However, here in *Stardust Crusaders*, it is particularly obvious that the combination of voice (inner and dramatic monologues, conversations, etc.), sound effects, and music serves a double function. On the one hand, as discussed through the hacking scene in *Gurren Lagann*, voice acting produces some hints regarding future events in the form of inner monologues that reveal the characters' strategies. Given the extreme stillness of images, the absence or the abstraction of spatio-temporal hints in anime is generally balanced by the introduction of verbal explanations for the sake of clarity. Nevertheless, these strategies provide us only with temporary limits. They are revealed only partially to the audience, and are prone to change —repeatedly at times— before the action is complete. Consequently, the audience is left bereft of hints for causality (again in stark contrast to the careful guidance in games), for the relation of actions and consequences are constantly readjusted. Then, only after the action is complete, or only in retrospect can one reach a relatively reliable interpretation. It has to be kept in mind that this is a very tough task when we are talking about long-running series.

On the other hand, audio elements of various sorts help forging a temporal unity and moving the narrative —as Steinberg points out through Tezuka's statements on anime production (13). While movement in limited animation is minimized, the continuity of sound assures the audience that the narrative flow has not actually come to a halt. However, there are further consequences of sound-meeting-limited animation that need to be emphasized here in relation to the concept of play. As limited animation employs sound to boost up dynamism, yet keeps the number of cels depicting movement as few as possible (or sticks to such aesthetics while employing digital techniques), it also runs the risk of abstracting time, movement, and space —particularly when the time is over-stretched. Thanks to the sound, the audience can understand that the fictional time is passing. But what happens if the passing time does not lead to any change of state? What happens if the road seems to go on and on, yet the characters never get closer to their destination? To put it simply, causality dissipates. As spatio-temporal cues do not work, making

predictions becomes less and less possible for the audience, hence mystery and tension fill the atmosphere.

In reverse proportion to the scarcity of reliable clues as to how things work in the fictional world, and consequently as to what may unfold in the next episode, verbal statements in various forms provide abundant clues about the emotional states of the characters. In fact, in the racing scene of analysis, half of the "conversation" between Joester and Kakyōin takes the form of loud cheering and commands —rather than having an explanatory value, words as well as sounds and music are teeming with tension. Even if the audience may not know what to anticipate, they cannot fail to notice the strong distress felt by the characters. In this way, character relations occupy the center of attention permanently, as causal/spatial/temporal connections unravel, setting the characters free to form new relations at any given setting, with any other set of elements.

Unpredictability and Dynamism in Anime (Part II): Stillness Negated
Steinberg, as we have mentioned above, delves into the dynamism of anime and the effects of anime techniques, eventually to discuss the medium's position in media mix projects. Thomas Lamarre, who is an inspiration for Steinberg, critically examines the structures of depth and their effects on perception from a media-theoretical perspective in his seminal monograph, *The Anime Machine.* Below, let us take a closer look at *No Game No Life* (*Nōgēmu Nōraifu,* 2014) in relation to Lamarre's theory.

As mentioned previously, *No Game No Life* is about two siblings named Shiro and Sora, both of whom are well-known gamers. Known by the nickname "Blank," their team has an immaculate gaming history with no defeat, although in real life they are nothing but outcasts. One day they receive a mysterious message, an invitation to an alternative reality where every clash of interests gets resolved in some type of a game. Following their crash into this new realm, they start playing for the throne. Throughout the series, the siblings play multiple games with differing set of rules. Only the very last challenge comes in the

shape of a video game. In contrast to the previous example from *Stardust Crusaders* though, Shiro and Sora *enter* the virtual game world through some equipment of virtual reality.

The first thing that the audience sees is the complete intro of the game. The intro relies heavily on 3D rendering, but the style is not preserved after the intro is over —which gives the impression that the intro's purpose was to emphasize the particularity of the video game medium. Once the siblings open their eyes to the virtual Tokyo which happens to be the battle field, they get stricken with agoraphobia automatically. Only after confirming that it is not the actual city of Tokyo that they are in, they regain their composure and start listening to the explanations for how to play the game. In a radically different manner than the previous case studies, the rule system here seems to be given a quite pronounced central position. Even more loyal to the experience of playing a game, the characters announce that they will explore the rest of the limits uncovered by the guidebook while they are playing the game.

The video game that the siblings are challenged to play (in a team of four against one main enemy) is a shooter entitled *Love or be Loved,* in which the players try to shoot rivals and non-playable characters with "love guns." The game doesn't have a complex set of rules, nevertheless, the siblings are professional enough to check out the degree to which real life physics are incorporated into the system. Interestingly, these rules prove reliable unlike in the case of *Stardust Crusaders*. It is made clear both to the audience and the characters of the story that the rules are final: the bouncing bullet will bounce every time, clothes will always disappear if shot, etc. Rules are so important that upon noticing that Stephanie, who is another member of their team, is not processing the necessary info, Shiro and Sora deny her the position of a capable player. Subtly implied here is the goal-centered understanding of a game, which discards the pure experience of the game world as meaningless.

In order to discuss the specificities of movement in anime, let us turn to the first serious battle scene. In accordance with the content of the scene, we witness a significant rise in the tempo of action. After Shiro

finds out the hiding place of the enemy, Izuna, she starts to climb the stairs faster and faster till she breaks into a sprint. While the music speeds up, the tension also rises, culminating in Izuna's shot in Shiro's direction, and the following zigzags of the love missile. As Shiro proves to be a much better opponent than Izuna predicts, the showdown between the two temporarily gets masked by a white light of powerful explosion. Overwhelmed with her opponent's precise and relentless shooting, as a series of bullets sweep past her, Izuna runs at a supernatural pace allowed to her as a were-beast.

Of course, the (in)famous limitation on movement in limited animation, or in better words, the the minimization of movement even and most noticeably in scenes of intense action can be easily observed here. While such minimization comes with a particular use of stillness and repetition, it must be noted that the combination does not negatively effect the pace of action. On the contrary, within the particular gameworld in *No Game No Life*, repetitive actions such as quick and long runs, high jumps and sequences of flight that turn invisible to the eye produce a sense of speed and agility implied by reduced visibility. Moreover, the ensuing sensation is employed specifically in relation to the supernatural powers that two characters, namely Izuna and Jibril, have possessed from their birth and brought to virtual reality with themselves. The type of movement that generally applies to the humans in the game, namely to Stephanie, Shiro, and Sora, are short sprints and repetitive gun shots.

The game that the characters are thrown into is a shooting game, making gun shots a valid point of analysis. As a matter of fact, one of the most important scenes can be explained to define anime dynamics. Proving almost equal to their enemy in the battlefield, Shiro and Sora take temporary shelter in a park with Jibril on the watch. While Shiro frantically tries to calculate their chances of winning and to develop a strategy, the party gets attacked suddenly by Izuna. The missile shot from her gun crosses the frame from the upper right to the down left, and leaves a glowing neon trace.

Right after the gunfire, as an expression of despair sweeps Sora's face, a bluish-white light fills the space, and we understand that Shiro is shot. Following suit, Izuna appears right above her enemies. Next a bunch of glowing missiles come rapidly from slightly different angles and bounce off the ground in various directions. Finally, Shiro, who has automatically joined the enemy's side after being shot, sends a bullet straight at her brother. While Sora is frozen in the middle of the screen with dread on his face, in the split of a second Jibril enters the frame from the right, and snatches him out of the missile's range.

Now, in order to analyze the scene, let us turn to Lamarre's theory regarding anime, starting with the concepts of *animetism* and *cinematism*. Animetism is one type of "potential" that moving images acquire, manifesting on and between surfaces, for example, on and between layers of celluloid sheets when they are laterally moved as in the case of limited animation. In contrast to this stands cinematism, creating a sensation of proceeding *into* depth, which might be associated with a bullet's (i.e., a ballistic) perspective and thus with destruction. There are a multitude of ways to convey a sensation of movement in animation, but conveying a sense of movement *into* depth requires a certain type of compositing that leaves gaps in between the cels (or layers) composing an image, emphasizing the emerging feeling of volume while maintaining a Cartesian perspective throughout the animation process. However, Lamarre points to the fact that anime in general opts for "flat compositing" —which, on the contrary, pushes the cels closer to each other and to the surface. Being pushed to the same level as the rest of the composition in this manner, the background ceases to function as a reference point. Finally, when the cels are moved or slid laterally with almost or no gap in between, which is often the case in non-digital anime production, movement gets spread on the surface. Naturally, such combination of lateral movement and flat compositing does not support a sense of permanent depth.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that anime ends up devoid of depth altogether, or that it cannot present an attractive rendering of missile movement. Obviously, the scenes in question from *No Game No Life* show a lot of missiles flying around, and "[t]he rapid divergence, convergence of the missiles as they

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race from their source seeking their target produces a phantasm of one-point perspective in its ballistic form" (131). While Lamarre uses the quoted words to describe a scene from another animation, namely the *Daicon III Opening Animation* (made by the animators who would form Gainax later), they are perfectly applicable to *No Game No Life* too. In *Love or be Loved*, as the bullets that the characters fire at each other cross the screen diagonally, they give a sense of depth to the environment with the curving trajectories they follow and the glowing traces they leave behind. However, as Lamarre notes, what appears on the screen "is not exactly one-point perspective: even though there is a sense of an origin and destination for the movement that recalls the vanishing point of one-point perspective, nonetheless the relative sizes of projectiles do not follow from scalar projection." (131) Perspectival representation strictly organizes the sizes of each (visual) component of an image according to their distance from the implied observer looking at the image. The scenes described above, however, feature no change in the size of the missiles while they move across the image. As Lamarre puts it, the elements forming the (moving) image follow, instead, the principle of "exploded projection," which organizes parts in relation to the whole. In other words, exploded projection shows objects as if there is an explosion at the core, pushing each piece equally away from the center, without making a change in their sizes in relation to the implied presence of an observer to the scene.

The replacement of Cartesian perspective with exploded projection brings about several implications and outcomes. By not regulating the sizes of moving objects according to their distance from the observer, exploded projection undermines the idealized position of the audience. Even though we can say that temporary sensations of depth keep appearing, such occasions confirm the standpoint, or acknowledge the authority of the observer/audience for only as long as they last. Moreover, *the* standpoint disperses into a multiplicity, and multiple standpoints may contradict. While the centrality of the audience gets weakened, the contents, or the information found in the (moving) image gain centrality. As the position of the audience does not have any effect on the size of the components of an image any more, everything is emphasized to the same extent (equalized). Not surprisingly, Lamarre's discussion connects to Rancière's

discussion of images at this point: —be them visual, verbal, or of any other kind,— images are brimming with an excess of information that goes hand in hand with their de-hierarchization, and with the difficulty in picking a permanent interpretive standpoint for the audience.

Anime techniques, especially the combination of flat compositing with the lateral sliding of cels, produce diegetic outcomes. The lack of permanent depth that ensues from such combination sets movement free to erratically diverge on the surface. In other words, in anime worlds, movement can come from any direction, any time. Lamarre describes the effects through the example of *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (*Fushigi no umi no Nadia*, 1989–90) with these words:

> Flatter compositing imparts the sense of a space and time structured around sudden appearances and disappearances. Many of these devices are not specific to *Nadia* but part of a general rhetoric of television anime in which figures pop abruptly on and off the screen, or heads poke into a scene, or screens suddenly split into two, three, four, or more planes. Usually the planes are articulated diagonally to emphasize a field of multiple actions, in contrast to horizontal and vertical splits that often stress simultaneity. (161)

In the light of Lamarre's theory, what can be said about *No Game No Life*? Despite the obvious emphasis on rules and therefore predictability, through the use of lateral movement and flat compositing, the transition between binary states is rendered imperceptibly quick, which re-introduces unpredictability to the scene. In other words, the definitiveness of rules IS counterbalanced by the sudden intrusion of bullets into our field of vision from any angle, at any time. With the heavy use of such techniques, especially in line with a narrative of sudden raids and the need to hide, states of stillness-speed and visibility-invisibility are starkly contrasted.

Following this, it can be said that limited animation, or more specifically anime which opts for flat compositing, does not simply impose a constriction on movement. Instead, in contrast to strict representations of Cartesian perspective, by not providing a permanent trajectory for action, it usually builds a rather pronounced sense of dynamism. Unleashing objects and characters from an anchoring order of depth, and pushing them to the same level of the surface, enables a multiplicity of directions and synchronicity in action. Rather than pointing at the limits of action, thanks to such techniques employed all too often in action scenes, the sense of predictability is undermined, and the joy of surprise is regained.

C. PLAYING ANIME

Anime Unlimited

In the abstract of his article "No Mastery Without Mystery: *Dark Souls* and the Ludic Sublime," Daniel Vella coins and defines the term the "ludic sublime" as the "crucial aesthetic moment in the player's engagement with a game, defined by the player's drive towards mastery of the game coming face-to-face with the impossibility of obtaining complete, direct knowledge of the underlying system." According to Vella, the very fact that a player can never exhaust the combinations a game may provide, grants the game a contradictory charm. The player grasps that it is impossible to understand the core of the game as it is and in its entirety, yet s/he feels driven to this awe inspiring mechanism. By the power of mystery, the player is intrigued to delve under the surface of the game, and wonder about the complete set of possibilities offered by the black box. In Vella's understanding, lack seems to be the driving force for the gamer. Vella connects the concept of the "ludic sublime" to Rancière's "aesthetic regime." But before discussing the particularities of his take on Rancière in the chapter to follow, let us first discuss the picture Vella draws for gaming experience.

Vella's point is important, first of all, in that it reveals how game systems provide more than what is accessible to the players. Game researchers generally tend to emphasize the centrality of the game system

as a core of precise rules that are determined and determining all the other aspects of a game. While the focus is on the game system, gaming seems to be a perfect give and take between the game and the player: players provide the input, the game system creates the output. It naturally follows that the player develops an understanding of the game system directly, which leads to mastery. While Vella acknowledges the indispensability of the game system for the understanding of the medium's grammar, he believes that the exclusive interest in it overshadows some other aspects of gaming experience —most importantly the subjectivity of gameplay. As Vella aptly remarks, there is "an essential, and unbridgeable, gap, between her [the player's] experience of the game, her understanding of the game as system, and her awareness of an underlying implied game object" (4) —and it is in this gap that he locates the ludic sublime. Vella's point compels us to focus on the players' understanding of games rather than the game system itself, for the players will build an understanding of the game, and mentally construct a model of the game system depending on their own experience —that is, their play sessions and observations.

