The Playful Citizen

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Civic Engagement in a Mediatized Culture

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1.   The playful citizen: An introduction

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With the emergence of digital and mobile technologies, our conceptions and hopes of what citizen participation entails have changed profoundly. It seems as though interactive, networked, and cheap technologies have greatly democratized how literacies, knowledge, and power structures are generated and perceived in everyday life and that they have increased—and have further potential to increase—the degree of civic engagement. From playing, modifying, and designing games and interactive documentaries, and using playful tools and games for the production of alternative knowledges, to becoming protest-cartographers or pollution measurers, citizens appear to engage with, alter, and probe media technologies to a far greater extent than ever before. At the same time, we should be critical of what exactly these apparently enabling technologies do, and question what the drawbacks and the possibilities of digital media are for civic engagement.

In this edited volume, we provide an overview of the potentials and limitations of citizen engagement in the digital age through a selection of contributions from various academic fields. These contributions discuss the many digital media technologies and developments that grew to prominence in the second decade of this century. From the Occupy Wall Street movement to the development of citizen science games, from new forms of participatory documentary film-making to the rise and exploits of Reddit users, unifying all these topics is a sustained focus on what we consider to be *ludic*, or *playful*, engagement. It is through this view, we argue, that forms of partaking such as DIY, journalism, research, activism, art, or politics are to be understood. We would like to share a particularly striking example here, found in the 2010 exhibition *Space Invaders*, organized by the National Gallery of Australia. Referring to the eponymous 1978 arcade video game, this playful exhibition celebrated the energy of graffiti culture and its street-based creativity (Babington 2010). Street artist MEEK's contribution *Begging For Change* shows a homeless man holding a sign that reads "Keep your coins, I want

change." This work's explicit word play exhibits powerful social comments about the inadequacy of non-binding charity and compassion, and about the need for structural change (see Mouffe 2013, 64). From this particular instance of playful social commentary, we find we can extrapolate many other clues as to how forms of public participation in the early twenty-first century can be understood. Play, we posit, is an important theoretical principle for comprehending new manifestations of civic engagement.

With this book, we therefore want to further our interdisciplinary understanding of how media and citizenship can converge in contemporary culture through the lens of play. In an era in which play has left the traditional playground and has pervaded domains traditionally perceived as non-playful, we need to get a better analytical purchase on how this shift has changed our approaches to citizenship as well as to media. The ongoing ludification of culture (Raessens 2014) and ludification of identity and self (Frissen et al. 2015) prompts us to rethink what citizenship is and how it can be understood, enacted, analyzed, and conceptualized in relation to media and play. If we have become more playful as citizens, in what ways and through which media is this manifested in our daily lives? Which media practices can we discern as evidencing and letting us understand the reciprocal relationship between ludification and citizenship? And should these practices be viewed as new ways to enhance and change the agency of citizens, or rather as facilitating and maintaining dominant hegemonies or assemblages of power (e.g. Lammes and Perkins 2016)? We set out to give a pluralistic answer to such questions by bringing together scholars from different fields. They discuss a plethora of themes and topics, from game design to politics, pertaining to playful citizenship in the digital age.

The multifaceted framework we offer in this book builds on a corpus of academic literature that has previously drawn attention to the phenomenon of the ludification of culture and how culture can be understood through a playful lens (Fuchs 2012;[1] Fuchs et al. 2014; Walz and Deterding 2015). It is important here to address the question whether the ludification of culture refers to, or is meant to be interpreted as, an ontological or an epistemological claim. The claim is ontological if it refers to a "new phase of history characterized so much by play that we can deem it a play world" (Combs 2000, 20). Or, as Eric Zimmerman declares in his *Manifesto*, if the claim is that we are living in a "Ludic Century" (2015).

In this book, we do focus on this ontological aspect of ludification of culture and society; however, our claim is also of an epistemological nature.

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1   All references to online sources were current as of 5 November 2018.

We argue that the concepts of play and the ludification of culture are crucial for understanding what we call the "ludic turn in media theory" (Raessens 2014, 109), and should be used as heuristic tools to shed new light on contemporary notions of citizenship, as lenses that make it possible to see new objects and phenomena in a different light and study them in a particular way. Both concepts enable us, as theorists, to identify poignant aspects of today's media culture—and to construct a specific conceptual perspective on this culture. Zimmerman's claim that we are living in a ludic century is both too broad and too narrow: it is too broad because it seems to suggest that we should have the whole twenty-first century as our research locus, and it is too narrow because the kind of research Zimmerman advocates is restricted to a game studies perspective. Our approach is rather more finely drawn: we argue that we should become more specific by studying particular cultural, scientific, and political fields and practices, and by doing so take into account broader developments that we wish to label as the 'ludic' or 'playful' turn taking place in these domains.

In tandem with academics noting a ludification of culture, especially in the social sciences, scholars have become increasingly interested in how digital and analog media can be used to engage citizens with their environments. From local citizen science projects (Nold 2009; Gabrys et al. 2016) to experimental, creative, and embodied projects (Calvillo 2012; Last 2012; McCormack 2013), these studies shed light on how media technologies can stimulate citizen participation through their performative, experimental, and creative affordances. While such studies at times implicitly relate citizenship to the ludic, we argue that creativity, experimentation, openendedness, and playful citizenship should be examined more directly as well.

This book is indebted to a rich array of studies that directly or indirectly examine the relation between citizenship, media technologies, and play. However, we want to take a step further in how we tie such perspectives together. What has not been thoroughly examined so far is how these three can be approached as a *triadic* relationship. Although studies about citizen science games, for example, may draw attention to the relation between science and games, they often underplay what citizenship is about. To be clear, it is often impossible to give equal attention to all three aspects and their reciprocal relations in individual studies, but it is precisely for this reason that an ordering, clustering, and contextualization of cases and analyses is needed to truly understand this triadic relation between citizenship, media, and play from a critical perspective.

We are convinced that such an ordering should go beyond disciplinary boundaries if we really want to start to understand citizenship, media, and

play from a multilayered perspective. The collected texts offer the reader a pluralistic perspective: we invited scholars and collected insights from diverse fields such as (new) media studies, politics, science and technology studies, critical geography, design studies, game studies, play studies, communication studies, and urban studies. This book should speak to anyone interested in how citizenship, media, and play are unfolding in the digital age and how we can develop a multifaceted and situated perspective to understand their relations and connections in productive ways. By bringing together a plethora of historical and more recent cases, and by including authors hailing from different fields to examine such phenomena, we present a book that critically investigates manifestations of citizenship, media, and play in contemporary digital culture.

