

## THE GAME OF LIFE: NARRATIVE AND LUDIC IDENTITY FORMATION IN COMPUTER GAMES

*Jos de Mul*

Human identity is not a self-contained entity, hidden in the depths of our inner self, but is actively constructed in a social world with the aid of various expressions, such as social roles, rituals, clothes, music, and (life) stories. These expressions not only mediate between us and our world (*referentiality*) and between us and our fellow man (*communicability*), but also between us and ourselves (*self-understanding*). Consequently, changes in these mediating structures reflect changes in the relationship between us and our world, in our social relationships, and in our self-conception.

In recent decades the domain of expressions has been (massively<sup>1</sup>) extended by computer games and, as a result, we witness the emergence of a new tool for identity formation. In this chapter I shall examine the way computer games construct our identity in comparison with traditional narrative media, such as novels and movies. My investigation is primarily philosophical: it aims at a *conceptual* clarification of the relationship between (playing) computer games and human identity. However, though this study is not empirical, one of its aims is to contribute to the theoretical framework for empirical research in this field. The theoretical starting point of my investigation is Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity. I will argue that this theory provides a fruitful conceptual framework for understanding the way playing computer games construct personal identity. However, because his theory exclusively focuses on standard linguistic narratives, we will have to amend this theory in order to apply it within the domain of computer games.

I will develop the argument in three sections, starting with a short analysis of the concept of identity. Against this background, I explain Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity and discuss some constraints that prevent its application to computer games. In the next section, after a short analysis of the concepts of play, game, and computer game, I discuss the narrative dimension of computer games and the interactive dimension that distinguish computer games fundamentally from narra-

tives. Then I present an outline of a theory of ludic identity, and discuss the transformation in our present culture from narrative to ludic identity construction. Finally, I formulate some aspects of this transformation that are crucial for its evaluation.

### Narrative Identity and Its Discontents

#### *Human Identity*

Like so many words in everyday language, "identity" has no unequivocal meaning, but a number of connotations. This is connected to the long history of the concept, during which the phenomenon identity has taken on various interpretations. The word has its etymological roots in the Latin concept *identitas*, which in turn is derived from the concept *idem*—the same. In the context of our discussion of human identity it is useful to distinguish among logical, anthropological, and reflective identity.

As *logical* concept, "identity" refers predominantly to *numerical unity* ( $x = x$ ). Adapted to human persons, the concept identity indicates the unique relation that every person has with him or herself. This logical principle of identity means that a person is identical to the self and to no one else. Concerning this *personal identity*, it is possible to distinguish between physical identity and psychic identity, as a person has both a unique body and—narrowly intertwined with it—a unique mind. In a less strict sense, the concept "identity" is often also used to designate extreme similarity, for example when we refer to "identical twins." Though identical twins are not numerically identical, they share the same genetic characteristics.

However, in common language, the concept "identity" generally not only refers to this rather formal logical notion of identity, but also to the "sameness of essential or generic character in different instances" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). In this *anthropological* meaning, the concept refers to the *spatial* and *temporal* continuity of the personality.

Spatial continuity lies in the fact that the elements from which the physical and psychic identity are constructed do not form a loose conglomerate, but an internal nexus, in which part and whole are closely connected.<sup>2</sup> This is already clear on the physical level, where the different body parts are integrated into the unity of the body. Thoughts, actions, and desires are linked together in a meaningful way, too. For example, the way an ambitious person visualizes the future is internally connected with bodily and psychic desires and the actions undertaken aim at the realization of these desires. In a healthy person, all aspects of the personality are more or less integrated. Of course, this integration is never complete—human life is characterized by all kinds of dissociative states, such as (day)-dreaming, religious or sexual ecstasy, immersion in a movie or a (computer) game, highway hypnosis, intoxication by alcohol and other drugs, and so on. However, when the meaningful nexus is largely or completely lost—for example in the case of dissociative identity disorders—the result is a disintegration, or even a total loss, of the person’s identity in this spatial sense.