Indeed, recent critical discourses on gaming seem to slant towards the same direction as Vella. In "Constitutive Tensions of Gaming's Field: UK gaming magazines and the formation of gaming culture 1981-1995," Graeme Kirkpatrick draws attention to the historical variations of how the term "gameplay" was understood. Interestingly, at the earlier stages of the medium's appearance, gaming magazines would advertise games as software that deserves merit depending on how their codes are written, and as technological products comparable to even fax machines. As Kirkpatrick showcases, magazines back then would give codes for the readers to type in themselves for free play. This sounds like an unlikely selling strategy for today, for at least two reasons: commercial titles generally consist of complex coding, and the charm of games is thought to reside in "gameplay." Despite being a vaguely defined phenomenon, the importance of gameplay is emphasized in contrast to the understanding of games solely as technology, and it is thought to include the individual's personal gaming experience. Critical discourses also seem to dwell more and more on such experience, and one's failures (to carry out actions, to discover

possibilities) too are counted as a valuable part of it.[32] The experience is formed through what the player can't do as well as what s/he can.

However, despite the validity and importance of Vella's point regarding the centrality of the players' understanding of the game system rather than the game system itself, it can be argued that the fascination with the system or the possibilities it enables cannot capture the entirety of a gameplay experience either. While the charm of endless possibilities cannot be denied, it may not be the only driving force for the players. Instead of yearning for a complete knowledge of the game system or the mysteries that it holds, players may find satisfaction in a personally limited area within the unlimited.

To oppose Vella's assumption, the multiplicity of player preferences in gaming can be brought to mind. While some people have a "gamist agenda" (in Ron Edwards' terms) of playing for a particular goal, to a person of a "narrativist agenda," a game may end with the exhaustion of anticipatory play, no matter how many possibilities that may leave uncovered (qtd. in Upton 192-8). We can also easily bring to mind how some people try to cover certain games which grant multiple lives to a character without dying at all. Upton calls such limitations brought to the gameplay by the gamers themselves "internal constraints." While the categorization of gamers' tendencies as gamist or narrativist agendas may feel too broad to account for particular cases, Upton's concept shows how gamers can create their own rules and find pleasure in accomplishing the tasks of their own invention. As in the case of "speed-runs," in which gamers try to finish games in the minimum amount of time possible, the optimum interaction that a game offers can even be ignored. While it can be argued that players' decision to play games in alternative ways should be considered as extras to the main attraction of the systematic potential, or as a part of it, it is simply impossible to prove what passes as the main attraction without looking at each play session.

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[32] See "Death Loop as a Feature" by Olli Tapio Leino.

The type of animation so far exemplified is called "limited animation," which is mostly identified with Japanese TV anime. Limited animation differs from "full animation" especially with the reduced number of drawings used to animate movement. Similar to the common but changing attitude in game studies to over-emphasize the system's role in gaming, and partially resonating with Vella's fascination with the plus alpha that can never be obtained, the perception of anime has also been dominated by a focus on lack and limitation.

At first glance, the emphasis on lack and limitation as the defining trait of the medium does not seem baseless. A quick look at TV anime series reveals a common point regarding movement. As mentioned quite often, where one expects to see movement at most, that is in the fighting scenes, movements of the character(s) actually flee from sight with gradations. In battle scenes movements can be masked. Although such scenes are obviously action scenes, not only the movements, but even the bodies of characters might vanish. In the end, the anime audience never get to see the whole movement, or are granted a complete revelation of movement or of the trick of the action. However, there never is such a promise to begin with. Here, what is *given* instead might be called *attraction* (also referred as *spectacle*).

As Wanda Strauven puts it briefly, "[v]ery generally, attraction stands for 'center of interest,' for that which attracts people (e.g. tourist attraction); more specifically, it can refer to a spectacle, a (variety, circus, cinema, etc.)" ("Introduction to an Attractive Concept" 18). In other words, contents related to "showing" rather than "telling," not to be interpreted but to be enjoyed, may be categorized as attraction. Similar to a magic show rather than detective fiction, the entertaining aspect is what cannot be seen. A magical illusion is never explained; watching it is the source of fun.

Many film scholars, Tom Gunning in the first place, related this concept with specific periods in cinema history, especially with early cinema from the beginnings of the 20th century. In "From the 'Cinematic' to

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the 'Anime-ic': Issues of Movement in Anime," Caroline Ruddell connects Gunning's arguments to anime in the eye opening way that follows:

> Gunning argues that viewers of (early) cinema were well equipped to decipher the 'magic' of the illusion and were active consumers of this form of entertainment. Gunning's observation is useful in understanding how spectators are likely to bring more 'knowledge' to the cultural products they encounter. […] Spectacle as events, literally slowed so that we may enjoy the sheer display of innovative depictions of movement, can be understood as 'lifted' from the development of aspects such as narrative. This is not to say that viewers do not identify with the images of 'disruptive' movement; the showcasing of spectacle and animation, as well as the comment on character psychology and motivation, can provide further 'anchoring' points for viewers. (125-6)

Obviously anime has developed its own spectacle since its birth, which is hardly surprising. In fact, not only has anime found innovative ways of presenting minimized movement, it has also turned the jerkiness of movement itself into a form of attraction. As Ruddell's words indicate, the disruption of movement has become inherently connected with characters, partly and most obviously through the dialogues and commentaries increasingly used in the absence of movement —sometimes precisely to explain this very absence. Moreover, as actions stretch over time due to the reduced number of frames employed, and their results are delayed indefinitely, characters get stuck in moments of emotional strain and anxiety. In this way, we can say that anime transfers the visibility of the external (movement) to the internal (psychology). Inner worlds of the characters and the relations between them take the central role generally belonging to actions. This shift is not only acknowledged by the audience, but also sought after actively by them.

> Every medium, we might say, is founded on an enabling condition, a "positive subtraction" or "enabling impediment" that in turn defines it as a medium. The responses to this positive

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limitation do not imply a kind of teleology implicit in the medium but rather a set of creative

innovations that could solidify into something like style, technique, genre, or system. For anime,

the limiting of motion was the positive condition for its formation as a style[33] and for the

development of the transmedia communication on which it depends. (Steinberg 35)

With the words quoted above, Steinberg presents the so-called limitation on the representation of

movement as a constructive condition for the medium's identity. At the end of the quote, he makes clear

that the identity of anime is inextricably related to other media. As mentioned previously, Steinberg turns

to the basic animation techniques that Tezuka and Mushi Productions developed, and reveals how they

have incorporated conventions of manga and *kamishibai* (storyboard theater) into anime. However, thanks

to the same phase of experimentation at the birth of the medium, as Tezuka envisaged based on his

knowledge of kamishibai, sound has also made its appearance as an indispensable element of narration. It

is the combination of all these elements that has come to grant anime a peculiar sensation of dynamism in

the end. High tempo music and over the top voice acting help building the impression that events are

unraveling at a great pace, the extremity of which cannot be observed but felt.

Seen from the perspective of Lamarre's theory, the processes accounted by Ruddell and Steinberg are

made possible thanks to the "multiplanar animetic machine" (26) or simply the "anime machine" that

Lamarre regards as a site of underdetermination. This concept brings together multiplanar images

(resulting from the combination of multiple layers of drawings on top of each other), animetic movement

(the type of lateral movement favored by the animation stand), and Félix Guattari's concept of *machine* (a

nodal point where abstract and concrete elements like drawings, camera, and artists' contributions are

brought together). Thus, Lamarre's anime machine becomes a space for unforeseen interaction within the

materiality of animation. The anime machine does not only bring together a multiplicity of medial tools

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[33] While Steinberg approaches anime as a "style," this thesis posits it as a particular medium. For the particular
reasons, see the introduction.

and the expressive potentials they hold. Through the structures of movement and depth brought about by its technical properties, it imbues the moving images with a power and potential that get spread on the surface of the screen, which compels us to reconsider anime's so-called limitedness. In its ability to fold multiple media into itself, anime creates various entry points for further pleasure, available for an extremely wide audience group. In the light of these, anime cannot be evaluated through the simple binary oppositions of limited vs. full, or lacking vs. complete. Anime creates surplus, and this surplus becomes equally defining as the supposed lack of movement in the medium.

Animetic Playspace

Previously, we discussed the effects of animetism in creating temporary depth and erratic, unpredictable action. Through the combination of Lamarre and Steinberg, we have observed clearly how the stillness of animetism has an implied dynamic nature, in its potential to present sudden spurts of action according to Lamarre, and in its very stillness according to Steinberg. Finally in the previous section, we arrived at the conclusion that regardless of whichever perspective we take, the limited animation of anime does not seem to be limited in the sense that it is somehow lacking. Instead, as Ruddell says, "viewers […] identify with the images of 'disruptive' movement; the showcasing of spectacle and animation, as well as the comment on character psychology and motivation, can provide further 'anchoring' points for viewers" (125-6). To paraphrase Ruddell's quote, we can say that even if stopping the movement means taking away some stages of narrative development (or some elements of *fabula* or story in narratological terms) by suspending the action, an anchoring ground of affect, or a new *space* is created.

While Ruddell addresses the effects of suspended action in anime clearly and briefly, the theoretical foundation to her account comes from Gilles Deleuze's writings on cinema, also employed by Lamarre extensively in the second part of *The Anime Machine*. In his seminal works *Cinema I* and *II*, Deleuze groundbreakingly introduced the concept of "time-image" in comparison to "action-image" into film analysis. Lamarre briefly yet clearly introduces both concepts in the following passage:

What Deleuze calls classic cinema is not unlike what other film scholars call the classical style—which entails an emphasis on cause-and-effect, goal-orientated movement through a subordination of time to space. Simply put, cinema develops a set of conventions to impart a sense that movements clearly begin and end somewhere, and we can trace their course coherently. This often translates into narratives in which protagonists pursue and attain a goal. […] [A]mong varieties of movement-image coordinated within classic cinema, the action-image is the one that tended to shape the conventions for cause-and-effect, goal-oriented action that came to dominate classic cinema. It is a crisis in this specific kind of movement-image (the action-image), within the overall coordination of cinema called classic cinema, which spurs the emergence of the time-image.   (197)

While the term may lead simply to the expectation of movement on screen, action-image does not necessarily show movement, but builds a sense of causality at times through montage by showing action and its consequences. What counts, as Lamarre states, is the clear correlation between cause and effect, which presents a traceability to the action. The apparent change in spatial coordinates yields a sensation of time passing as it would in our physical reality.

Time-image, in contrast, *visualizes time*, which spells out a crisis for action-image. Beyond this stark opposition, time-image can be further explained through the concept of the "interval" in the way Lisa Åkervall does in "Cinema, Affect and Vision":

In the cinema of the Movement-Image the interval is an in-between between action and reaction, a short suspension between a perception-image and an action-image, but in the cinema of the Time-Image its function changes substantially. The interval widens and claims its own right; it enchains action from reaction. The perception-image is no longer followed by an action-image.

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As the sensory-motor schema of action and reaction – the sensory-motor way of connection –

breaks down, optical and sound situations emerge. These are situations that are no longer directly

transformed into action, but rather extend the interval's state of suspension and latency and thus

open up a space for thought and an experience of time no longer tied to movement.

In light of Åkervall's introduction, time-image seems like an over-extended interval between an action

and its presumable outcomes, usurping the realm of representation that action is expected to fill.

Postponing results of actions for indeterminable periods of time in this way does not only obscure

causality, but also undermines the hegemony of movement on screen. The stage then belongs to "optical

and sound situations" which do not paint a picture of how actions develop, but present themselves as they

are, and show time as it is, instead of implying its passing as a side effect. In fact, this is how affect is

born: not in relation to the context, but within an unclear limbo state that erases relations but leaves

power. It can be said that the audience here are not reaching a logical conclusion through studying the

context which should yield a particular feeling or emotion. Instead, they *physically perceive* the scene so

to say, and crudely label it as an impactful period of time rather than an impossibility that breaks

narration.

Obviously Lamarre considers anime to lend itself remarkably well to the production of the time-image,

which does not stop at putting the action-image in crisis. "Limited animation tends toward the production

of 'soulful bodies,' that is, bodies where spiritual, emotional, or psychological qualities appear inscribed

on the surface" (201). Lamarre notes that in combination with character design, this particular stillness on

the screen works to impart a sensation of dynamism to the characters, animating, so to say, their

inner-worlds while detaching them from their backgrounds and contexts (204). In the scope of this

chapter a perfect illustration of the case has been discussed. In *JoJo* we have seen how the action-image

can be distorted, how actions can lead to results —if they ever do— only with a significant and

disorienting delay, how the spatial and temporal relations can be severed, and how, as Lamarre and

Ruddell state, the tension gets written on characters' faces in close-up. Rather than depicting the course of action, the racing scene discussed above seems as if depicting a mesh up of the objective chain of happenings and the characters' subjective perception of it.

Overall, we can say that the time-image in anime is received as an intensity, which leads to a habitual reaction through repetition, and to affective relations with parts that do not necessarily come together to form larger narrative units. Due to the growing familiarity with this type of image, along with the growing satisfaction derived from the parts that constitute an image (especially characters and certain features of the characters), the time-image does not stir a perceptual crisis anymore. In other words, it does not push the audience to think outside the box to make sense of the medial experience. Nevertheless, when Ruddell is building upon Lamarre's theories, she hints at a complication occurring during this process:

> The 'stopping,' or slowing, of action within the action sequences focuses attention less on the development of the battle than on InuYasha and his renewed powers. The spectacle of InuYasha and his abilities is made prominent over all other aspects of the narrative, even the exact events of the battle; in both instances it is not really clear how InuYasha wins as he often is shown 'isolated' in the frame, rendering an understanding of spatial relationships to other characters rather difficult. (120) [emphasis mine]

Ruddell's words echo Lamarre's observation that spatial relations are broken. What is clearly revealed is InuYasha's powers (but not their limits) and his inner world. Instead of acquiring spatial understanding, or maybe because it is impossible to acquire spatial understanding, the audience can now focus on the characters and develop affective relations with them. But, as Ruddell demonstrates, not only space, but also actions remain in the dark. Still, this doesn't mean that their existence is erased. Taking Ruddell's interpretation a little further, it can be argued that through the implication of an action taking place somewhere, anime actually creates *a new space* —except, no one can give a true account of its contents.