Citizenship, media, and play

Our point of departure is the changing notion of what citizenship entails in our contemporary digital media culture. As Joyce Neys and Jeroen Jansz argue in their chapter in this volume, the importance of contributing to and interacting with democracy's formal institutions is increasingly complemented by citizens who express their political and civic engagement in different, playful ways. Analyzing the notions of play and playful media should subsequently enable us to better conceptualize our idea of 'playful citizenship'.

Yet, as discussed before, this book aims to respond to the academic status quo in which the triadic relationship may have been under-theorized, but where *dual* relations have been conceptualized to a far greater extent. As will be discussed below, the relationship between certain pairs within our triad of citizenship-media-play has already been fairly well studied, namely in the case of media and citizenship, and of playful media. Our line of argumentation is as follows. First, the relationship between media and citizenship stands in a long theoretical, predominantly sociological tradition, including the more interdisciplinary field of communication studies. Therefore, discussions overwhelmingly emphasize citizenship as shaped by information and communication media (mass media and more recently social media). Recently, more attention has been paid to other technologies, practices, and approaches. This includes gaming, urban mobile media use, sensing technologies, datafication, media practices other than mostly rational and deliberative communication practices, and an emphasis on the imaginative, creative, and affective as important dimensions for

understanding civic media. Second, we observe that media and associated media cultures have become more playful. Many authors point to this ludification of digital technologies, and the culture of playfulness this fosters and taps into. Accordingly, we also need to redefine citizenship as *playful* and make clear what this notion of playful citizenship means within the domains of culture, science, and politics.

New media and changing civic engagement

Civic participation can be described as the extended involvement of individuals in a collective political decision-making process (Gordon and Mihailidis 2016; Koc-Michalska, Lilleker and Vedel 2016; Skoric et al. 2016). Broadly speaking, we can discern a rights-based model of citizenship, a duty-based sense of citizenship, and a contemporary kind of actualizing citizenship (cf. Hartley 2010). Each of these models highlights a different type of civic agency and mode of participation. And, as Kligler-Vilenchik notes, each citizenship model come with its own way of understanding media in relation to citizenship (Kligler-Vilenchik 2017, 1890).

First, in the rights-based view of citizenship, instruments for civic participation include voting, campaigning, demonstrating, contacting elected representatives, joining political organizations, access to the judicial system, and so on. This emphasis on institutions underpins an understanding of citizenship in terms of what Margaret Somers calls "the right to have rights" (2008, xiv). This citizenship model highlights the power dynamics between state, market, and civil society. Governments are often the legal owners of issues and the ultimate decision-makers. Communication tends to be managed by authorities. Citizens have varying degrees of rights to obtain information and limited opportunity to voice their opinions using media. With the rise of mass media, a plethora of institutions and (global) corporations have increasingly started to lobby for their interests and likewise have become political agents that use various media strategically.

Second, in what Bennett, Wells, and Freelon (after Schudson 1998) refer to as 'dutiful citizenship,' individuals participate in civic life by joining or forming organized groups, by becoming more informed via the news, and by engaging in public life based on a sense of personal or collective duty (2011, 838). This model of citizenship understands civic participation as being driven by a sense of responsibility, or out of obedience to public authorities (Ibid., 839). Thus, citizenship is a form of socialization.

Third, digital media technologies are frequently understood as a driving force of civic participation. This would necessitate a reconceptualization of

citizenship. In the context of studies of young people's use of online media, Bennett, Wells, and Freelon identify the rise of what they call 'actualizing citizenship,' in order to draw attention to the ways in which self-expression, emotional involvement, and intrinsic motivation are key elements in peer networks sustained via social media. Elsewhere, Bennett and Segerberg argue that we need to rephrase 'collective action,' based on high levels of organizational resources and the formation of collective identities, as 'connective action,' which is based on personalized content sharing across media networks (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). Other authors have similarly focused on civic involvement through various media as a way to highlight everyday practices of the political rather than formalized institutional politics. With digital media technologies, 'networked publics' can engage with shared issues and material objects of concern (Latour 2005; Marres 2007, 2012; Varnelis 2008). Technologies empower people to monitor issues collectively and act upon them. Schudson calls this kind of active civic engagement 'monitorial citizenship' (Schudson 1998, 311-312). In this changing landscape of mediated citizenship, citizens increasingly feel a sense of collective ownership of complex (urban) issues (De Lange and De Waal 2013). At the same time, John Hartley observes the emergence of a 'silly citizenship' (Hartley 2010), in which comedy, satire, viral videos, and other manifestations of playful media revolve around attracting people's attention in the mediated political landscape. Hartley observes: "It is as much dramatic and performative as it is deliberative. The play's the thing, as DIY-citizens, many of them children, perform their own identities and relations" (Ibid., 241).

Civic engagement thus is increasingly understood in this third sense, by focusing on personal experiences and affectively charged social networks. Some have argued that digital media afford more casual practices of engagement. Critics highlight how media divert attention away from real issues and trick people into pseudo-participation, bordering on 'make-believe' involvement, with 'slacktivism' and 'clicktivism' (e.g. Morozov 2011; Tufekci 2017). While these authors take a very critical perspective, Alex Gekker, in his contribution to this volume, takes into account the limitations and opportunities of this development. He reworks Jesper Juul's notion of 'casual games' (Juul 2009) and calls this new type of participation 'casual politicking'.

Most theories on media and citizenship focus on communication aspects and, by extension, community dynamics. In communication studies and sociology, a key debate in the discussion about media and civic engagement concerns reinforcement theory versus mobilization theory. The reinforcement thesis holds that media cater for more of the same and thus help to

establish more firmly what someone already believes. This is frequently labeled using terms like balkanization, filter bubble, capsularization, or parochialism. Mobilization theory, by contrast, argues that media expose people to new ideas and different perspectives, and therefore allow people to become better acquainted with ideas and standpoints beyond their known world. In terms of social capital, the reinforcement thesis emphasizes the tendency of media to strengthen 'bonding capital' and 'strong ties,' while the mobilization thesis underlines the potential of media to foster 'bridging capital' and 'weak ties' (Skoric et al. 2016). Mercedes Bunz, in her contribution, uses this tension to highlight how digital media can both facilitate increased participation and, at the same time, contribute to an additional splintering of publics.

Further specifying the relationship between new media and citizenship, we can identify three groups of questions, dealing with information, communication, and action. First, an information-based understanding of citizenship looks at what constitutes 'the well-informed citizen.' The 'good citizen' is a well-informed citizen. What happens to citizenship when digital media technologies and platforms become prominent as new sources of information? For example, in their chapter, Jessica Breen, Shannon Dosemagen, Don Blair, and Liz Barry address the question of what constitutes new types of citizen-generated information and knowledge, and how this is conveyed. Second, a communication-based view approaches citizenship in terms of social identities. The good citizen is a community member, local or imagined. What happens to this communal type of citizenship with the rise of digital media technologies and practices? Digital media shape how we connect to and feel part of groups, communities, and publics. New forms of distribution and the digital self that have emerged in the digital age complicate our senses of belonging and identity. Again, play is an important element for understanding this shift in social identity. Jennifer Gabrys, for instance, analyzes community-led citizen sensing projects in her contribution as a new form of environmental citizenship. Third, a focus on action highlights how citizenship emerges by doing things collectively, often with a common purpose. The good citizen is a creative entrepreneur. How do digital media technologies afford new modes of action? For instance, in his chapter, Douglas Rushkoff analyzes these issues by focusing on the Occupy movement, while William Uricchio focuses on how people actively engage with interactive documentaries.