Temporal continuity lies in the fact that in the course of our life we remain more or less the same person (that is, the same spatial unity of bodily and psychic elements). To a certain extent we keep the same body during our lives, and thanks to memory and expectation our (conscious) mind also occupies a certain *permanence in time*.<sup>3</sup> However, this continuity is never complete. Our psychological continuity is characterized by interruptions (sleep) and gaps (forgetting). Moreover, our bodily and psychological continuity is not static: it develops over time from birth to death under influence of biological growth and renewal (almost all of the cells in our body are gradually replaced by new ones), learning processes, new experiences and, finally, decay. Also with regard to the temporal nexus, sometimes we see that radical discontinuities—for example, by a complete loss of memory or the loss of a part of the body, a transgender operation, the development of an disruptive addiction, dementia, or a religious or political conversion—may result in fundamental changes or even total disintegration of the temporal (bodily and psychic) identity.<sup>4</sup>

A third and crucial aspect of the human identity concerns the *reflective* dimension of identity. We encounter this dimension when we pose the question for whom the spatial and temporal continuity characteristic of personal and cultural identity arises. Although other people can ascribe a personal or cultural identity to us (which can have a great influence on the way in

which we experience our selves), finally *we ourselves* are the ones who experience our personal (and cultural) identity—that is to say, the meaningful spatial and temporal nexus. Reflectivity denotes self-awareness, self-reflection, having a self-image. We express ourselves and recognize ourselves in self-(re)presentations. Whether someone possesses a female, Islam, or fan identity (or possibly integrates all three) is not only always somewhat arbitrary, determined by physical characteristics, actions, habits, or thoughts, but is also dependent on whether the person regards and recognizes their selves as such. A phenomenon such as transsexuality shows that the objective and the experienced reality do not necessarily correspond.

### *Narrative Identity*

In the history of modern philosophy there has been much discussion about the *ontological* status of human identity, about its specific mode of being. We can distinguish two extreme positions. On the one hand, in the rationalist tradition starting with Descartes, defined the I or self as *a substance with consciousness*, “a thing that thinks” (Descartes, 1968, p. 106). Following the Christian notion of the eternal human soul, this tradition, conceives of this thinking substance as an isolated, timeless, noncorporeal entity. On the other hand, in the more skeptical movement within the empirical tradition, at least starting with Hume, denied the I or self any real substance. According to Hume, consciousness is nothing else than the continuous stream of perceptions and ideas: “I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. . . . The identity which we ascribe to the mind of man is only a fictitious one” (Hume, 1956, pp. 252, 259). Or, in the words of Daniel Dennett, a temporary humean skeptic, it is “a theorist’s fiction” comparable with an abstractum such as “the center of gravity” of an object in physics, that does not refer to any physical item in the world (Dennett, 1992).

Though the skepticism against the Cartesian conception of the self as a timeless substance is justified, Hume and Dennett seem to throw away the baby with the bathwater. Unlike the case of an entity, which does not have a subjective experience of its center of gravity, a person consciously does experience him- or herself. In the passage quoted from Hume, even he turns out to be *someone* who claims to be unable to find himself behind the flow of consciousness (Ricoeur, 1992)! The prob-

lem seems to be that both Descartes and Hume seem to agree that the self, if it exists, must be a substance. With the phenomenologist Heidegger, however, I want to argue that human *existence* is fundamentally distinguished from the ontological status of objects such as stones because human beings *exist in time and space* (Heidegger, 1996). Existing does not simply mean that we are situated in time (after all, this is also true for a stone), but that our being has a fundamentally temporal character. Although we always live in the present, unlike the stone, in our acting we are always oriented toward our future *possibilities* and we are also always determined by the possibilities we realized in the past. In *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricoeur denotes the distinction between the identity of mere occurrent entities such as a stone and the identity of human beings by the concepts *même* (*idem*) and *soi-même* (*ipse*), or, in other words, *same-identity* and *self-identity*, respectively (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 1–3, 116f.). This concerns the difference between identity as sheer *permanence in time* and identity as *selfness*, the personal involvement in, and the reflective consciousness of, our own existence.

According to Ricoeur, the problems flowing from Descartes's concept of identity arise from the very fact that he unfoundedly conceives human identity as a substance. In fact, we are concerned here with a metaphorical transfer—intangible human identity is presented as if it were a mere entity like a stone. This metaphorical transfer (and the conceptual confusion that goes with it) is seductive, because the self also has a certain permanence in time because of its bodily and psychological continuity. Therefore there is a certain *overlap* of the *same* and the *self*. But in these two cases the permanence in time is of a fundamentally different order. As opposed to the stone, the self remaining the same in the time—Heidegger calls this self-constancy (*Selbstständigkeit*) (Heidegger, 1996)—is not simply continuing to be the same in time, but the contingent realization of a possibility. Ricoeur clarifies this self-preservation of the self with the example of an illocutionary act such as making a promise. If we keep a promise, it is not because we simply remain the same person, but results from a volitional effort. Our identity is not a simple fact, but a continuous task, only ending with our death. In our everyday existence we are always, as we like to say about our websites, “under construction.”