This new space can be called an "animetic playspace," which should be contrasted to a "gap." For example, when movement is supposedly masked by bright lights or completely substituted with abstract shots, what is hinted at is an intense force released or a great impact dealt. It is this effect, this attractive effect or spectacle that fills the gap. Instead of a lack, what arises can be seen as an opportunity to introduce attraction. In the meantime, however, it is equally possible that nothing actually happens, or things fail to happen in the emerging space. No one can now, for it is blocked from sight. The important point is, unlike a gap that is missing something, here the audience perceives a positive space where anything can potentially happen.

We can see the spectacle in combination with a masking in *No Game No Life* —not only the background vanishes, a light covers the whole frame with the characters inside, sweeping over the characters. In this total abstraction, there is still volume and power. As a matter of fact, light is a potent tool in creating space. For example, Zero art movement, active between 1957 and 1967, was born out of the will to change the intellectual atmosphere of pessimism in the aftermath of the World War. Regarding light, which was one of the most important "materials" that the group engaged with, Otto Piene makes the following philosophical statement: I go to darkness itself, I pierce it with light, I make it transparent, I take its terror from it, I turn it into a volume of power with the breath of life like my own body ("Paths to Paradise" 65). What Piene and his colleagues seek is the sense of *power and volume* that light is able to produce.

With the use of light in anime, volume/space is created in 2D and is masked at the same time. Movement can't be seen, but the open space is perceived as a positive *space-for-potential-action* rather than a negative *space-lacking-action*. Let us remember how, in *No Game No Life,* Shiro gets shot in a flash of light and falls on the ground during Izuna's surprise attack. Later in the story, however, it is revealed that she was never shot —she was only pretending to be.

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Such understanding of space brings to mind the playspace in games from a certain perspective.

> There may be 10^{50} unique positions within the play space of chess, but at any moment during a game only a few dozen lie within the horizon. And since many of these will be rejected as tactically unwise by expert players, the typical horizon of intent in a game of chess contains only a few moves. If we are interested in analyzing gameplay, these two horizons give us a way to talk about the moment-to-moment texture of the encounter while allowing us to ignore huge chunks of the play space that don't affect a player's immediate experience. (Upton 49)

Let me clarify this weird analogy between the playspace in anime and the playspace on the chessboard. As Upton states, naturally, some squares are often left unvisited in a single play session. However, the unused spaces obviously differ from the space outside the board. The space outside the board is an actual space of lack, yet the unused space's is ghostly presence, its potential is felt all through the game.

The use of stillness and light together implies dynamism and generates affect. At the same time, this combination creates a (positive value of) space, which is necessarily filled with affect, and therefore is relatable yet unknown. The true contents of this space will never be known —not only because they are not shown, but also because of the contradictory information that the medium amply provides. Unlike the "huge chunks of the play space that don't affect a player's immediate experience," animetic playspace *affects* immediate experience. The reception of the inherent unclarity invites, even triggers recreations of the potent scene. In such space, physical action and character interactions can be imagined later.

> If I put the term "viewers" in quotes here, it is because we have already seen, first in the discussion of Okada Toshio's otakuology and then in the context of Anno Hideaki's exploded view, anime often involves the construction of multiple lines of sight or perceptual trajectories. These do not

entail a defined viewing position or a fixed subject who transcendently consumes anime objects or patronizes the anime world. Instead, we saw how anime techniques and structures imply an interactor whose pursuit of the potential depths that traverse the anime/manga/game world make of her or him a cooperator in the production and promotion of the expanded anime world. The pivotal role of the garage kit in Okada's apologia for otaku reinforces this sense of the fan as a producer, assembler, or fabricator, who engineers and navigates his or her path within the manga/anime/game world. Viewing anime frequently builds on or extends into fanzines, amateur production *(dōjinshi),* cosplay (costume play), conventions, fan- subbing, toys, garage kits, and music venues. Anime thus becomes a nodal point in a culture industry that generates crossover, spin-off, or tie-in productions in the form of manga, light novels, character franchises, toys, music, video games, and other merchandise. (185)

In this lengthy paragraph, Lamarre draws attention to how actively the audience is consuming anime (thanks to the "anime techniques and structure"), which manifests itself in the form of various types of fan-works. What I would like to further point out is that *even the so-called passive form of consumption involves the active involvement of the audience* —not only because people have to interpret what they see on the screen, but also because engaging with anime requires a specific form of combinatory play with the ambiguity that it tends to produce.

Before ending this chapter, let us take one last look at *No Game No Life.* Right before the attack in the previously discussed scene at the park, Shiro frantically tries to calculate their chances of winning and to develop a strategy to beat Izuna. However, she stops without producing a numerical outcome. While it looks depressing at first glance, this does not mean that the result of her calculations is zero, which refers to impossibility. The result she finds is "blank," the name she and her brother give also to their team. Unlike zero, blank is not absence; it is a ghostly presence (with volume but no specific shape) like the playspace in anime.

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Putting Theory Into Perspective

As a form of play, what kind of constraints can we talk about in the case of anime, and what kind of free movement? What helps us map out the limits and potential for action (what a character can and cannot do), what helps us predict what is to come? In the meantime, how does anime keep our options open, underdetermined?

Anime does not provide the same kind of interactivity with video games. Moreover, it doesn't seem to pronounce causality and predictability through spatial design and calculability. On the contrary, the examples discussed in this chapter suggest that anime particularly undermines calculability. Nonetheless, as a form of play anime is expected to provide a balance of un/predictability.

The main source of predictability for the anime audience can actually be located outside the medium. It can be identified as the database, as the informative environment surrounding all forms of media. Today, all sorts of information are at least potentially parts of a massive virtual storage —made more dynamic, comprehensive, and accessible than ever thanks to digital technologies and the internet. This database gives birth to the possibility of easily breaking everything into their smallest units of resemblance, simply by gathering everything together. In other words, it encourages to seek and find recognizable elements and patterns. Anime's interpretive constraints largely stem from the medium's willing embrace of such recognizable and therefore predictable elements. This being the case, it might be a better strategy to further inquire how anime balances out the situation by increasing unpredictability.

On top of the downplay of calculability, the structures of movement and stillness directly related to anime techniques do not support predictability, except for temporary periods. Instead, they create a sense of dynamism, unpredictability, and ambiguity. The internal logic is never clear —always retrospectively adjusted. In contrast to video games, anime opens alternative routes for interpretation and serialization in

this way, while balancing the determining effects of the database. The ensuing balance is a balance of extremes, supporting a profusion of predictability and unpredictability. Therefore, as to the question whether we can measure the potential of a character, techniques of limited animation don't seem to provide a positive answer.

What, then, fills the void of emphasized causality in anime? While the structures of movement and stillness seem to downplay predictability, they seem to work in favor of affect. Instead of movement, characters' mental states gain visibility, and the focus shifts to character relations. The dramatic use of aural and verbal elements too, especially the large number of dialogue and monologues, strengthen the affective impact. Thanks to the structures of stillness and movement, anime creates a playspace of unpredictability and affect.

This animetic playspace which is registered as a site of intensity and unclarity (rather than a site of completely uninterpretable nonsense) allows combinatory play with whatever affective parts the audience can or would like to salvage. The encounters with these potent sites encourage the audience to imagine different routes of action, and keep re-imagining, provided that they find enjoyment in this form of consumption.

The first chapter claimed that gamelike media supports combinatory play in general. The second chapter discussed the particular playspace anime tends to create. Through the concrete example of *Sword Art Online* media mix, the following chapter will discuss in detail how gamelike media tend to allow for combinatory play with different sets of tools, and how their differing ways results in particular experiences.

CHAPTER 3 - SAME WORLD, DIFFERENT MEDIA

In the first chapter, through the combination of Hiroki Azuma and Jacques Rancière's theories, the emergence of an online and offline information bank, a database, has been brought to attention. It was argued that this database brings together the human factor with algorithms and different digital technologies, causing a momentous effect on the consumption and production of narratives.

Today, all sorts of information —potentially if not actually— stand in reserve for the making of new contents. Once these info appear on the same platform, it becomes easier to observe similarities in variation. What is stored can be dissected and classified, turned into a pressing reference point for what is yet to be stored, and yet to be produced. From the database perspective everything seems cliché, as everything is reduced to exchangeable units. But, precisely because they are exchangeable, these units possess an enhanced mobility.

If the characters of realist narratives are shaped by their social, historical, economic, etc. contexts, and are inextricably tied to them, the database presents characters as a set of recognizable elements, which allows them to exist in any context. In this way, an endless circle of life and death for characters, or an endless process of recycling, is born. Any paradoxical situation arising in this process is promised to be resolved in serialization —or simply can be imagined as an alternative trail of action in a parallel universe.

In this sense, ie. in how they seem to allow for recycling and repetition, contemporary narratives (especially of popular culture) can be considered gamelike. But then how exactly do we play them? According to Brian Upton, "play is free movement within a system of constraints" (15). In narrative media such movement takes place in the mind, referring to the "players'" constant move from one interpretation of events to another, and their constant retracing of the most possible course of action for what is to happen next. This being the case, the database seems to act like a system of constraints for

contemporary narratives, and a quite powerful one at that: By listing up the most commonly encountered characters/settings/events, along with their subunits or the moe-elements that constitute them, it suggests how a story should unravel.

How do gamelike narratives balance out this situation and create a sense, a space of freedom and unpredictability under the shadow of the database? In the previous chapter it was argued that anime provides a potent field of affect, an "animetic playspace" so to say, allowing for a specific kind of narrative play. In order to discover how this playspace comes into being, one needs to consider the aesthetics of the moving image.

Lamarre claims that anime puts the action-image (in a Deleuzian sense) into crisis. Quite often, anime still movement to such an extent that it becomes very difficult to connect an action with an outcome. The difficulty does not simply stem from a decrease in speed. In slow-motion scenes of classical cinema, for example, actions take longer than they should, but that doesn't usually challenge the audience's understanding of a scene. While the use of slow-motion generally comes with clues that help us register the change of speed as subjective or relative perception of time, the time-image seems to reveal how the subjective can usurp the objective realm. In case of the latter, actions seem to take place without producing results (at the expected pace, or at all), while this breach of causality is never openly addressed as subjective perception of objective (clock) time. As the time-image disrupts the connection between actions and their outcomes, along with the understanding of calculable time inferred from movement, Lamarre defines time-image as s "nonrelation at the heart of all cinematic relations and relationality" (199).

However, in contrast to what Deleuze assumed, the shocking quality or the subversiveness that would stem from the collapse of cinematic relations has already been lost. Not only has the time-image become more familiar to the audience and therefore less shocking, the strategies to deal with inconsistencies of any sort have also spread. Considering that serialization is a common tendency in production today —and

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that gamelike narratives are potentially never-ending stories—, contradictions are very likely to appear. In fact, Jan-Noël Thon considers acknowledging the abundance of inconsistencies and developing ways to handle them among the basics of literacy in contemporary media culture:

> [W]hen dealing with contemporary films, comics, and video games, recipients not only "fill in the gaps" (as it is described by Ryan's principle of minimal departure) but also routinely "ignore" some aspects of narrative representations in order to intersubjectively construct the represented storyworlds. Particularly in cases where the assumption of representational correspondence becomes problematic, recipients will look for alternative external explanations related to authors' intentions or representational conventions before trying to imagine implausible or even impossible situations or storyworlds, which would be made necessary by insisting on internal explanations. In fact, I would argue that both "filling in the gaps" and "ignoring" certain aspects of a narrative representation are equally crucial parts of comprehending narrative works across media. […] Kendall L. Walton pointedly describes this aspect of narrative meaning making in terms of a principle of charity: "The generation of fictional truths is sometimes blocked (if not merely deemphasized) just, or primarily, because they make trouble—because they would render the fictional world uncomfortably paradoxical […]" (62)

With regards to the alternative external explanations that Thon mentions in this passage, the following summary of Tamar Yacobi's theories could be revealing:

> The constructivist approach has been pioneered by Yacobi (1981, 2001, 2005), who directs attention to how readers resolve textual incongruities with five integrating mechanisms: (1) the genetic; (2) the generic; (3) the existential; (4) the functional; (5) the perspectival. The "genetic" mechanism attributes fictive oddities and inconsistencies to the author's production of the text, regarding them as the author's mistakes, among other things. The "generic" principle appeals to

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generic conventions of plot organization such as the progressive complication and the happy

ending of comedy. The "existential" principle refers incongruities to the fictive world, typically to

canons of probability that deviate from those of reality, as in fairy tales or in Kafka's

"Metamorphosis." The "functional" mechanism attributes textual incongruities to the work's

creative ends that require such oddities. And the "perspectival" principle ascribes textual

incongruities to the narrator's unreliable observation and evaluation as symptoms of

narrator/author discord […]. (Shen, "Unreliability" par. 24)

In fact, except for certain titles, anime do not aim for a subversive effect anyway. On the contrary, the

time-image is largely employed to balance out the decisiveness of the database. In other words, it is

possible to incorporate inconsistencies thanks to the database, while it is also *necessary* to incorporate

them to ensure that play can take place (or simply to avoid boredom to ensue because of the predictability

that the database brings to the case).

What kind of effect does the time-image produce in anime, or how is it perceived by the audience? On the

one hand, we react to an intensity (affect) inscribed mainly on characters. On the other hand, the "actual"

content of scenes that are hidden from sight is never revealed. In this potent setting, we can engage in

combinatory play: we can re/combine the parts we like if that is the type of pleasure that we seek. If not,

the most likely interpretation of the scene will suffice.