Play and playful media

In this introduction and throughout this book, we develop a framework for approaching citizenship in the digital age through play, with play as both a heuristic tool for understanding citizenship (a way of looking), and a set of civic practices (a way of doing). A key strength of the notion of playful citizenship is that it opens up a productive space to start reconceptualizing citizenship in a post-identitarian age, venturing beyond sedimented categories of group affiliations. Play offers a new set of terms to recast today's practices around citizenship in more dynamic and processual terms: as experimental, as rehearsal, as continual competition, as joking and mischievous, as engaging and participatory, as a type of meta-communication, and so on.

An important step in our argument is that media themselves have playful qualities that warrant a reconceptualization of citizenship. Although play has always been a constituent element of many cultural practices (Huizinga 1955), since the 1960s, a tendency can be discerned in which daily cultural practices have become far more imbued with play. This cultural shift has further accelerated with the emergence of a myriad of digital technologies, which impels us to think of the modern digital age in terms of a playful media culture (Frissen et al. 2015) where play has become increasingly connected with daily activities. This is, for example, evident in our changing attitudes to work, travel, politics, or the economy. But let us first unpack the notion of play.

Most people would associate the activity of play with games, but to engage with the notion of play in a broader socio-cultural perspective we start from a more general definition. A very basic definition is given by Salen and Zimmerman, who consider play as "free movement within a more rigid structure" (2004, 304). While some chapters in this volume do discuss play in relation to games, in other chapters play is understood in this very general form: as seeking the 'play' in an established mechanism or structure, which can be a media technology, but also politics, art, or scientific research. In both a game-related definition and a more general one, play can be considered a problem-solving force. As Salen and Zimmerman point out, "when play occurs, it can overflow and overwhelm the more rigid structure in which it is taking place, generating emergent, unpredictable results," potentially even leading to transformative play where "the force of play is so powerful that it can change the structure itself" (Ibid., 305). The notion of play having transformative power has by now been pushed far beyond games—think of notions of 'critical play' (Flanagan 2009) and 'carnivalesque play' (Sicart

2014), or of popular game designers like Jane McGonigal foreseeing "games that augment our most essential human capabilities—to be happy, resilient, creative—and empower us to change the world in meaningful ways" (2011, 14). Such lines of reasoning have since become very much in vogue as the simultaneous ludification and digitization of culture has given rise to new connections between citizenship and participatory media technologies that are shaping our culture.

The connection between media technologies and play is, of course, not new. Scholars within and well beyond the field of game studies have already established the link between various media and play (Stephenson 1967; Fiske 1987; Silverstone 1999; Kerr, Kücklich, and Brereton 2006; Raessens 2006; Simons 2007; Buckland 2009; Sicart 2014; Frissen et al. 2015), but very few of these studies focus on the sociocultural implications of this playfulness in media, let alone on citizenship.

We should be cautious, though, not to overstate the potential of play and, consequently, games and other playful media. In their critical political analysis of the digital gaming phenomenon, Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter remind us that we should not consider play as necessarily or inherently empowering or democratizing (2009). For them, games are also the exemplary media of 'Empire,' Hardt and Negri's concept for describing postmodern global capitalism (2000). Similarly critical views have also already been expressed about phenomena like gamification (e.g. Bogost 2011a, 2011b; Fuchs et al. 2014; Walz and Deterding 2015). The question remains in what ways we have become empowered and where the limitations of our participatory powers lie. Games can motivate citizens to engage in citizen science and make players become ecological citizens by encouraging support, sympathy, and action for a variety of scientific and ecological issues. Cheap embeddable sensors, portable wireless communications, and computation technologies, paired with crowd-sourcing, networking, and co-creation principles from online culture, may all leverage citizens' involvement in gathering, visualizing, disseminating, and producing data, information, and forms of knowledge and culture. Even though they may inspire citizens to become involved and thus help overcome asymmetries between where power is produced and where it is 'lived' (see Latour 2003), we still need to examine further where exactly their strength lies as well as the limitations of the affordances such media technologies really offer to change the way we perceive and engage in active citizenship (see also the chapters by Anne-Marie Schleiner and Ingrid Hoofd in this volume).

Another gap we aim to fill is giving attention to some of the sociocultural implications of an increasingly playful media landscape. Lievrouw and

Livingstone (2002) propose that we think of media as composed of three elements: technical devices, social practices, and institutional arrangements. This provides a useful framework to zoom in on the playful qualities of media technologies. At the level of devices, we can see that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have playful affordances (see also the chapter by Joost Raessens in this volume). In addition, we observe that new technologies are often approached and understood in playful ways, opening up room for playful exploration and experimentation. At the level of practices, we similarly see a plethora of playful or lusory attitudes (Suits 1978) and uses of ICTs that can be extended to reflections about playful citizenship. Think about the origins of computing culture in the playful hacking practices of MIT students, and hardware hackers of the West Coast (see also the chapter by Stefan Werning in this volume). Thirdly, at the level of institutional arrangements and protocols, we contend that play is a productive heuristic for focusing on more structural aspects of media and citizenship. On the one hand, play provides a rich arsenal of strategies to deal with today's complexity, uncertainty, risk, and network society. We see this in new arrangements for innovation and creativity: experimentation, (urban) living labs, self-learning networks, social movements, with room for improvisation and failure (see also the chapters by Eric Gordon and Stephen Walter, and by Mark Deuze and Lindsay Ems in this volume). On the other hand, play highlights the fact of *being played*: under the moniker of participatory media, people are being nudged into compliance, as a neoliberal ploy to extract free labor veiled as creative play done of your own free will (see also the chapter by Sonia Fizek and Anne Dippel in this volume).

Playful citizenship

So far in this introductory chapter, we have discussed the dual relationships between media and citizenship on the one hand, and media and play on the other. We now want to focus on the link between play and citizenship. One of the first scholars who paid attention to this relationship was the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who, in his *Homo ludens* (1955), put forward the notion of play as generative and constituting the 'origin' of human civilization. He concludes his long treatise on play with the argument that "civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come *from* play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it" (1955, 173, emphasis in original). It is important to point out here that Huizinga was critical about the interwar period, when he saw the play element in culture turn into barbaric "puerilism" (Ibid., 205). To tie this into

our argument with some poetic license, he was also aware that play could spoil the potential for civic engagement. He nonetheless pointed out that:

> [R]eal civilization cannot exist in the absence of a certain play-element, for civilization presupposes limitation and mastery of the self, the ability not to confuse its own tendencies with the ultimate and highest goal, but to understand that it is enclosed within certain bounds freely accepted. Civilization will, in a sense, always be played according to certain rules, and true civilization will always demand fair play. (Ibid., 201)

Building upon Huizinga's ethical reflections, we contend that play is an indispensable ingredient for building a civic society and citizenship. Yet, we are also critical of how Huizinga, motivated by the troubled interwar period, relates 'good' civilization to sticking to the rules of play. Instead, we also see potential in *not* playing by the rules, in bending rules, or changing rules. For Huizinga, cheating and being a spoilsport "shatters civilization" (Huizinga 1955, 201). However, there have since been many instances that demonstrate that transgressive forms of play can also present and produce new forms of civil resistance, or even ludic anarchy, the latter powerfully demonstrated by the Situationist movement in the late 1950s and 1960s. Such playful practices, in which citizens as players, political activists, artists, or provocateurs creatively engage with bending, shattering, or ignoring rules, can result in highly productive ways for citizens to engage with and give shape to their civic society.

The unruly dimension of play and citizenship is addressed by René Glas and Sybille Lammes in this volume when they discuss ludo-epistemology and meaningful citizen participation in processes of knowledge production. It is also touched upon by Ben Schouten, Erik van der Spek, Daniël Harmsen, and Ellis Bartholomeus, as well as by Stephanie de Smale, in their analyses of non-expert forms of knowledge production. Furthermore, in the contribution by Michiel de Lange attention is drawn to the destabilizing, yet productive potential of play when speaking about creative engagement with urban issues, while Sam Hind points to creative aspects of protest as a disruptive human and non-human practice.

We want to show the situatedness of playful citizenship and how specific cases either destabilize, or consolidate notions of citizenship and society through creative and playful approaches. As such, we see play as a manifold phenomenon and are critical, yet open to how it can change, stabilize, and undermine our classical notions of citizenship. We want to offer readers a kaleidoscopic view of the ludic potential of playful citizenship.

Structure of the book

Now that we have established the notion of playful citizenship, we want to present it as a productive label for bundling and identifying common threads in a variety of empirical phenomena as interrelated, from citizen science to political activism, from online gaming to urban planning. To give structure to the breadth of contributions, we have divided this book into three parts, each pertaining to the notion of play: ludo-literacies, ludo-epistemologies, and ludo-politics. These three parts, discussed below, form a new way of ordering the emerging technologies and developments of the past decade that relate to the notion of playful citizenship. The three parts of the book do not delineate strict borders; inevitably there is quite some overlap in themes and topics. The chapters in each part nonetheless point toward a specific relational context in which we can situate and understand contemporary playful citizenship.

Ludo-literacies

As indicated earlier, play is permeating our daily lives more than ever. It is not just the omnipresence of games in many people's media diet, but the ludification of culture in general that should be addressed to understand this properly. And, as Matthias Fuchs argues, "societies with high lusory attitude will turn anything into games or into toys," which results in media technologies with increasingly ludic interfaces, thus advancing the process of ludification ever further (Fuchs 2012). This makes it all the more important to be able to understand the nature of contemporary games and play as part of critical media literacy.

According to Zagal, games literacy entails having the ability to play games, the ability to understand meanings with respect to games, and the ability to make games (2010, 23). Whereas the ability to play is functional, the ability to understand games is critical. Zagal defines understanding games as "the ability to explain, discuss, describe, frame, situate, interpret, and/or position games" in the context of human culture, other games, technological platforms and their ontological components (Ibid., 24). The third ability of games literacy moves from critical to creative, as understanding turns into the more active role of designing one's own preconditions for play.

For Zimmerman, this design-oriented take on literacy is key for what he calls *gaming* literacy, a new set of cognitive, creative, and social skills that point to "a new paradigm for what it will mean to become literate in the coming century" (2009, 25). Zimmerman thinks the mischievous

meaning connoted by the term 'gaming' (rather than by 'games') is deliberate: "Gaming a system, means finding hidden shortcuts and cheats, and bending and modifying rules in order to move through the system more efficiently—perhaps to misbehave, but perhaps to change that system for the better" (Ibid.). Here, we see notions of games literacy that, through their critical and creative dimensions, align with more critical takes on media literacy that focus on active citizenship. As Kellner and Share point out:

> Critical media literacy involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, and to construct alternative media. (2005, 372)

They too stress the importance of being able not only to understand media, but also to intervene through participatory, creative media practices.

In the chapters in *Part I: Ludo-literacies*, we take these three different aspects of games-related literacies as our point of departure. Joyce Neys and Jeroen Jansz show that playing political games can contribute to an increase in political participation and political engagement. Next, Stefan Werning and William Uricchio analyze how designing, modifying, and producing games and interactive documentaries can be considered to be forms of creative, cultural, and political expression, as a means of developing the player's critical understanding of the medium. Finally, Joost Raessens, Anne-Marie Schleiner, and Ingrid Hoofd claim that making sense of games requires an understanding of the social, cultural, and political context in which these games are made and played.

Ludo-epistemologies

In the second part of this book, we look at the connections between play, media, and citizenship from the perspective of knowledge production. Using the term 'ludo-epistemology,' we have grouped together authors who use different perspectives on whether play and epistemology can form productive relations and how this is done. Under the header of ludo-epistemology, we see strategies that move away from a top-down conception of knowledge production, instead incorporating citizens' daily practices into the equation. Inspired by Feyerabend's term 'anarcho-epistemology,' which he introduced

to prompt a radical transformation in how knowledge is understood and made—scientists are citizens too—we argue for a shift to focus on play in order to achieve this. Similar to Feyerabend's (1978, 1987, 1993) anarchic and somewhat 'messy' (see Law 2004), yet possibly less radical approach, play also has strong potential for overcoming asymmetrical relations between traditional bastions of knowledge production (e.g. the laboratory) and how techno-science is used in daily life by citizens (Latour 2003). However, it puts more emphasis on the creative, imaginative, subversive, and inquisitive qualities that can be part of knowledge production. This is exactly what lies at the core of this part of the book: it is through play that epistemology becomes more participatory.

We agree with Sutton-Smith (2001) that play is always ambiguous and can be attributed contradictory or paradoxical meanings. In relation to knowledge production, ambiguity affects not only play, but also a preconception regarding the distinction between science and citizenship. According to this view, citizens are considered lay people while scientists are experts. Such thinking, we argue, prevents us from developing more innovative strategies (in design, method, or thinking) for meaningful connections between citizenship and science that truly use the potential of the playful citizen as an actor in techno-scientific knowledge production. At the same time, the contributions to this part of the book show that we need to keep a close eye on critical questions about when and how modes of play, like tinkering, tweaking, reshaping, and even cheating, become tools that subvert or even clash with knowledge production in terms of usefulness and the ethics of participation and civic action.