From now on, let us take a look at how media display *the same general tendency* (to balance play in the

age of the database) *with differing sets of tools.*

Are Video Games Gamelike?

In the way summarized above, the previous chapters have put together Lamarre and Azuma's theories.

However. Lamarre criticizes the latter in some ways. Interestingly the following quote raises one point of

criticism while also revealing how the two perspectives can be linked.

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Previously I used the term *distributive field* to characterize the tendency toward a dehierarchization of elements within the anime image, to acknowledge a loss of the sense of center and periphery, which comes with the flattening of layers (especially prevalent in the male otaku anime lineage of limited animation). I prefer distributive field to database structure, not only because distributive field gives a better sense of the dynamics of the image but also because it avoids the impasse that attends Azuma's account of database structure. Azuma acknowledges that certain elements (*moe* elements of attraction) serve as attractors, and yet in his haste to establish absolute breaks between modern and post- modern, he denies all forms of asymmetry. He construes the database structure in terms of a total erasure or complete disappearance of all forms of asymmetry. Consequently, when he tries to explain the attraction of *moe* elements, he calls on conventions and control. Which is to say, he does not see the emergence of attractive elements in terms of the materiality of the database. Instead he leaps outside the database structure, and suddenly and arbitrarily posits forces of control and social conventions that program the male otaku consumers to focus attention on specific elements, whence his references to brainwashing and drugging. Needless to say, this is where Azuma, despite his evocation of postmodern thought, is crudely modern and deterministic in his manner of thinking. (273-4)

This passage reveals that Lamarre considers the distributive field a better substitute for the database structure. The problem seems to be his peer's predilection for symmetry. This thesis shows that Lamarre and Azuma's theories are compatible on many levels. However, Lamarre aptly criticizes Azuma for ignoring the asymmetrical dynamics of media consumption. Azuma's argument indeed sounds too teleological at times as he observes a worldwide tendency toward a pure form of database consumption. For the time being, however, grand narratives seem to be mixing with smaller ones. Discussions made on online forums or on different platforms of social media seem to point at such a situation. Although a lot of

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people are consuming popular culture at an amazing rate, and are certainly familiar with the "unrealistic" conventions of popular media, it is not difficult to see many examples of moralistic readings that do not necessarily acknowledge the validity of other perspectives. Also, censorship laws applied in different parts of the world present another sound reason to believe that grand narratives, especially in relation to ethics and the state, still apply to the case.[34]

Nonetheless, Azuma's perspective proves invaluable for its emphasis on the imaginative environment that surrounds media and functions as a gravitational center. While anime lends itself very well to a discussion of the dynamics of the distributive field, it needs to be clarified that no medium is the originating point of this phenomenon. Database shows itself in manga, anime, light-novels; in fact, it goes well beyond the Japanese context, marking cinema, games, and other media forms produced and consumed transnationally. The asymmetries observed here and there might be considered the results of this border-defying quality, which puts the database in touch with factors of different intensities —such as different media, and other (non)human factors with different historical, economic, political, conceptual backgrounds.

In addition to the database, the concept of "gamelikeness" too faces solid criticism. In "Playing 'Naruto': Between Metanarrative Characters, Unit Operations, and Objects," Martin Roth introduces Azuma's theory altogether to criticize the concept of gamelikeness in the following way:

> [Azuma] advances the idea that in the area of pop-cultural contents, the "modern" system of story production is replaced by "meta-narrative game systems", which lay out the rules for "players", according to which they themselves can produce multiple narratives. However, Azuma restricts this concept of a game-like metanarrativity to the structural similarities between story generating

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[34] For more on the topic, see: "Re-viewing Thomas Lamarre's The Anime Machine After Hayao Miyazaki's The Wind Rises: On the Critical Potential of Anime" by Selen Çalık.

tabletop role-playing games and literature, and does not provide specific tools for the analysis of video games where they go beyond narrative. (247)

Roth basically says that gamelikeness is not applicable to games themselves. Azuma limits his discussion to certain genres and qualities of games, which renders his concept of gamelikeness inapplicable to games themselves. But Azuma himself acknowledges the situation by saying that he never intended to develop a theory of games to begin with. In any case, the following question begs for an answer: What makes games different to the extent that gamelikeness is not applicable to them?

Roth takes a look at how Naruto games offer a different experience compared to the anime and the manga of the same title (248). Basically, even when the games may have nothing new to add to the story, similar to what Ian Bogost observes in relation to the Harry Potter games, they offer the chance to choose the protagonist. Moreover, because of a "standardization [that] not only targets the fighting ability and health condition of the characters, but also takes place on the level of controls" (250), Roth claims that this "homogeneity among characters transforms them into abstract, functional, even 'characterless' beings, reducing their 'characteristics' to mere appearance and only a few special techniques" (250). In other words, due to the fact that the players use more or less the same controls for every character, who seem to possess equal amounts of power and health, the characters lose their feeling of personality. This, Roth claims, is farther-reaching than what Gō Itō observes to be kyara (250), and radically differs from Azuma's understanding of characters:

> Rather than defining game characters as a (limited) 'bundle of potential actions', it seems more appropriate to begin from the contrary assumption that they are, beyond their appearance and names, little more than empty shells that can be filled with content of functionality as demanded, and thus become interchangeable. (251)

To put it simply, video games seem to differ from other media in how they treat characters. The shelling out of characters requires proper attention if one is to engage in a comparative analysis of the medium in relation to gamelike media in particular.

> What is at work here may be understood as a particular set of unit operations, which reassemble very few fragmented elements into a meaningful unit, in which play momentarily takes place. As with the characters this suggests a structure of production opposite to that portrayed by Azuma. Rather than drawing on a huge database of elements or, in the case of game-like metanarrativity, on the individual "player", these games rely on a very limited selection of (altered) fragments from the franchise, but their system sets unit operations into motion, spontaneously relating diverse elements according to the required circumstances or demanded functionality, and thereby expanding the scale of the game. (254)

In the way that Roth describes them, in games, the difference or even hierarchy between character traits and powers is erased with the use of the same, inherently empty, and limited number of building blocks for everyone on the one hand. On the other hand, the limited number of actions that the characters might engage in in a particular order or combination, which could also lead to a sense of personality, are also handed over to the player.

In contrast, gamelike media seem to fix characters by attributing them unchangeable yet simple traits, from almost an unlimited pool of options, that is, the database. In order to move from text to text, characters need to be fixed in their essential traits, which would allow them to be recognizable in any situation, meaning that they are not entirely hollow.

However, the difference of video games from gamelike narrative media is not limited to the treatment of characters. In fact, the last quote from Roth's text points to the second aspect that should be discussed: "[T]hese games rely on a very limited selection of (altered) fragments from the franchise, but their system sets unit operations into motion, spontaneously relating diverse elements." To put it differently, while the

units used in games may be free of content, the system relates them in its particular ways. If games shell-out characters which enables the player to act on their behalf, they also need to fix the relation between input and output, and between actions and their outcomes in order to simulate what happens if the player takes control. If games give us the freedom to walk in characters' shoes, they can do so only by fixing such relations.

For example, if pushing the button A allows the character to jump, it is not going to turn into a sitting command all of a sudden. Moreover, if there is a gravitational force present in the gameworld, every jump will lead to a fall. Very crudely put, programming can be defined as writing "if statements" in codes. If a certain input is provided, it is bound to trigger a specific output. In other words, games build their own logic.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we seek real life logic in games. The fall after our jump may take three times longer than it should take in our world, in the case that the gameworld is given a gravity three times weaker. Plus, this logic does not only apply to the physics of a gameworld in a narrow sense: Our enemy may get stronger with each attack instead of getting weaker, unlike what would happen in real life. Lastly, even when the game logic is applicable to real life, it may not feel so realistic at times. For example, in one of the bonus episodes of *Hitman* (developed by IO Interactive and published by Square Enix) that came out in 2017, it is possible to assassinate the target by electrocution, which is entirely possible in real life. But the question is, how many people could come up with the idea to expose a wire so that the target would be shocked to death while he is urinating?

Nonetheless, all of the above situations reveal a certain logic that guides players' actions —life-like or not. Given that the relations between actions and outcomes are fixed, or consistent, any seeming absurdity can be justified. If we are aiming to cover a game, it is necessary to have a certain level of understanding of this logic which the gameplay itself reveals.

So how are the relations organizing action treated in gamelike media? Let us discuss this by taking a look at how characters manage to (repeatedly) survive death in anime, through a comparison with Disney animation.

The first thing that comes to mind regarding Disney is how obsessively the studio strives for animating movement in an attractive manner.

> Walt Disney famously pushed his animators toward a greater verisimilitude of movement and weight displacement in the drawing of their characters. Disney's drive toward realism was also taken to new levels in his attempt to reproduce the filmic production of depth in the form of the multiplane camera, a camera with multiple levels of glass separated spatially, allowing animators to produce a cinematic illusion of depth (from differentiation between foreground, middle ground, and background to the simulation of racking focus and the creation of out-of-focus parts of the shot). ("Realism in the Animation Media Environment: Animation Theory from Japan" 288)

As Marc Steinberg's words attest to, Disney wanted to depict movement as realistically as possible, particularly working on movement, weight displacement, and depth. However, it can't be said that Disney animation mimics life per se. In fact, Disney's style is considered hyperrealistic rather than realistic, for it basically imitates the film camera's perspective, rather than capturing the world out there with hundred percent objectivity. The mimicry of camera realism, however, still creates the impression of indexicality, or the impression that it is capturing the real world and its physics. Therefore, interestingly, Disney characters who are obviously not realistic —in the sense that they are anthropomorphized animals, with roundish, stylized figures, and that they do not die—, find themselves in our world, or in a world to which familiar rules of physics apply. Moreover, Disney's hyperrealism has a deeper connection with realism in that it "also covers the Disney Studio's application of realist conventions of narrative, logical causality and character motivations – breaking with the largely non-realist and anarchic dynamics of the cartoon form" (Lister et al., *New Media: A Critical Introduction* 138).

Disney subjugates movements to physics and causality. Therefore they seem to occupy time and place, and are followed by outcomes. By mimicking the use of camera in classical cinema, Disney animations seem to "capture" worlds that function properly (except in the funny scenes) with characters. In fact, the instances that Disney characters evade death or injuries are amusing precisely because the worlds they inhabit seem to follow the rules of physics and causality. While it is simply impossible for these life forms to exist in our world in real life, the fact that their curvy bodies can bounce off solid surfaces and render them more durable than brittle forms makes total sense. In other words, there is a consistency, a relational system at work in Disney worlds, but the characters' unorthodox, magical forms allow them to survive or bypass it —the action is somehow logical, but not entirely predictable.

Anime, on the other hand, does not go in the same direction as Disney in order to "move" images. Early anime, according to Steinberg, relies on a combination of manga and kamishibai techniques, and brings together minimum, almost symbolic movement with voice. Through this combination, it manages to create a sensation of dynamism and of passing time, despite the fact that the action itself flees the eye. However, when the combination is taken to an extreme, actions just don't seem to produce outcomes. From a Deleuzian perspective this can be considered a crisis of the action-image, an attack on causality and the notion of estimable, calculable time. Additionally, anime's preference for flat compositing and lateral movement —or the digital imitation of the aesthetics of the older techniques— keeps sudden, unpredictable spurts of movement and the sensation of imperceptible speed always at bay.

As a result of its particular aesthetics, contemporary anime tend to build worlds without a reliable sense of physics. While there seem to be rules that organize spatio-temporal relations, they are arbitrarily betrayed at times. In a setting that may or may not function as expected, anyone can be a hero/ine without a special shape or magic. Most often, willpower proves to be enough to suspend logic. Therefore, potentially, every anime character is a superhero.

To sum up, in Disney tradition, thanks to their exceptional figures, characters can stand against real life physics that is imposed on them; while in anime, characters can defy physics through supernatural speed which might be displayed at any time and by anyone, for the anime itself can arbitrarily suspend the notions of physics and causality. What anime renounces is not only the (cinema) realistic representation of movement. Anime also chooses to renounce causality and the sense of real life physics that comes with such style. Furthermore, it avoids opting for any other relational system organizing actions.

While anime incorporates a great deal of unpredictability, the database environment guarantees that a balance for narrative play is maintained, by functioning as a source of immense knowledge and predictability. The outcomes of actions might be postponed significantly, but the audience will not be left completely in the dark as to what is/will be happening. However, we have to note that the exact actions that flee the eye can always be re-written at will, the loosened contexts can be fiddled with, even to the extent that would set the characters free.

In light of the discussion so far, it looks like anime differs from games radically in its treatment of characters and their contexts. Anime characters seem to owe their mobility to the ambiguity of contexts, as much as to their codification, which ensures that they are recognizable in any context. This may also shed light upon why 3D creates a sense of incongruity in anime mostly, while it is largely employed in games. In "Polygraphic Photography and the Origins of 3-D Animation," Alexander R. Galloway explains the basic dynamics and the implications of polygraphic photography —the predecessor of computer modeling— with the following words:

> [François] Willème and [Christian Wilhelm] Braune and [Otto] Fischer deployed multiple lenses in order to animate the camera (by making it metastable and virtual). By modeling the spatial coordinates of the test subject, it became possible to translate the movement (of the camera) into spatial dimensionality, and in doing so, translate photography into sculpture.

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> Only polygraphic photography can explain the origins of computer modeling, and by extension
>
> computer animation, because this photography introduces a way of seeing completely foreign to
>
> the cinematic legacy: the virtualization of the eye into a metastatic virtual camera able to view an
>
> object from any point of view whatsoever. (66)

What comes forward in Galloway's explanation and claim is that modeling captures the exact space that an object occupies, which necessarily grants a numerical value to the object and its immediate surroundings. In this way, it can be claimed that the characters become more predictable, first because any limited perspective is as telling enough as a full vision, and second because some sort of spatial relation with the environment is born.