Part II: Ludo-epistemologies aims to give answers to these questions from two key perspectives. The first three chapters of this section zoom in on citizen science projects as they are enacted in daily live. From Jessica Breen, Shannon Dosemagen, Don Blair, and Liz Barry describing the hands-on tactics advocated by the Public Lab for mapping pollution, to the sensing projects examined and compared by media and science and technology studies scholar Jennifer Gabrys, and the biohacking project discussed by game and media scholar Stephanie de Smale, these chapters offer the reader a taste of ways in which play can be used in everyday life to turn citizens into experts and give them a creative voice in producing 'artefacts' that can have a direct impact on their livelihood and well-being. The last three chapters in this section also form a triad, this time centering on the potential and pitfalls of citizen science games. René Glas and Sybille Lammes combine science and technology studies (STS) and game studies perspectives to arrive at recommendations on how to change the aforementioned asymmetries, while

Ben Schouten, Erik van der Spek, Daniël Harmsen, and Ellis Bartholomeus approach this from a design perspective. Lastly, Sonia Fizek and Anne Dippel are perhaps less optimistic when they warn how the labor involved in citizen science games can also be used to enforce neoliberal ideologies.

Ludo-politics

The third part of this book collects contributions discussing how ludic engagement with digital media technologies offers new opportunities to 'act politically.' These chapters suggest several tensions in the relationship between playful media and political agency. While acknowledging that these tensions cannot be completely resolved, the authors investigate where and how those tensions occur, and what perspectives help in understanding the limitations and opportunities in dealing with them.

The first tension frames playful media between strengthening individual and collective agency, and co-optation. Playful media can help to build networked publics around shared issues of concern, but can also consolidate existing institutional structures and corporate interests. Cloaked as fun and play, they foster pseudo-participation or 'tokenism' (Arnstein 1969), confining agency to what Müller (2009) terms 'formatted spaces of participation.' Some argue that discourses about participatory media as disruptive change agents in effect serve as simulacra for true political action. In an age of political consensus—which Chantal Mouffe (2005) has called 'post-politics'—the logic of participatory media platforms sustains the neoliberal consensus, and a 'Californian ideology' of individual responsibility and entrepreneurialism. A closely related second tension revolves around the question of whether social media platforms help to strengthen or erode collective action and public values. A growing number of authors—e.g. Trebor Scholz (2016); Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal (2018)—are critical of what is called the 'sharing economy.' Play then acts as a thin veneer for an underlying political economy of relentless extraction of free or low-paid labor and value. Recent publications (e.g. Rathenau Institute 2017) underline the possible harm this increasing reliance on participatory platforms could do to historically nurtured public values and democratic institutions. A third tension is whether playful media help to unify the public realm or further accentuate social differences. As discussed above, some people are ludo-literate and make productive use of media technologies, whereas others may not be able to. Hence civic rights are not the same for all. Playful media thus may contribute to social sorting by fragmenting the public into what we could call participation readiness levels.

Throughout *Part III: Ludo-politics*, authors explore how playful media, ludic strategies, and tactics are employed in civic contexts to deal with these tensions. Mercedes Bunz sets the scene by arguing that new and playful forms of political participation do not necessarily allow revolutionary change and may not even provide sufficient friction and debate for real changes to occur. The four chapters that follow aim to show that there *are* productive frictions that can be generated in playful citizen activities, by staging carnivalesque interventions that use Twitter as a means for organizing and disrupting activities (Sam Hind), by incorporating play-like 'meaningful inefficiencies' in all kinds of everyday societal processes and systems (Eric Gordon and Stephen Walter), by approaching political gatherings from a player/hacker's point of view, rewriting general assembly rules and prototyping new ones (Douglas Rushkoff), or by moving away from efficiency-driven plans for building 'smart cities' to more serendipity-embracing projects including the participation of people in creating 'playful cities' (Michiel de Lange). The last two chapters in the book advocate a cautionary stance in analyzing and praising playful uses of new media technologies to create fissures in power. Playful citizenship is not guaranteed to deliver on its promises when it is driven by a means-over-end attitude (Mark Deuze and Lindsay Ems), or when the political arena itself becomes a game in which people predominantly casually participate (Alex Gekker).

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Part I

Ludo-literacies

Introduction to Part I

René Glas, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Joost Raessens,
and Imar de Vries

In the first part of this book, we present a collection of chapters on the relationship between the design of games and other playful media on the one hand, and the politics of citizenship and participation on the other. More specifically, all the chapters relate to notions of 'ludo-literacy' as discussed in the Introduction. In what follows, various elements of games and play-related literacy—being able to play, critically understand, and create games—come into view, showing that without such literacy, citizens lack the critical skills to understand how game and playful design operates. These elements also allow game and playful media developers to enrich their work, creating more interesting, participatory experiences. Such skills, as will become clear, can be employed for political gains and needs, but also for acts of resistance. Moreover, having a critical understanding of games will allow us to think about the limitations of civic game design.

One key question asked when discussing games with political themes or goals is in what ways they facilitate civic engagement and political engagement. In the first chapter of Part I, entitled *Engagement in play, engagement in politics: Playing political video games*, media and communication scholars Joyce Neys and Jeroen Jansz ask this very question. What makes this work especially interesting as a starting point for this collection is their exploration of contemporary notions of citizenship and how these notions relate to modern (Western) democracies. They look at what constitutes a 'good citizen' in our contemporary mediatized culture and how political games arouse civic engagement and political participation in their players. Discussing both theory and empirical findings, Neys and Jansz highlight the persuasive potential of games, but they also call for further investigations of these effects.

New media and games scholar Stefan Werning is also interested in the relationship between citizenship and engaging with games, but he approaches this subject from the perspective of design rather than play. His chapter, *Analytical game design: Game-making as a cultural technique in a gamified society*, highlights an aspect of ludo-literacy—game design—that is key to understanding how games and playful media operate. According to Werning, being an independent citizen requires a basic knowledge of how software and programming operates due to our society's heavily reliance

on digital media. Game-making, he argues, should be seen as a cultural technique. By engaging with 'analytical' game design experiments, the process of game creation allows citizens to understand and give shape to their surroundings, moving beyond enhanced ludo-literacy toward active civic engagement.

Moving away from games, media scholar William Uricchio focuses on interactive documentaries as a playful format in his chapter entitled *Rethinking the social documentary*. In this chapter, he stresses the potential of this new documentary film format for increasing the participation of viewers in the creation of documentary productions. He shows that through playful participation, viewers can collaborate and co-create with makers, influencing the final product. It allows viewers to pick and reorder content that they find relevant for their own personal engagement with a certain topic. This creates individual experiences and is a move away from having a strong authorial voice. For social impact documentaries, he points out, being able to trace and collect such individual experiences could also provide further insight into how civic engagement through contemporary media actually works. Uricchio's chapter presents a strong case for the civic potential of allowing viewers to play with the documentary film format, foregrounding the interactive documentary as a potent challenger for its traditional linear and author-driven counterpart.

In contrast to the previous chapter, new media and game scholar Joost Raessens focuses on a close reading of one particular example of a political game, the ecology-themed online production of *Collapsus – Energy Risk Conspiracy*. In his chapter, entitled *Collapsus, or how to make players become ecological citizens*, he aims to tackle the psychological climate paradox, namely the observation that the more climate facts people hear, the less likely they are to take action. The question is whether climate communication can be channeled through a game in such a way that it actually manages to change citizens' thinking and behavior regarding climate change issues.

The contributions by Neys and Jansz, and Werning provide more general overviews of the potential of playing and making politically charged games, while Uricchio and Raessens focus on the potential of a new playful genre and a specific production respectively. The final two chapters in this section of the book take a more critical stance on the often alleged or implied emancipatory or empowering potential of such productions. In her chapter *The broken toy tactic: Clockwork worlds and activist games*, media artist and theorist Anne-Marie Schleiner takes the procedurality of games as her focal point. She examines what she refers to as the 'toyness' of activist simulation games, a ludic abstraction of the real world that can negate a

game's potential critical impact. It reminds us that we should not take the persuasive capacity of procedural rhetoric as a given: the clockwork logic of a game can be so enchanting to the player that he or she can lose track of its argument. To confront players with the inner workings of a game, and consequently its inner argument, might require such toys to be broken by disruptive game design or deviant player strategies.

Finally, new media theorist Ingrid Hoofd tackles the civic potential of digital play head-on in a chapter entitled *Video games and the engaged citizen: On the ambiguity of digital play.* With a critical reading of a key piece of empirical research on the civic potential of games, she unpacks the overly positivist undertones of such research. By situating political games in a larger framework where digital play meets global neoliberal capitalism, she points out that games that might look empowering or emancipatory actually make such notions part of the pre-shaped and predicated mechanical logic of games. Taking cues from Baudrillard, who discusses the seductive nature of games that try to divert energy away from efforts to actually change a system, Hoofd considers playing games as engaging with the highest-order demands of cybernetic capitalism. This, she argues, applies to most civic games as well. Like Schleiner, though, she recognizes ways for resistance and subversion through playful self-reflexivity and hacking practices.

2.   Engagement in play, engagement in politics: Playing political video games

Joyce Neys and Jeroen Jansz

Abstract

It is a widely shared value in Western democracies that citizens should engage with political and social issues. This engagement is not necessarily confined to party politics, but includes other aspects of citizenship as well, from commitment to a local cause to supporting the global campaign of an NGO. Video games are arguably an excellent platform for encouraging and developing such engagement. Playing may facilitate civic engagement by allowing players to practice and experience different civic competencies in the safe environment of the game. This chapter discusses the results of research in this up-and-coming field and critically assesses those results in light of the opportunities this form of play might offer citizens when negotiating contemporary forms of citizenship.

Keywords: Civic engagement, citizenship, media, play, serious games, persuasive gaming

This chapter explores whether playing political video games can facilitate civic engagement and, if so, how it encourages political participation. Over the last several decades, there has been an increasing academic focus on the diverse properties, characteristics, effects, and consequences of games and gaming. The research spans across a wide variety of topics that range from addiction and other negative effects of excessive gaming, to a focus on simulation from a design and educational perspective, to the beneficial effects of games in relation to health issues (e.g. revalidation and exergames). These topics have been scrutinized from different perspectives. Games have been analyzed from an economic perspective (focusing on the multimillion-dollar game industry), a psychological perspective (addressing

a wide range of motivational questions), an educational perspective (where games are studied in the context of formal and informal learning), and a cultural perspective (where games are studied as cultural artifacts of play) (Raessens and Goldstein 2005; Ritterfeld, Cody, and Vorderer 2009). In other words, the field of game studies is maturing and is thus providing additional knowledge that contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between gaming and culture. We see, slowly but surely, the field moving away from the bad versus good debate and starting to ask the bigger questions: how and in what settings can games best be used to what end?

The immense global popularity of playing video games is one important instance of what Raessens has called "the ludification of culture" (2006, 2014). However, ludification is by no means confined to playing (entertainment) games as playfulness increasingly penetrates different cultural domains (Frissen et al. 2015, 9). For example, leisure time (fun shopping), work (presenting repetitive tasks in a playful manner), and school (edugames). In this chapter, we will focus on the political domain. We aim to investigate whether and, if so, how citizens might become engaged in politics by playing (political) video games. We will discuss both games that purposively communicate a political message, as well as games with more indirect political implications.

The chapter starts by exploring contemporary notions of citizenship and what that entails in today's (Western) democracies. Related to the shifting conceptualization of citizenship, or what it means to be a good citizen, the changing media landscape is briefly discussed, after which we zoom in on games. We then move to discuss the wider notion of play in relation to engagement and how there are indications slowly starting to emerge that games are an excellent tool to engage (young) people, also in more political matters, even though it also becomes clear that 'true' engagement, or extended and substantial change in political interest/engagement, is always the product of the dynamic between playing such a game (the game as first contact and instigator) and the player's discussion about the (contents of the) game with his/her peers. We argue that this might be explained by political socialization theory (see also Lin et al. 2010; Bourgonjon and Soetaert 2013), which leads to the conceptualization of games as one form of socializing agent.

The good citizen is an active citizen: Citizenship in the twenty-first century

It is a widely shared value in Western democracies that citizens should engage with political and social issues. This is deemed necessary in order to maintain a healthy functioning democracy, since democracies thrive when citizens are active agents and participate in public debate informing themselves about issues relevant to them in particular and society in general. It is often argued that this informational prerequisite is required in order for citizens to make well-informed decisions in more formal electoral processes and to be able to fully participate in society (Ekman and Amnå 2012). This full participation entails, among other things, voting in local and national elections, being able to identify that a neighbor might need help, and knowing where to go when there is a problem in one's community. In other words, it is expected that citizens know their rights and responsibilities and that they are able to act upon those when necessary. Therefore, being a 'good citizen' relates to the functioning of political and electoral processes (e.g. making an informed decision when voting) also on a societal level (e.g. being concerned with civic issues both on local and national level).