Still, it should be noted that 3D modeling doesn't guarantee reliability by itself. Different models may prove incompatible with each other once they are moved around, and characters may look like they are gliding on surfaces. On the other hand, 2D does not necessarily obliterate causality or spatio-temporal relations. Nevertheless, 3D rendering creates an *expectation of consistency in spatial relations*, and grants a sensation of calculability or predictability to the characters and their immediate surroundings, which is at odds with the ambiguity that anime tends to favor especially in visual expression. Of course it is impossible to know for sure how exactly anime will change over time, but for the time being it sticks mainly to the 2D aesthetics especially in character design, even when it relies completely on digital technics.

Gamelike Video Games

While games have systems which fix the relation between actions and outcomes, that doesn't mean they belong to the representative regime. In "No Mastery Without Mystery: *Dark Souls* and the Ludic Sublime" previously mentioned in Chapter 2, Daniel Vella offers an analysis of *Dark Souls* (developed by FromSofware and published by Namco Bandai Games in 2011) to prove the case.

Dark Souls pigeonholes itself within some of the most established videogame traditions. At first

glance, then, it would appear to be a poorly-chosen example of the ludic sublime, proffering

familiarity and a pre-established, conventionalized mastery that would seem to leave little room

for mystery. In practice, however, *Dark Souls* sets out with the express purpose of unsettling

these preconceptions, deploying a range of formal techniques and mechanisms designed to arrest

the player's judgment and prevent her from arriving at a stable cosmic understanding, preserving

a sense of mystery and gesturing towards a whole that escapes the player's conceptualizing grasp.

In various ways, *Dark Souls* works to actively remind the player of the limits and the inadequacy

of her perceptual opening onto the milieu of the gameworld, the computational systems

underlying it, and the space of possibilities they structure.

In the way that Vella describes it, *Dark Souls* seems to purposefully create a sense of ambiguity that looks

a bit odd considering how the previous section focused on causality as a systematic element in video

games. Moreover, Vella goes on to state that he does not limit his findings to the particular game under

analysis:

> This is not to suggest that *Dark Souls* presents us with a special case, in the sense that it
>
> establishes a sublime aesthetic mechanism that other games do not. What sets *Dark Souls* apart is
>
> arguably a matter of degree, not of kind: it simply foregrounds a sublime quality of mystery that,
>
> I have argued, is integral to the formal structure of digital games. A consideration of the ways in
>
> which *Dark Souls* achieves its sense of the ludic sublime, then, can perhaps begin to point us
>
> towards a poetics for this aesthetic mode.

In this manner, not only does Vella connect digital games to the aesthetic regime (the common trait of

which is the ambiguity that escapes interpretation), he also claims in passing that this connection is

inherent in the medium. However, Rancière's theory does not seem to associate any medium with a

particular regime. In contrast to Vella, this thesis posits that research in general shows what media tend to stress in different points in time, rather than what they are inherently capable of.

Vella lays the philosophical background to reveal how games are constructed in the mind as well as by the system. However, he pretty much leaves out the socio-historical background. While Vella obviously focuses only on games, these aspects help us reconsider the media environment today and intermedial relations. Without that part, games look like the only and penultimate manifestation of the aesthetic regime.

If we take them as forms of play, all media, on the other hand, can be considered systems of balance, working with different tools, and with slightly different ways of enabling play. Games enable action —trailing alternative routes of action— and simulate their outcomes. To do that, they fix relations and hollow out characters. Obviously, the fact that *Dark Souls* obscures causality at times doesn't really change the fact that it is still a system. It just shows that the expectation of predictability/unpredictability is tilted —for a reason that Vella does not discuss in detail (and through examples): the existence of a database.

Due to the increasing accessibility of available info —concerning narratives and media conventions, among all sorts of other things— contemporary media need to avoid feeling dull to the audience. In other words, the current consumption/production environment seems to compel media to opt for a balance of extremes (increasing the use of familiar elements, while boosting ambiguity concerning how they relate to each other), rather than a balance of un/predictability. That is because the external guidance of the database might be too revealing, unless media introduce ambiguity on their own accord. In order to enable action, that is, to allow players to pursue alternatives and to see their outcomes simulated, games need to fix the relations organizing action systematically, even in the case of *Dark Souls* and the like. But the current situation presents options as to how and to what extent each work will provide hints regarding the particular dynamics of its system. While some games aim to convey a clear image of causality, some

others are now able to obscure causality on the assumption that the accumulation of player data on the internet will add a clarity to the picture eventually anyway. There are several strategies games employ to increase ambiguity. Vella brings up some of them in his article, such as the inclusion of collectible items with no functional value in the game, putting seemingly accessible places out of reach, revealing the causes and effects of certain actions in the dark, etc. Due to the assumption that word will eventually spread, a lot of big budget games tend to increase interactive elements, alternative courses for action, easter eggs, etc. to maintain player interest as long as possible. The following strategies, however, do a better job in reflecting the mentality of the age as they also offer a temporary cure for it: creating open worlds or online games allowing infinite re-play sessions with an indefinite number of participants. Such games seem to downplay the importance of a main goal that terminates the game in favor of shorter, infinite play sessions with accumulative rewards. The paradox of the age reveals itself here: While options are seemingly infinite, there is only one option to replay the game.

Differing from games, narratives only *imply* alternatives and need to give a more or less substantial quality to characters. But how they choose to define characters and to relate them to their contexts, differ from genre to genre.

In realist texts, social conditions —or the context— hold the character in place, even though the genre itself can be considered a manifestation of the excessive information caused by the early formations of the database, birthing confusion that would be scorned by the likes of Corneille. The character and his or her actions are defined in strict relation to the social context. Such narratives enable interpretive play, just like Upton describes: triggering constant interpretation and anticipating processes as the narrative unfolds, regarding what is happening and what will in the future.

Gamelike narratives, in contrast, minimize the necessary connection between characters and their contexts. They typify the characters to the extent that their general outlines won't change according to context. This hollowing out of characters for the sake of mobility is comparable to the games' treatment

of characters, but with a significant difference of intensity. While characters can be imagined in any context at will, their core traits cannot be played with: Sherlock Holmes can investigate a murder in 23rd century Japan, but imagining him as an ordinary housewife in London wouldn't make much sense.

At any rate, if characters of gamelike narratives enjoy a significant freedom today, that is also because their contexts have grown loose too. Actions and outcomes no longer seem to be consistently organized by a higher set of rules that the readers/audience infer from what they observe. Relations grow ambiguous, causality seems to work only temporarily —until it is breached all of a sudden. These ruptures, including the leaping of the characters' from story to story, can always be justified with the promise of a sequel or a prequel, or with the implication that some crucial information is yet to be disclosed. Hence, even when we know a lot about character types or media conventions, we cannot anticipate what exactly these characters are going to do, and how exactly they are going to do it. Such particularities of narratives are not only unpredictable, but also infinitely re-writable —in official series, fan works, or simply in the mind. It is often thought that clichés kill mystery. While it is true that the database elements induce narrative predictability, the database does not organize the relations between actions and their outcomes. On the contrary, the temporariness of relations seems to be of the essence. The absence of a relational system is a requirement to allow combining and recombining database elements at will. The predictability of these elements are born from their uniformity and the ensuing compatibility. As long as this quality is present within these elements, new relations can be found between them time and again. And that is what we termed "combinatory play."

Taking media as forms of play implies that they all have an inherent relationship with alternative courses of action —either presenting or pointing at them. What makes them "gamelike," on the other hand, seems to be their reliance on ambiguity and repetition in initiating play.

One Environment, Different Media

In light of the discussion so far, the benefit of taking media as a balance of predictability and unpredictability comes forward. Today it seems that there is a general tendency, executed in media-specific manners, and resulting in particular experiences: to opt for a balance of extremes in predictability and unpredictability, or to level the ubiquity of information —regarding media conventions, most popular narrative patterns, character traits, plots of individual works, and much more— with the use of ambiguity.

There are several strategies that media employ to incorporate ambiguity. The looming potential of alternatives distresses causality most often by serialization, or by the use of online platforms and digital systems. Consequently a disinterest in death appears —or an interest in it as an excuse for replay.

In fact, it is impossible to guess when a character will die even in realist narratives. Characters can survive fatal accidents miraculously, which happens in real life too. The narrator's lack of knowledge may be misleading, new information may be revealed as the story continues to unravel —in other words, for this and that reason death may prove more unpredictable than expected despite our knowledge of real life. The difference in gamelike narratives is that, as unpredictable, shocking, or sad as it may be, death does not necessarily cancel out alternatives, for resurrection can be justified with the strangest of excuses in worlds of unclear causality.

Although gamelike narratives are gaining more and more visibility, this narrative model does not wipe out the realist model. In today's media environment, separate models can co-exist and can be enjoyed in different ways. This being the case, today, the quest for alternatives can go on forever, even when each play is satisfactory in itself. While, on the other hand, it still makes sense to inquire where we find a freedom of movement and where the constraints reside for each individual work.

A. *SWORD ART ONLINE* - LIGHT NOVELS

As the experience *in* video games becomes the main theme of stories across different media, and as virtual reality becomes their main setting, video game interfaces get incorporated in the narration in whichever way possible. But let us twist the following argument by Henry Jenkins (from "Game Design as Narrative Architecture") here: "if some games tell stories, they are unlikely to tell them in the same ways that other media tell stories" (2). Similarly, if other media such as anime present us with games, they are most likely to come up with something of their own.

Even if gamelike narratives share the predilection for creating internally indeterminable, unpredictable narratives (which are playable through the imposing guidance that external sources provide), from a narratological perspective it can be argued that they should display media-specific tendencies due to the different tools that they use for narration. Thon offers a very useful compilation of Ryan's statements regarding such tendencies in the manner below:

> Marie-Laure Ryan proposes a "list of narrative can do and can't do for language, static images, and instrumental music" (*Avatars* 18, original emphases), according to which language can easily "represent temporality, change, causality, thought, and dialogue," "make determinate propositions by referring to specific objects and properties," "represent the difference between actuality and virtuality or counterfactuality," or "evaluate what it narrates and pass judgments on characters" (*Avatars* 19), while encountering difficulties when attempting to precisely represent the spatial relations within a storyworld and being incapable of showing what elements of the storyworld look like. In contrast, images or, rather, pictures can easily represent the spatial relations within a storyworld as well as the "visual appearance of characters and setting," but they cannot "make explicit propositions," represent the "flow of time, thought, interiority, dialogue," "make causal relations explicit," "represent possibility, conditionality, or counterfactuality," or "make

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evaluations and judgements" (Ryan, *Avatars* 19). Finally, music may "create suspense and desire for what comes next" and generally "arouse emotions," but cannot "represent thought, dialogue, causality, virtuality," "single out distinct objects, characters, or events in a storyworld," or even "tell a specific story" at all, "since its stimuli have no fixed meaning" (Ryan, *Avatars* 19). (Thon, 70)

In the remaining sections of this chapter, Ryan's basic outline for media-specificities will be followed and tested out on the *Sword Art Online*. In order to apply both Ryan's views to the media mix, two fight scenes that appear across the light novel, manga, anime, and the games are picked up for analysis. It has to noted, though, that in the quote above, Ryan discusses simply the "narrative potentials" of different media, not "narrative musts." Each work can be considered the result of particular choices as to how these potentials will be emphasized or downplayed. The discussion here does not aim to invalidate the certain statement by Ryan —it aims to take it as a leverage point.

In her article "GWI: The Gameworld Interface" that later turned into a book, Kristine Jørgensen argues that the interface, that is the "surface" that the gamers engage with as opposed to the deeper existence of a "system," actually cannot be understood separately from the game or the gameworld that it is supposed to allow access to:

This paper has argued for the gameworld interface —the idea that the gameworld must be considered an interface between the player and the game system. However, this argument does not mean that the gameworld is being reduced to a communicative tool; on the contrary, I have argued that the gameworld interface is at the core of the gameplay experience, and that it must be considered to *be* the game itself. Interacting with the gameworld is playing the game, and this stresses the idea that the gameworld is both content and medium at the same time. Also, I want to

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put emphasis on the thought that this is not a paradox – rather, it is a defining feature of the game medium due to its interactive and participatory nature. It is a convention of the medium. (9)

Jørgensen's words posit gameworld interface as the totality of the gamers' experience, and a defining convention of the video game medium, which gives us all the more reason to ask, "What happens to (video)gameworlds when they are emulated by other media?" In order to address the question, however, it is necessary to raise at least a slightly better understanding of the term's scope:

> The idea that the gameworld is an interface also means that I regard all informational elements as inherent to the gameworld – regardless of whether they are represented as symbols above character heads or other features that do not support a coherent fictional world. As long as such elements represent something that has impact on or reality status in the gameworld, they must be considered part of the gameworld for functional reasons. (9)

Acknowledging the importance of interfaces for the video game medium, the comparative analysis to follow will target especially how the Japanese popular media in question present the mostly visual, extra-diegetic elements of the interface, which Jørgensen believes to be a part of the gameworlds.

In a rather recent article, entitled "Tell It Like a Game: *Scott Pilgrim* and Performative Media Rivalry," Jeff Thoss discusses the incorporation of video game aesthetics by the comics and the movie of the title in question. Thoss reaches the conclusion that there is a constant rivalry between media to extensively and skillfully include "intermedial, discourse, and story-based references" (226) to other media, as the *Scott Pilgrim* comics and movie lay bare. However, this rivalry does not seem to pose a threat to the existence of any media involved; on the contrary, it seems to draw attention to the creative processes at hand and feed the expressive repertoire of the media involved.

While the movie and the comics tell the story of Scott Pilgrim, and the adventures he has as he tries to win the heart of the girl whom he likes, the plot gets video game-like as the challenges thrown in Scott's way take the shape of a series of boss-fights with the seven evil ex-boyfriends.