In other words, in order for a democracy to flourish it heavily depends on the civic virtues and the engagement of its citizens (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Honohan 2002; Schols 2015). This civic engagement of the active citizenry can roughly be described as all actions that any individual citizen undertakes to change something for the better that affects not just him- or herself, but also the broader community he or she is part of. These actions can, for example, be described as, but are not limited to, volunteering to help out other people in need, taking part in a demonstration for equal rights or signing a petition to help free a fellow citizen from wrongful imprisonment. Citizens speaking up and being concerned with their communities and social surroundings benefits democracy overall. The formal institutes of power, like for example the government, are thus made accountable and, as such, are forced to listen to the people, which, in turn, guarantees quality of government and a healthy and thriving democracy.

What this means in practical terms has been, in particular in the last decades, reason for heated debates, both in- and outside of academia (Dahlgren 2006, 2009). For most Western democracies, active citizenship used to be described via participation in more formal institutions or volunteer work, but also membership in a political party. This tendency is also reflected in academic research that has measured the degree of good and active citizenship using the aforementioned characteristics. For over a decade, for

example, the authoritative International Social Survey Program (ISSP) has used four categories of citizenship to assess what good citizenship should entail according to respondents: Participation (e.g. importance of voting and being active in politics); autonomy (e.g. being able to form one's own opinion); social order (e.g. obeying the law); and solidarity (e.g. supporting people who are worse off) (see also Dalton 2008). These surveys are used worldwide, both nationally (e.g. the General Social Survey in the United States) and internationally (e.g. the European Social Survey).

However, these questions mainly address the normative conceptualizations of the 'good citizen' according to citizens themselves. It describes, in other words, what a 'good citizen' should be doing and not what citizens actually do. And while there is a predictable discrepancy between citizens' civic values and their actual behavior, expressions of these values were seen to be rather stable. Up until about the start of the twenty-first century, in most Western democracies civic values relating to social order were valued to be more important to good citizenship than any others (Dalton 2008). This duty-based citizenship expresses itself in the acts citizens perform in relation to society (as the community of citizens). Among these social acts, political party membership was relatively high, as was union membership, as well as the self-evident duty to vote in elections.

Increasingly, however, there have been signs that citizens seem to be participating less, at least in these formal institutions (Kerr et al. 2009). A research study by Hoskins, Villalba, and Saisana (2012) shows that younger generations particularly lack the civic competences needed to be(come) successful active citizens and that these competences have been in decline over the past several decades among European youth. These results are in line with previous research that signals a steady decline in civic engagement in general and political participation in particular over the course of the last half century (e.g. Craig 1996; Levine and Lopez 2002; Lopez and Donovan 2002; Wattenberg 2002). Most known in this respect is perhaps Robert Putnam's work *Bowling alone*, in which he argues that "declining electoral participation is merely the most visible symptom of a broader disengagement from community life" (2000, 35), but he is surely not alone in this analysis (e.g. Kaase and Newton 1995; Norris 2002).

However, with the increase in main stream internet access in most Western democracies around the turn of the century, quite a few opposite readings of the state of democracy started to emerge. Rather than seeing a decline in engagement and participation, some scholars started to recognize a fundamental change in the way citizens engage and actively participate. In particular, online participatory practices were celebrated (e.g. Jenkins

2006; Jenkins and Carpentier 2013; Thorson et al. 2013; Kligler-Vilenchik and Shresthova 2014; Jenkins, Ito, and boyd 2016). It has been acknowledged that patterns of engagement and participation that are visible offline can also be seen online (e.g. Smith 2013; Gainous and Wagner 2014), so enthusiasts remain confident in their argument that democracy is thriving. They point out that young people increasingly show high levels of participation and engagement, but that they show this in different ways than before (e.g. Stolle and Hooghe 2005; Rainie et al. 2012; Schols 2015).

These different ways of participating and engaging with political and civic matters were for a long time not regarded as political practices. This might be one way to understand the contrasting readings of the state of democracy as outlined above. More recently, however, these different approaches are beginning to be reflected at the conceptual level with changes in the measurement of political participation and civic engagement. Joakim Ekman and Erik Amnå (2012), for example, propose a new typology for participation and engagement that makes a clear distinction between manifest (i.e. political participation including formal political behavior) and latent (i.e. civic engagement and social involvement) forms of participation. The idea of latent forms of participation is especially crucial in understanding these newer forms of political behavior.

A more fundamental explanation of the aforementioned contradictory results might be to take generational differences into account regarding the very notion of what citizenship entails. In other words, what it means for citizens to be a 'good citizen' changes and has been changing over the last several decades. This is best reflected in a shift in people's views concerning the importance of the different civic values discussed earlier. Rather than emphasizing the importance of contributing to and interacting with democracy's formal institutions (reflected in party memberships, for example, which translates into a dutiful form of citizenship), it has become increasingly important, especially but not only for younger generations to express their political and civic engagement in different ways (Bennett 2008; Bennett, Wells, and Freelon 2011). Dalton (2008) refers to this as the difference between dutiful and engaged citizenship, also referred to as allegiant and assertive citizens (Dalton and Welzel 2014). Interestingly, this is also reflected in a change in the importance of civic values. So-called allegiant citizens value social order more (e.g. obeying the law), while assertive citizens place more importance on autonomy (e.g. being able to form your own opinion in your own way) and solidarity (e.g. supporting those who are worse off) as markers of good citizenship (Hoskins, Villalba, and Saisana 2012).

Additionally, Chouliaraki (2010) argues that citizenship should be conceptualized as expressing oneself in public. This seems increasingly relevant with more opportunities to express oneself and engage online. Self-mediation in this sense might be at the core of engagement and participation and lead to new forms of playful citizenship. She states that:

> This mediated participation of ordinary people in public culture is being hailed as blurring traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers, and leading to new forms of playful citizenship, critical discourse and cosmopolitan solidarity. Drawing on a view of self-mediation as a new terrain of democratisation that is, however, embedded within the regulative regimes of the market or the state, [we should] critically explore the dynamics of mediated participation as an ambivalent discourse that is shifting the sensibilities and practices of citizenship. (Chouliaraki 2010, 227)

For Chouliaraki (2010, 3), the ability to express yourself in order to make yourself visible and audible is key here. Therefore, creating and sharing content online constitutes an act of citizenship and should be considered as a form of citizen performance and voicing. In this sense, the changing media landscape, particularly the rise of the gaming industry, most definitely plays a significant role in the further exploration of playful citizenship.

Media landscape: Games as socializing agents and informal contexts

Games have increasingly been the focus of academic research and the field of game studies has matured over the last two decades (Raessens 2016). Game studies as an interdisciplinary field examines games from a communicative, psychological, design, and Humanities perspective approaching games as simulations, representations, and cultural artifacts (e.g. Le Diberder and Le Diberder 1998; Aarseth 2001; Frasca 2003b; Raessens and Goldstein 2005; Bogost 2007). Games are and have been celebrated for the specific properties they bring to the table. These characteristics seem to be particularly beneficial in settings where a player wishes to explore and experiment while also being able to experience the consequences that his or her choices might have (Jansz 2005; Squire 2007; Neys and Jansz 2010).