While especially the movie does an excellent work in producing a video game atmosphere, there is no indication that Scott *literally enters* a game, and therefore inhabits such environment. Neither is there, as Thoss makes clear, a sign that everything is happening in Scott's delusional mind. Regarding this puzzling point, Thoss claims that "[r]ather than attempt to look through these discursive elements and search for some mimetic (re)solution [as to why the whole video-game look/feeling was necessary in the first place], readers [as well as the audience in the movie's case] are perhaps asked to look at them, stay on the media surface, and rejoice in the ways that the comic book [or the movie] is producing the illusion of a different medium for them" (220). That is why, at times the abundance of interface elements can even block the background action, but it still works for the advantage of the medium: "Spectators do not watch *Scott Pilgrim*'s ending [where the video-game aesthetics is performed to extremes] because they are interested in the details and outcome of Scott's fight, but this fight is a pretext for the film to find as many ways as it can of styling itself as a game and for viewers to enjoy the resulting discursive space" (226).

Thoss's article testifies to the general trend of media to refer to each other in order to offer more pleasure to the audience given that they are familiar and fond of those other media, such as video games. In a narrower sense, he also shows that there is pleasure to be found in observing how a certain medium emulates another's expressive possibilities —this itself is a spectacle that sometimes outshines the attraction of story-elements. In any case, at least in the scope of his article, Thoss does not seem to think of the game interface's appearance beyond an intermedial reference.

Turning to *Sword Art Online*, however, we might find more about how else such emulations of gameworld interfaces may function. As opposed to *Scott Pilgrim*, the media mix title under scrutiny here takes a (fictitious) gameworld as its setting. This being the case, in a way that brings Jørgensen's view to

mind, we might expect health bars and so on to reveal information about the story, as they belong to the same world as the depicted geographical features, or the characters themselves.

For those who are not familiar with the title, let us summarize the first light novel volume of *Sword Art Online* that will be analyzed in the following paragraphs. The first volume, *Aincrad,* tells the story of Kazuto "Kirito" Kirigaya, who gets trapped in a MMORPG along with hundreds of other people. The creator of the game programs it in a way so that the head-mount devices would put the players in a comatose state. The objective he imposes on everyone is to clear the game without dying, for survival in this virtual world means survival in the real one.

It goes without saying that the audience cannot directly experience the gameplay, or have a direct access to the characters' skill trees, stats, inventory, and so on. The experience of the gameplay as well as the access to the listed informational elements is limited to what we read on the page, and generally in the form of protagonist's account of what is happening, or in the form of dialogues; in other words, it is acquired necessarily "second hand." An understanding of causality is built on this second hand knowledge, which adds a certain ambiguity to the picture. But the system seems to be quite strict: Despite the fact that we do not know what moves or skills they have, the characters seem to suffer facing high level bosses, whom they shouldn't be able to kill because of the numerical difference in power, and only in groups can they take them down. Also, at the beginning of the story, in fact on the first page of the first chapter, a definition of the HP bar is introduced, which translates as "a visualization of life," (12) showing at the time that the protagonist was twenty percent closer to death. This is quite an early implication of the system's existence and precise, numerical control over death. In the light novel it is not possible to see an actual visualization of any hit or health points bar, but it is very often mentioned —especially during battles—, along with commands, skills, and other interface related vocabulary. All are written in ways reminding us of programming language, in the fashion of the following skill name: "<Dual Blades>."

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To sum up, we can say that the narration seems to emphasize the system's presence by constantly bringing it up and to build a reliance on its decisiveness especially regarding health and death. The first fight scene that will be analyzed, special in that it takes place between the protagonist and another character, Heathcliff, who later on turns out to be the creator of the game, employs the same strategy. The fight starts with a system message, "<Duel>," the moves and skills are introduced as the action escalades, and the HP bar is tracked meticulously (196-9).

However, before long, as Heathcliff seems to be losing, and Kirito is in high spirits, something strange, something that the system should not allow, happens: to Kirito's eyes, everything seems to slow down, except for his enemy. At the end of the chapter, Kirito describes the incident by saying that Heathcliff has gone beyond the limits of a player, beyond the limits of any human. What Heathcliff manages to do here can also be described as going beyond the limits of the system, as shown by the momentary decomposition of his avatar into the polygons that made it up (200-1).

Interestingly, the second fight between the two characters starts with the justification of such seemingly system-defying instance. Upon being asked how he could guess Heathcliff's real life identity, Kirito says that it was his impossible speed in the first fight that gave it away. Heathcliff, or Kayaba, then explains the mystery, saying that it was his fault changing the system settings to allow super speed at that moment out of panic. Through this explanation, the system seems to recover its integrity —but only temporarily. As the second fight draws to its end, Kirito receives a vital blow, the system signals that he is dead, and his avatar starts to dissolve as expected. However, with a sudden twist, for the first time in the game's history, the protagonist comes back to life against the system, "the absolute god" (328), in a rush of rage.

In these action scenes, *Sword Art Online*'s main strategy of creating tension becomes clear: drawing a seemingly reliable limit, such as the reliability of the system and the finality of death, only to defy it when the right time comes. While this structure requires utmost attention, it is equally important to notice that

the first person narration contributes to this effect significantly. In fact, this particular narrative style is considered one of the pillars of "anime-manga realism" by Eiji Ōtsuka, briefly summarized by Steinberg as follows:

> The realism of anime-manga realism is then not a matter of fidelity to a real-world referent — the perceptual realism that Prince sees operating within 3-D CGI, for instance. Rather, it is a style of writing that imports the nonnaturalistic, nonrealist media of Japanese animation and comics into a literary form that operates according to principles of naturalism. It is an operational realism that, in writing anime-manga characters into the naturalistic style of the I-novel, produces a sense that the character itself — a mere conglomeration of codes and patterns, as Tezuka first suggested — has an "I" and hence possesses interiority ("Realism in the Animation Media Environment: Animation Theory from Japan" 293).

Kirito's narration throughout the volume indeed seems to reflect an "interiority:" a variety of human feelings and emotions, his frustration and anger specifically in the fighting scenes under analysis, combined with a sensation of urgency. Rather than the over the top features of the plot, it is this aspect of the narrative that the reader may regard as a connection to real world.

On the other hand, the same narration also seems to imbue action with emotions and opinions: Whatever is happening in the fighting scenes, for instance, inescapably adopts a subjective take, as these scenes are presented through the protagonist's particular perspective. Very often, self-motivational statements and challenges addressed to the rivals interrupt the action. Because of such jumps, in a way, the action looks as if it is taking place in the mind. While, as Ryan's media-specificity list suggests, language indeed can represent thought efficiently, it also seems to blur temporality and causality due to the nesting of the objective (albeit virtual) world out there within the subjective, inner world of the protagonist.

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As he describes the final attack he launches on Kayaba, Kirito states that it was half determination, half an inexplicable force that moved his body. This narration makes it sound as if the fight was between the decisiveness of the system and the soul of the character. In *Aincrad (Ainkuraddo, 2009)*, Kirito wins the battle against the system, signaling that the storyworld is in fact governed by an inexplicable, incalculable order.

Kayaba's words seem to point in the same direction, as he calls his rival the most unpredictable factor in the game. In fact, Kayaba's diagnosis is pretty apt in that the characters of gamelike narratives, but most often the protagonists, are very unpredictable —not at all in their general outlines, and in the details of their actions. It is certain that they will survive, but how exactly? The readers/audience can never know, because limits are introduced only to be broken.

In *Aincrad*, the fictional game system is first introduced as an unchallengeable limit to players. Life force is given a numerical value that cannot be manipulated by those who don't have system access, and re-spawning from death is said to be impossible due to the game developer's choice. However, throughout the game, the protagonist beats enemies of much higher level than himself, which is impossible in numbers. Moreover, he defies the system eventually by not only increasing his speed through sheer willpower, but also through challenging the developer himself to a fight and coming back from the dead to strike the final blow. In sum, the idea of a game system is introduced as an *affective twist* to be denied repeatedly.

The reason why affect seems to apply to the case is that, despite the ambiguity of the context —not knowing what *exactly* is taking place and to what consequences—, it is possible to react to the mental turmoil of the characters. While death may never ever come or be faked forever, the blatantly subjective narration —where the depiction of action gets interspersed with the protagonist's self-expressed feelings— leaves no doubt about the character's fear and suffering. From Kirito's perspective, even when

the system falters, the expectation of final death seems to remain —if not striking then, eventually it will. In this sense, the narration seems to give soul to the characters, unpredictability to the narrative.

The elements mimicking game interfaces in *Sword Art Online*, especially the use of health bars, go beyond intermedial references, while the function they have is completely different from their in-game functions. *Sword Art Online* places the characters in a gameworld where physics can betray the readers' expectation. Health bars in particular suggest a causality beyond our reach —just like one would expect them to function in games. However, eventually the validity of the information displayed grows questionable. To put it differently, the decisiveness of the game system seems to be incorporated in the story, only to be challenged repeatedly. This structure can be exploited until the characters, or the readers, get what they want. The mixture of emotional urgency with the image of a reinforced-but-always-potentially-under-threat system gives us combo play. While the logic of the narrative flees the mind, precisely because it flees the mind we can imagine endless "what if?" scenarios.

B. *SWORD ART ONLINE* - MANGA

Before jumping to the analysis of the *Sword Art Online* manga, *Aincrad Volume 2*, checking out Ryan's statement on the narrative *potential* of images, creates the expectation of encountering a less intense portrayal of "flow of time, thought, interiority, dialogue," accompanied with a clearer understanding of space. However, as manga brings together images with language, obviously it doesn't have to struggle that much to maintain the emotional complexity displayed in the light novel —in addition to the dialogues given in speech balloons, the protagonist's inner voice too finds its way into the manga to a good extent. Moreover, the manga can be compared to the light novel in regard to how it relates the (visual) depiction of action directly to the mind. However, this doesn't mean that manga doesn't have other, visual strategies to render interiority visible. But in order to talk about them, it will be better to discuss the spatial relations in manga first.

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In "Game Comics: An Analysis of an Emergent Hybrid Form," Daniel Merlin Goodbrey gives an account of how he settled down to hybridize games and comics, and also introduces the key features of games and comics based upon previous research. Eventually, Goodbrey reveals his decision to take space/spatiality as the crossover point between the two media. As previously mentioned, space plays an indispensable role in video games, as a provider of hints for unraveling the game, as well as the backbone of gameplay experience if we accept Janet H. Murray's view that "video-games are about exploring an infinitely expandable space" (qtd. in Goodbrey 7).

What Goodbrey points at is the utmost importance of space in both media: covering a manga or a game can be considered a spatial discovery in the sense that while one has to move his gaze over the spatial arrangement of separate (or at times overlapping/merging) panels in the former, the latter requires the player to move the cursor, character, etc. in gamespace. Moreover, both media inherently provide a connection between time and space. Perhaps the easiest way to reveal such a connection in manga without recourse to a specific example is by bringing to mind how reordering panels can produce an entirely different timeline for a series of events or how mistaking the reading direction can mess up the temporality if not the entire narration completely.

However, the strictness of the temporality-spatiality relation can be said to differ between games and manga. The specifics of such relation in games are briefly discussed by game researcher Michael Nitsche in "Mapping Time in Video Games." Nitsche describes the connection between the two concepts aptly as a matter of consistency. The following quote reveals what he means.

> Not unlike a good tour guide knows a city's layout and traffic patterns, an experienced *Quake III* player is aware of the spatial conditions in the game. That is why an expert can navigate the same game space much faster than a new player. The player who masters the space gains a spatial and

temporal advantage. Not surprisingly, level designers adapt to the architectural principles and see

distances as elements of timing. During the creation of the seminal de_Dust map for the *Half Life*

[…] mod *Counter-Strike* the designer, Dave Johnston, adjusted the map's timing through spatial

positioning: "I had been playing with the timing - when each of the teams would meet in the

middle, and who would reach the main bomb site first. (...) I moved the CT spawn positions

closer to the centre of the map - a distance which, when running, took about 2 seconds to cover -

so the CTs would arrive at the hallway 2 seconds earlier than before." (147)

Through this example we can see how the understanding of space can effect the time it takes to cover a

certain part or the entirety of a game. Moreover, and more importantly, the same example shows how the

minimum amount of time to accomplish a certain action over a certain area is built into the system by

game designers. The relation between time and space turns into a systematic invariable, an external

constraint on limits of action for the player as well as the character. As Nitsche points at elsewhere in his

article, even games with temporal complexity, such as *Prince of Persia* which allows the player to rewind

time (basically through a save/load mechanism introduced diegetically), leave the architecture/space

unchanged lest players get disoriented. In line with the discussion in the previous chapters, games fix

relations: certain actions produce certain outcomes in time and over space. In fact, *Beginning*

Programming for Dummies does a very good job in explaining the process in the simplest manner

possible: depending on the input (keystrokes or joystick movements), game programs calculate how fast

and far to move a figure on-screen, and produce the output (move the figure on-screen) (13). Most games

try to help players grasp this causality through hints and explanations.

While the racing scene in the manga *Jojo's Bizarre Adventures: Stardust Crusaders* (previously discussed

in Chapter II) presents an almost perfect coordination of spatial and temporal arrangement —which, in a

way, makes it comparable to digital games—, *Sword Art Online* seems to take a different approach to the

two concepts, especially clear in its total abstraction of space. Interestingly, the impact of such abstraction

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in relation to other visual traits of this manga can be discussed by referencing a very brief analysis offered by Fusanosuke Natsume of a manga page (from Mariko Iwadate's 1986 series *Tōi hoshi o kazoete* [Count the distant stars]):

> It exhibits a bold use of blank space, which can probably be traced back to manga's favoritization of monochrome renderings. The panels are laid out diagonally, without borders, overlapping each other. While panel arrangement in general is a configuration of closed panels, this standard has been loosened here. The characters which seem to float within a blank space void of any background, and the text free from balloons create a unique feeling of hovering. In tune with the characters' disconsolate mood, the panels' function of articulating time is suppressed here, and the blank background robs the scene if realism. […] this expression dodges being read, rather inviting the gaze to just wander around. (51)

While Natsume addresses a shōjo manga title in this analysis from "Pictotext and Panels: Commonalities and Differences in Manga, Comics, and BD," the points that apply to the *Sword Art* Online manga are hard to miss. Monochrome rendering being a general trait of all types of manga, there is not much to be gained from paying attention to it. However, having started from Ryan's comment on the potential of images to present spatial relations clearly and to visualize storyworlds with ease, we should notice how *Sword Art Online* mainly opts for simply leaving the background blank. Very much in line with Natsume's analysis, in both of the fighting scenes that we've chosen to discuss*,* rather than the specific locations within the gameworld, the characters mainly seem to be occupying emptiness. Natsume claims that the abstraction of the background undermines the realism of the scene, which is agreeable on one level. But the abstraction also seems to move our focus especially to the simplified expressions of the characters and the surrounding texts, which are quite telling as to how the characters feel instead of where they are.   Interestingly, this is also a sign that there is no need to start with the real space to understand the precise (emotional) situation that the characters are in. The faces themselves are telling enough on

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their own, and the readers presumably have seen millions of moving sceneries anyway. It is possible to substitute for the missing content with something of our pick, as long as we relate to the characters.