Games offer "a set of experiences a player participates in from a particular perspective, namely the perspective of the character or characters

the player controls" (Gee 2007, 23). Within a game, the player often has to achieve certain goals to progress further. Players can decide on their own how to achieve these goals by making their own choices (within a certain framework). There is also a system of immediate feedback in place that tells the player (in more or less clear terms) what the consequences of their actions are and how these might be improved. In this way, games in general encourage players to interpret their experiences in certain ways and to seek explanations for their errors and expectation failures. Additionally, the practice of gaming is often set in a social setting as well. It is not uncommon for players to seek each other out and to discuss strategies or to solve problems related to the game (sometimes referred to as 'augmented play,' see Ito et al. 2009). As a result, the social network around the game is equally important in the overall gaming experience as the game play itself (Squire and Jenkins 2003; Gee 2007). The medium of the game can, in this sense, be regarded as a socializing agent.

The positive effects of playing games have been established in many different domains. These include, for example, increasing students' motivation to learn in a school environment, the acquisition of more expert knowledge and digital skills, as well as improving the performance of surgeons (Lieberman 2006; Ritterfeld and Weber 2006; Gee 2007; Goris, Jalink, and Ten Cate Hoedemaker 2014). There are three reasons usually given for these effects. The first focuses on the entertaining properties of games: games are perceived as "possibly the most engaging pastime in the history of mankind" (Prensky 2005, 101). The second factor concerns the interactive nature of games: playing a digital game is impossible without the active involvement of the players (Cover 2006). Consequently, players must pay attention to what they are doing and what they see on their screens. Gonzalo Frasca (2003b) points out that this means games offer distinctly different rhetorical possibilities; games offer different tools for conveying opinions and feelings than do more traditional media that depend heavily on the mechanism of narrative representation. Games, in contrast, mostly rely on the mechanism of simulation. This also becomes clear when considering the third point. The truly unique properties of games arguably lie in their expressive power. According to Bogost (2007), digital games are an expressive medium. They visually represent how real and imagined systems work and invite their players to interact with those systems in a playful manner. The capacity of games to reveal complex situations (Mitgutsch 2011b) in a relatively simple and often fun way is what distinguishes this medium from other, more traditional, media forms (see also Corbeil 1999).

However, while there gradually seems to be an increasing academic interest in the uses and effects of games in different areas of people's lives, to date little attention has been given to the opportunities games might offer in relation to politics and citizenship. A notable exception is the research by Kahne, Middaugh, and Evans (2009), which explores the civic potential of video games in general. They argue that "gaming might foster civic engagement" (2009, 6). Since their focus is on the civic dimensions of video game play among young people, they have investigated what games have to offer youth regarding civic and political engagement compared to more traditional classroom settings. They find many parallels both in the structural form of the medium of the game (e.g. possibilities for some sort of simulation of part(s) of the political process and tools that facilitate collaboration and mentoring) as well as in the content of some games (e.g. learning how certain democratic processes work, learning about a particular event (war) or social issue (poverty), how to debate and share and form one's own opinion). Following Dewey's conceptualization of the democratic community, Kahne and his colleagues argue that games can be considered such places as well. This is particularly the case with the increase of participatory culture as described by Jenkins (2006) and Kligler-Vilenchik and Shresthova (2012). In this way, games can be seen as "places where diverse groups of individuals with shared interests join together, where groups must negotiate norms, where novices are mentored by more experienced community members, where teamwork enables all to benefit from the different skills of group members, and where collective problem-solving leads to collective intelligence" (Kahne, Middaugh, and Evans 2009, 6-7).

Moreover, there has also been research on the civic potential of Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, or MMORPGs, such as Blizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft* (e.g. Steinkuehler 2005; Curry 2010), as a 'third place' for civic development. The results of these studies seem to confirm previous findings that playing such games may help develop collaboration and leadership skills in general (Whitton and Hollins 2008; Jang and Ryu 2011) and willingness to help (Peng, Lee, and Heeter 2010). Furthermore, Raphael et al. (2010) suggest in their study that the "most effective games for civic learning would be those that best integrate game play and content, that help players make connections between their individual actions and larger social structures, and that link ethical and expedient reasoning" (2010, 199) to spark ethical reflection among their players. In addition, they obtained similar results as Kahne, Middaugh, and Evans (2009), who focused on how different civic skills were practiced and learned through gameplay (Raphael, Bachen, and Hernández-Ramos 2012).

The playful environment and social structure that the medium of the game offers is particularly relevant in this respect. In line with political socialization theory, when considering the game as a socializing agent, this medium can be regarded as one of the most important influences on how young people learn civic skills and engage in civic activities beside family and school. These finding are also supported the research of Bourgonjon and Soetaert (2013) as well as Lin and her colleagues (2010). This is especially relevant when we take into consideration the aforementioned shift, especially among younger people, toward more engaged forms of citizenship that value expression, autonomy, and solidarity more highly as traits of good citizenship.

Of particular interest in light of this chapter are games that are specifically aimed at affecting some sort of social change, that is, some form of attitudinal or behavioral change with their players. While such games have been studied for some time, it is only recently that this subdomain has required significant academic attention. Usually referred to as serious games,[1] they can be defined as games that aim to do more than entertain only (Ritterfeld, Cody, and Vorderer 2009, 6; Bellotti et al. 2013). The creator of the game specifically intends the game to be more than just entertainment, he wants it to inform even more, or even persuade the player in a playful yet serious manner.

Political video games: Games with an impact[2]

Ian Bogost (2007) coined the term persuasive games as a response to the dichotomy (still commonly used) of entertainment games versus serious games. He argues that the aforementioned terminology wrongfully suggests that entertainment games are not suited to communicating serious messages (i.e. to be used for something other than just mere entertainment). Moreover, the term 'serious games' alludes to an almost exclusive focus on game content, rather than on the process of communication of the specific medium. This procedural aspect of gaming is what allows for the communication of serious information in such a unique way. The term 'persuasive gaming' reflects the centrality of this procedural rhetoric while at the same time focusing on those games that challenge given norms and worldviews. As

1   This specific delineation from entertainment games, particularly trying to define what these serious games are *not*, has left the field of game studies with a myriad of different terms that aim to capture this difference (e.g. games for change, social games, political games, etc.). For the purpose of this chapter, we will refer to such games as serious games or, when discussing the specific subfield of interest, political games.
2   Parts of this section have appeared, slightly altered, in an earlier publication, namely Neys (2014).