This transfer of interest from the capturing of the (real) world/setting to the characters' inner worlds accessed by stylized visual cues is actually discussed extensively by Itō, whom Natsume mentions in relation to his discussion of paneling in manga:

> Integration through panel arrangement is a basic standard in manga, and a system that guarantees the narration's temporality. But in many shōjo manga the panel borders are frequently violated by blank space, characters, and script, making the picture look multi-layered. This layered structure of panels in shōjo manga, which I analyzed in the collective volume *Manga no yomikata* (1995), has been critically elaborated upon by Itō Gō in his book *Tezuka is dead* (2005). Itō posits that in manga it is actually impossible to say whether the reader's visual frame is formed by the page or the panel (he calls this 'the uncertainty, or indeterminability of the frame'), and that precisely this makes manga expression unique. Male-oriented manga leaned on cinematic techniques, and developed a style in which panels were supposed to play the role of the cinematic screen. Shōjo manga on the other hand pursued a strategy which Itō describes as follows: "Unlike *gekiga* and *seinen* manga [manga for male youth], shōjo manga didn't suppress the characteristic that is manga-specific in the truest sense of the word, namely the uncertainty of the frame." (251)

Despite the fact that both Natsume and Itō are talking about the paneling conventions of shōjo manga, the points they make are quite important to address the peculiarities of the *Sword Art Online* manga. In the fighting scenes between Kirito and Heathcliff/Kayaba, while the borders of the panels are mainly maintained, panel sizes and numbers per page are quite uneven. Moreover, the unevenness in size does not directly translate into a temporal clue: smaller panels are not necessarily introducing actions that should take shorter time. It is simply impossible to give an account of the fighting scenes by describing

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the contents of the panels one by one, as the manga does not treat panels as equal units. In order to verbally explain what is happening in the manga, one needs to take into consideration the variation not only in the size of panels, but also in the perspectives they seem to visualize, and how they seem to form meaning in relation to each other.

As the eye wanders around the page, it discovers a dizzying switch from perspective to perspective in the two scenes under discussion. While it is possible to stick to objective shots mainly and rely on the protagonist's perspective and words to introduce the subjective into the narration, *Sword Art Online* does much more that. Employing the term "(quasi-)perceptual overlay" coined by Thon (in "Subjectivity across Media: On Transmedial Strategies of Subjective Representation in Contemporary Feature Films, Graphic Novels, and Computer Games") can be very revealing for our discussion. To put it very crudely, by the term (quasi-)perceptual overlay Thon refers to seemingly objective (intersubjective to be exact) perspectives with incorporated subjective elements. In *Aincrad Vol. 2*, on page 165, the panels depicting Asuna's (Kirito's in-game wife) ghostly figure floating by Kirito's side at the end of the second duel and seemingly giving him determination are examples of (quasi-)perceptual overlay. While the three panels seem to be depicting the sequence objectively, for they show both Kirito and Asuna within the panel; in fact they contain elements formed in Kirito's mind, for the faded image of Asuna should be visible only to Kirito at that moment. In other words, Kirito's *perceptual* perspective —not only how everything should look to anyone from where he stands, but also how everything should look to his eyes specifically, how he perceives the environment in his mind, in a way no one else can— seems to be projected on a seemingly intersubjective perspective. These panels are interspersed with other more openly subjective or objective shots, bringing action and emotions together in an almost inextricable manner.

More than the use of (quasi-)perceptual overlay, however, the inner voice of Kirito seems to be maiming even the objective (intersubjective) panels. In both fighting scenes combined, almost half of the panels include Kirito's inner voice, within and without clearly demarcated areas that separate it from the rest.

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While they mostly appear next to the protagonist's image or partially overlap with it, at times they also appear next to or overlap with others' images seen through the protagonist's perspective. Given that these words also often overlap with speedlines and other visual elements within the panels, the narration feels like a whirlwind of action and emotions thrown in the reader's face —amplified by the total vanishing of the background setting.

Speaking of a whirlwind, however, one panel comes forward in the two scenes combined: the panel that shows the moment when Kirito accepts Kayaba's challenge for a second and final duel (*Aincrad Vol. 2*, page 149). This panel proves exceptional for showing the most proximity to Natsume and Itō's shōjo manga analyses. The panel in question can be considered the combination of two unclearly separated panels organized around the axis of the protagonist's image. While the upper part shows the frozen, content looking profile of Kayaba on the left and Asuna's face in tears on the right, the lower part shows the duelists' HP bars on the left, and Kayaba removing his invincibility by interacting with a floating virtual screen on the right. Below the HP bars, the rare sight of a thought balloon is spotted, for the thoughts in general are not separated from the visual composition by clear lines —in fact, in the upper part, Kirito's inner voice just appears over his face. As this brief description lays bare, the panel brings different temporalities (Kayaba's frozen profile vs. Kayaba's interaction with the system) and perspectives (Kayaba's face is seen from the side, Asuna's from the upper right) together around the character's body captured in a defiant pose from the front.

As Itō posits, this sort of paneling differs from the common employment of camera perspective in manga, which captures the same supposedly objective reality, either in a multitude of panels from different perspectives, or by tracing the movement taking place in this outside environment in successive panels. The panel described above, in contrast, is a composition of spatially and temporally unrelated actions. The overall result of such composition is a blurring of causality. Panels do not equal frames, can't be associated with camera eye.

Abstraction of space helps temporally, spatially, perceptually uneven compartments act like a big whole. In the meantime the visual depiction of the protagonist pervades the composition —in fact, not only in this panel, but throughout both of the scenes in question the protagonist's inner world becomes the prevalent element thanks to the inner voice. Thus, rather than an objective spatio-temporality, what comes to the fore is how the panels relate to each other through a subjective connection, mostly around the protagonist and his perception. The objective is mostly maimed by, sometimes submerged in subjective anyway. it can be said that the first person narration smearing emotion over action is transposed into the composition of manga here.

No matter how confusing it sounds, the readers of course can sort out what is going on, between the subjective and objective points of view, to a good extent in their minds. As introduced in the previous chapter, Neil Cohn stresses that there is no "time" inside the comics panel —the sensation of time is built in the mind of the reader. Even the bundling of different temporalities observed in the *Sword Art Online* panel can be disentangled in the mind to produce an understanding of the plot. However, it works better if we acknowledge that the organizing axis for action seems to be human relations rather than time and space —at least in this work. Even if the composition is sorted out in the mind, the confusion regarding the chronology is taken care of, and the omission of the background is filled up in the mind; the action as well as the system invoked are marked by the instability of emotions.

Of course, in comparison to the light novel, the *Sword Art Online* manga has the upper hand in presenting a mimicry of a game world. The HP bars and other informative displays of the system can be *seen* now as they would be in games, and the system messages can appear in digital-looking fonts. Moreover, the characters sometimes appear in front of gridded backgrounds that bring to mind videogame aesthetics, and seem to dissolve into little shards of data when they die. However, as none of these system elements appears constantly in line with a certain perspective, it is difficult to say to whom they are visible, which

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is not surprising considering the overlap of perspectives discussed above. But manga/comics readers are very much familiar with such abstractions in visual representation —even if the HP bars aren't displayed all the time, it is perfectly natural to assume that they exist in the storyworld, but had to be omitted from visual representation in accordance with the medium's narrative affordances. However, when these bars appear, they always seem to be maimed by the unpredictable human soul, orbiting the character, and at the end defied.

C. *SWORD ART ONLINE* - ANIME VS. GAMES

As Itō argues, and the above analysis of the *Sword Art Online* manga supports, ambiguities surface in contemporary manga. It can be said that anime has a fundamental connection with manga, but equipped with a different set of medial tools, it also should be offering a different experience to its audience, which seems to have kept the medium alive for so long and still is.

Anime inherits some of the uncertainties present in manga, through importing some of its visual conventions, especially their character centered compositions. But also in its tendency to juxtapose these still images with voice acting/sound effects in order to create dynamism, anime gives rise to its own points of ambiguity. While manga obviously cannot present movement directly, as it is as a printed medium; depending on what is visible/readable inside the panels, its readers most naturally fill in the blanks and create the movement in the mind. In contrast, while anime is expected to present movement, at times movement flees the eye, or just yields to stillness.

In order to have a better grasp of the difference between the two media, we should take a look at Lamarre's astute observation from on the subject:

[T]echnically speaking, manga are not moving images in the manner of cinema or animation. Even if we can persuasively speak of a succession of images in accordance with what Deleuze calls "any-instant-whatever" in the context of manga, nonetheless manga differs substantially from cinema and animation. Manga offers something like an assembly diagram or layout of the overall action-image or movement-image, inviting the reader-viewer to read in the manner of a film projector, recomposing movement. (288)

By presenting action across panels and pages, manga provides a diagram for the moving image, which is not subjugated to a fixed temporality by the medium. In anime, on the other hand, while sound effects/voice acting may keep the sensation of dynamism afloat, this sensation of dynamism does not seem to be compatible with the movement that for some reason does not appear on the screen. The longer it sounds that the action seems to take place, the stranger it seems that the visuals display no change. Anime gives an additional temporality to manga frames, only the information that it presents remains contradictory.

In the second chapter, we have discussed the dynamics of the moving image in anime, extensively in relation to the time-image. Below the discussion shall be extended, specifically inquiring what happens to the interface in anime. As introduced previously, the story of *Sword Art Online* told by different media revolves around the topic of limits. First it introduces the game system as an absolute framework organizing actions and their consequences, and later on, precisely because it has pronounced the absoluteness of the system so well, it presents the affective twist of defying the system time and again.

Ironically, however, one of the *Sword Art Online* games, the role playing game entitled *Infinity Moment* (Bandai Namco Games, 2013), uses the scene that Kirito finally defeats Kayaba and ends the game as a tutorial to help the player have a grasp of the controls and the limits of the characters' power and actions. "Defying the system" as a narrative theme does not necessarily inspire gameplay —the player is not

encouraged to find alternative ways to stand against the enemy. For instance, in an attempt to go beyond the system, doing something seemingly at odds with the instructions of the tutorial such as choosing not to fight Kayaba, getting zero points, being killed by Kayaba once and resurrecting again, is not rewarded by the game. Instead, after following the instructions by the book the level is cleared, and the thematic expectancy is fulfilled in the cutscene.

However, beyond the tutorial, another there is a surprise for those who are familiar with the anime or the manga: Kirito and the others cannot leave the game after the protagonist/player's victory against the system. The game presents an alternate storyline to the light novel/manga/anime series from this point on: Due to a system glitch, nobody gets to go back to the offline world. Funnily enough, with this twist in the story, the game system seems to re-claim its authority over action.

Another addition that follows in the game, in line with the implication that the game system is back on track, is the introduction of a variety of health bars, stat displays, etc. in the interface. While the change in looks end up emphasizing the system once more, the adjustment in the visual style —which may not be considered as elegant as it is in the illustrations/drawings of light novels/manga/anime— has another, more crucial function. *Infinity Moment* is a role playing game, the focus of which is on the gradual evolution of the main character(s) over time. The consistency of numbers is of utmost importance in order to keep track of the increase in experience, improvement of skills, accumulation of tools and wealth, in addition to functioning as a general guideline for possible future action (or predictability) and an axis for interpretation.

In the previous chapter, we briefly mentioned how HP bars and speed meters *mostly* correlated with action in the anime *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stardust Crusaders*. In *Sword Art Online* there is a stricter correlation between such informative elements of the interface and the rest of narrative elements. While it is true that numerical indications are not attached, the audience can see that the blows are actually are

reflected on the health bar above the characters, which proves that they are not simply decorating the frame but giving reliable information regarding the physical state of the characters. In this sense, they appear to be functional by Jørgensen's standards, in that they reveal information about the game world.

However, the reliability of the mimicked interface gets extremely doubtful once the audience try to pin down the focalizer in narratological terms. For example, in the first fighting scene taking place in arena, at one point we see both Heathcliff (whose real identity is still unknown) and Kirito from afar, with health bars hovering above their heads. That gives us the impression that the health bars may be visible for everyone, at any time, just not always represented. But, as the "camera" zooms out after just a few seconds, and as we notice that Asuna is looking at the fighting characters, the health bars vanish from sight.

In the game *Sword Art Online: Memory Defrag* (published by Bandai Namco for mobile devices in 2017) it is possible to play the same scene in the arena. However, what differs remarkably from the anime is the constant presence of several interface elements on the screen —not only constantly informing the players of the game state, but also providing comprehensive information. Throughout the duel scene in the anime, simple health bars are seen from multiple and at times contradicting points of view, and appear/disappear randomly. Therefore, even if they are accurate in appearance, they do not help us predict the limits of action. And more importantly, they shift the experience of an incessantly tracked process into triggers of affect by appearing and vanishing at critical moments. This is where an animetic playground, or a playground for free movement within anime's own system of constraints, can be spotted.

According to Jørgensen, any element of the interface, including the numbers, meters, and symbols displayed somehow separately from the other elements of game design, should be considered a part of the game world for revealing info about its reality status. In the *Sword Art Online* anime, such indicators seem to be in line with the reality status, but it is not clear when and to whom they are visible. Who are

the addressees of these displays, and how exactly do they read them? Of course, even in games it is quite possible that some indicators appear only during battles, and vanish from sight if there is no sense of danger. Similarly, even when they constantly occupy a part of the screen, they might be ignored by the players at times. However, when such indicators seem to appear and disappear *during action,* seems to attack the sense of *process* that especially role playing games seem to underline.

The *Sword Art Online* anime *assigns the interface a certain amount of time to appear on screen*. Interface appears and disappears, thus remaining unidentifiable with a certain perspective. The audience don't see it all the time at the corner of the screen or at the corner of a character's vision. The characters don't seem to see it all the time. But more importantly, even in the same scene it may appear inconsistently. This arbitrariness in display seems to work in favor of emphasizing affective points in the narration, signaling change or potential change rather than a process. The privileging of points of critical importance seems to come at the expense of a feeling of building progress, which appears as a point of difference between anime and games. Manifestations of the system are as arbitrary as the seemingly absolute but at times defied system.

Gamelike narratives allow for temporal/spatial complexities. The audience/readers have to wait for the end of the story explanation to get the timeline straight —and sometimes in vain, for the ending might be constantly postponed. Anime keeps dropping hints of affect —audio elements, eyes, blinking hp bars, etc.— despite its fixed temporality. While minimal in style at first glance —minimal in depicting movement at least—, anime bombards the audience with excess, producing a murder mystery sensations in any genre without the need for hearing the explanation.

A Final Note: On Ambiguity and Hybridity

In "Gurōbaruka Suru Manga," Jaqueline Berndt discusses the world wide success of manga from the global audience's perspective. By taking into consideration the Western as well as Japanese discourses on popular media and fan cultures, Berndt draws attention to the appearance of knowledge communities and active consumers who seek products with certain qualities. While the brief yet quite comprehensive article touches upon many such qualities, the fondness for "hybridity" as a source of increasing interest towards manga is noteworthy from this thesis's perspective. The hybridity of manga, that is its accommodation of contradictions in one body (i.e. gender and race indefinite characters, gag elements combined with realism, etc.), is arguably one of the features dragging Japanese and non-Japanese audience to manga. Seen from the opposite angle, the global interest also proves that hybridity is on demand in general, which makes it no surprise to see its reflections in various forms of popular media.

From the perspective of this thesis, it can be argued that the visibility of hybridity goes parallel to the increasing ambiguity in contemporary media that is necessary for combinatory play. On the other hand, if such a prominent quality is to be addressed in relation to media-specificities, it requires a research similar to Itō's, which was introduced previously in this chapter. The hybridity concerning history is a good entry point for discussion. Titles of alternative history and titles mixing history with elements of fantasy are quite commonly observed across media today. Manga build connections with history often through just *seemingly* historical references. More interestingly, when there are accurate references and careful reconstructions involved, even after obvious deviations from facts, the credibility of historical elements can be reclaimed. Manga can accomplish this feat, thanks to the centrality it ascribes to emotions. Historical and social conditions can always be thematized; nevertheless, it is the emotions that is actually binding over the narrative development. Even when the centrality of emotions is not explicitly acknowledged in the story, the distortion of historical facts can always be framed as a subjective take on history. In the meantime, historical limits serve as constraints until they are defied time and again, maximizing the unpredictability in narration, which is crucial for combinatory play.

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Anime and light novels, too, subtly convey the centrality of emotions. If it is paneling that plays a great role in allowing manga to knit subjectivity with actions, and build worlds ruled by emotions, light novels owe it to their particular style of narration to a great extent. Itō claims that in manga the uneven paneling and overflowing, overlapping panel contents merge the inner worlds of characters with the worlds they inhabit. In light novels' case, first person narration mimics the I-novel style, only to describe the overly stylized kyara's mind at work and actions in relation. In anime, subjectivity gets smeared on the screen especially at times when the implication of movement in still images clash with the duration imbued upon them as they are moved.

In this chapter, the media-specific depictions of video game interfaces are analyzed in comparison to the video games' use of them. Similar to the use of history as a seemingly decisive limit on action, the decisiveness of video game systems is invoked in order to surprise the audience with the timing of their permanent or temporary collapse. Apart from a few illustrated pages, the light novel of *Sword Art Online* limits interface elements to some commands and skill types that appear on page in a way reminiscent of coding languages (for instance, "<Dual Blades>"). More interestingly, these elements get interspersed with the narration of action and internal monologues, blurring the borders between the characters' bodies, minds, and the virtual spaces they inhabit.

The manga of the same title adds a visual aspect to the depiction of the virtual world, without taking language out of the equation. In fact, the internal monologues get inscribed upon the other visual elements of the page quite often. As for the interface elements, because they are not assigned a specific place on the page, they also get caught in the fluidity of composition. This being the case, it gets extremely difficult to match the visibility of interface elements with a certain perspective. Nonetheless, the omission from representation can easily be identified as a practical issue and compensated for in the mind of the readers.

Anime, however, introduces duration to the composition, ascribing a particular timing to the appearance and disappearance of the interface elements. HP bars necessarily get intertwined with other visual and audio elements, albeit without consistency. Because of the fact that both media contain dynamic qualities, a comparison between the anime and the video games of *Sword Art Online* is in order. As video games combine interactivity and narrativity, they do not need to incorporate ambiguity solely on the story level. The two *Sword Art Online* games briefly discussed in this chapter offer an interactive experience without radically changing how the two fight scenes under discussion appear in the rest media of the media mix. Yet, despite the semiotic similarity between the two media, the continuous and consistent presence of interface elements in video games creates the image of "play as a process," whereas the anime paint a picture of "play as a chain of critical moments" marked by the sudden appearances and disappearances of interface elements.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the 2000s, a polarization took place, or at least *seemed* to take place, between the so-called "ludologists" and the "narratologists" who approached games from two different perspectives: while the latter considered video games a potentially storytelling medium, the former wanted to limit its understanding to a system of rules that enabled interaction. Today, researchers pay attention to express that no one sees it fit to banish the discussion of "non-ludic" (or non-playable) features of games for the sake of developing a media-specific approach to video games.[35] Nonetheless, the terminology largely employed in the field still comes with implications that limit the ways how game studies can benefit from narratology and other fields of study concerning different media.

To understand video games and their media-specifity, a better understanding of the surrounding fields comes first and needs to be up-to-date. The same goes for the study of other media; game studies may be a young field, but it presents a fresh way of handling especially contemporary media. Strictly exclusive approaches seem to benefit no field, precisely because these fields are now inextricably connected.

For that reason, this thesis has brought together a multiplicity of theories concerning today's media environment with media-specific research, combined them, suggested revisions at times, and offered a clear framework of play to approach contemporary media in both their similarities and differences.

Brian Upton defines "play" as "free movement within a system of constraints" (15). It is possible to apply this concept to narrative media which are generally contrasted with games on the grounds that games do not necessarily tell stories. "Narrative play" takes place inside the mind of the audience. Movement refers to how the audience interpret the story and anticipate the future actions of the characters based on the information that media provide (which also reveals constraints to be the binding mental constructions based on the information received). This process is free in the sense that there are always multiple ways to

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[35] For more on the so-called ludology versus narratology debate, see Gonzalo Frasca's "Ludologists Love Stories, Too: Notes From a Debate That Never Took Place."

interpret narrative developments and multiple possibilities to anticipate what will be taking place in a story. The definition that Upton proposes seems to require a balance of predictability and unpredictability —clues are necessary for play, as well as ambiguities. Too much certainty reveals the next step instead of allowing the audience to make a guess within the available parameters; while providing no hints regarding the future leaves the "players" in complete darkness, making their guesses meaningless. However, interestingly, this type of balance brings to mind Jacques Rancière's definition of the "representative regime." Representative regime is;

1. A system that connects what can be seen, said, and understood,

2. A system that expels what cannot be seen, said, and understood from arts.

To summarize briefly, the main objective of this system is to purposefully limit the information available to the audience, so that the connections between actions and their outcomes are clearly grasped. However, according to Rancière, this regime mainly left its place to the "aesthetic regime" in arts in the 19th century. The defining property of aesthetic regime, on the other hand, is granting everything visibility and not hesitating to take anything as a theme regardless of their (lack of) importance. This regime has a deep and direct connection with the appearance of "encyclopedia" —an early worldwide information reserve which came into being with the invention of printing technologies and other factors. Despite being remarkably less pervasive, the encyclopedia creates a similar effect to the "database" of the digital age: by accumulating information from all over the world, it brings about a uniformity among them.

In postmodernity, with the appearance of digital technologies and the internet, a database of information has replaced the encyclopedia. In addition to accumulating info at a great pace, the database grants them immediate accessibility, and by doing so, reveals the smallest constitutive units and popular larger patterns of media products. This being the case, media and the type of narratives they produce seem more dissectable than ever.

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There are two outcomes of the formation of such a database. On the one hand, due to the audience's growing familiarity with database elements, narratives become rather predictable. On the other hand, the emerging excess of information weakens causality within narratives, which in turn stalls the interpretation and anticipation processes taking place in the mind of the audience. What part of the story is of more importance? What is more decisive on the fate of the characters? Such questions grow difficult to answer. The complexity of the situation seems to intensify as the database keeps getting bigger and more accessible, increasing predictability. While seeking familiar elements according to taste is a valid strategy of consumption, too much predictability surrounding any form of play (be it game or narrative play), simply may cease to attract the audience. In order to compensate for the claustrophobic effect of the database, media tend to incorporate ambiguity in bigger doses in whatever attraction they offer, and in the ways they can afford.

The situation described above calls for an update in Upton's model. The type of balance necessary for play to occur in today's gamelike narratives can be defined as a balance of extremes: too much predictability combined with too much unpredictability. The excess of information that the database brings about leads to a proliferation of recognizable patterns and a crisis of causality at the same time. This balance of extremes creates a different form of play than the "interpretive/anticipatory" play that Upton describes. In this thesis, the new form of play is termed "combinatory play." While the excess of information blurs the causal links between actions and their outcomes, database elements gain independence from their contexts. As interpretation and anticipation processes grow difficult, the audience grow inclined to re-combine the available elements at will and to relate them to each other in different ways.

In this manner, by bringing together Rancière and Hiroki Azuma, Upton's model for play is updated, and a simple framework to approach contemporary media, narrative, and audience tendencies is developed.

However, if media have grown gamelike, and if they are played in the way described above, what can be said about media-specificities? Martin Roth comes up with an apt criticism of Azuma's concept, claiming that gamelikeness is not applicable to video games. Roth states that unlike gamelike media, video games do not feed from a big database of moe-elements. Instead, they employ a limited number of "empty" units. If all the characters, including the protagonists, come to possess more or less the same amount of power, and if any of them can be picked by the player to become a protagonist in a sense, what happens to the characteristics that should make these characters recognizable?

In addition to this point of difference, unlike gamelike media, video games simulate the outcomes of players' actions by fixing the relations between actions and outcomes on the system's level. Not only is it systematically ensured that inputs produce outputs, but also the temporal and spatial qualities of the outputs are calculated by the system. Video game interfaces most often present lots of hints to the players to display the causality in the game, and thus to assign meaning to the players' choices.

Contrastingly, as the analysis of anime, manga, and light novels presented in this thesis reveal, it can be said that gamelike media try to obscure causality. Their characters can come back from death repeatedly, and each time can invalidate the previously made connections between actions and their outcomes.

How can we define anime then? What are its most general tendencies today? Anime is a gamelike medium that encourages its audience to engage in combinatory play. Differing from other gamelike media, anime tends to create a playspace with the medium specific set of tools at its disposal.

Focusing on anime reveals that this medium;

a. Stills movement and relies on voice and sound to create dynamism,

b. It can produce and terminate movement suddenly, because of the fact that it doesn't follow the principles of linear perspective,

c. Through a and b it merges affect and unpredictability,

d. Creates a space for combinatory play, which this thesis has named "animetic playspace."

By keeping a discrepancy between audio elements and visual depiction of movement, anime forms a space of ambiguity, the actual form of which is never revealed. In that animetic playspace, the audience can re-write what must be taking place, given that the anime provides them with attractive story elements.

The discussion summarized so far may give the impression that gamelikeness can never be attributed to video games, and that video games should be considered in connection to the representative regime. However, that is far from being the case. It can be said that video games have their own multitude of ways to blur causality. As Jan-Noël Thon notes in *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, narrative complexity has become a general tendency of contemporary narratives across media. The reappearance of characters after death is a widely used pattern, which is most often diegetically justified by presenting what happened as a dream within reality or a fictional construction. However, it can be said that anime, manga, and light novels tend to rely on one particular strategy that helps them get away with any type of inconsistency.

- In light novels, as Eiji Ōtsuka observes, through the mimicry of I-novels' narrative style,

- In manga, as Gō Itō observes, through the "uncertainty, or indeterminability of the frame,"

- In anime, as Thomas Lamarre claims via his reading of Gilles Deleuze, through the presence of the "time-image," subjectivity enters the composition and merges action with emotions to the point they cannot be separated anymore.

In this way, by creating worlds that are organized by emotions, these media free themselves from the need to justify inconsistencies. In these storyworlds, while it cannot be explained, the power of the soul always wins against the ghosts of limits. The motif of the video game lends itself very well to this tendency too:

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the unpredictability of if and when the supposedly unbendable systematic limits of video games will fail against the characters' willpower serves as a potent trigger for combinatory play.

How about the possibility of finding a similarity between video games and anime on the grounds of the semiotic properties they share? While video games can underplay causality too, interface elements are commonly used as sources of consistent information, which is generally supported by their continuous presence on the screen. In contrast, even when they are rather closely mimicked by anime, the disinterest in aligning them with a particular perspective, or the purposeful avoidance to do so, results in a particular effect. While the interface proves readable, the arbitrariness of its manifestation underlines the criticality of certain points in action, and contributes to affect. In the meantime, it can be said that the emphasis on play as a seamless process gives way to an experience of play activated in a chain of critical moments. The conclusion that similar semiotic features can lead to different results reveals how the nuances of narratology are crucial. This case can be taken as a supporting argument to focus on the tendencies of media more than their potentials. In this thesis, the medium of anime has been defined both through the tendencies that it shares with other contemporary media, and through its own medium-specific tendencies.

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