The confusion surrounding the notion of personal identity is further increased by the fact that we have a tendency to identify ourselves with opportunities realized in the past and therefore seclude ourselves from fu-

ture opportunities. What at first was simply possibility takes on the form of an aggregate of character traits and ingrained habits. A “second nature” emerges that contributes to the continuity of our personal identity. This fundamental passivity that ensures that much remains the same in us, makes us identifiable to ourselves and to others. In this case there appears to be not so much a question of an overlap, but rather of a transformation of the *self* to the *same*. Although this tendency is a natural part of human existence, the degree to which it appears is culturally and historically variable. Although personal (and cultural) identity in traditional societies is generally quite stable, in modern culture our identity is characterized by a high level of flexibility and changeability. As Sherry Turkle notes,

Not so long ago, stability was socially valued and culturally reinforced. Rigid gender roles, repetitive labor, the expectation of being in one kind of job or remaining in one town over a lifetime, all of these made consistency central to definitions of health. But these stable social worlds have broken down. In our time, health is described in terms of fluidity rather than stability. What matters most now is the ability to adapt and change—to new jobs, new career directions, new gender roles, new technologies. (Turkle, 1995, p. 255; cf. Gergen, 1991)

It is against the background of the discussion about the ontological status and the flexibilization of human identity that Ricoeur presents his theory of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1985, 1991a,b, 1992). Ricoeur takes Heidegger's notion of the existential self as his starting point, but he implicitly criticizes Heidegger for sticking to Descartes's immediate positing of the “I.” Unlike Descartes and Heidegger, Ricoeur does not believe that we have an immediate access to the self in introspection or phenomenological intuition. Self-knowledge is in almost all cases mediated. We know ourselves only via the indirect route of the cultural expression of ourselves in actions, utterances, images, music, nutrition, fashion, housing, institutions, religion, and so on.

Narratives are especially important in this respect. “The narratives of the world are numberless. . . . Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is or has been a people without narrative. . . . Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (Barthes, 1982, p. 79). Or, as Hayden White writes, “To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection

on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself” (White, 1980, p. 1).

This is also the starting point for Ricoeur: “Answering the question ‘Who?’... implies the narration of a life story” (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 335).<sup>5</sup> It is only in the stories we tell others and ourselves about our lives and about (real or fictitious) other lives that we articulate our own selves, and only by identifying ourselves with these stories our identity comes into being. Thus, for Ricoeur narrative is not only a suitable *metaphor* for human identity, but is also preeminently the *medium* with whose help we give our identity form. Our identity is contained in our life story. That story is not pre-given and static, but attains form in our actions and our narrative reflection on them. According to Ricoeur, in this process we can distinguish a three-fold mimesis.

The first level, referred to as *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, is connected with the narrative prefiguration of our daily life. In Ricoeur’s view this lies in the practical knowledge that guides our actions. We experience our dealings with our fellow human beings in terms of meaning: we distinguish motives and interests, we set standards and ascribe values, we attempt to realize certain ideals in life. Therefore in a certain sense our actions already contain an implicit narrative. Our life is an unremitting “Quest of Narrative” (Ricoeur, 1991a).

Ricoeur designates the expression of the experienced pre-narrative coherence in explicit narratives (varying from the everyday narratives we tell about ourselves to autobiography and—more general—in the art of novel) as *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>. This stage is described in dramaturgical terms, derived from Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy in his *Poetics*. Central in Aristotle’s argument is the notion of the plot (*mythos*), the expression of a series of mutually connected and motivated actions. According to Ricoeur, the plot (*mise en intrigue*) can be understood as “a synthesis of the heterogeneous” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 141). The plot brings the heterogeneous elements of which a story consists—events, such as actions and happenings, and existents, such as settings and characters (cf. Chatman, 1978)—to a unity. The Aristotelian plot can be regarded as a complete whole. It is a *whole* because all the elements within the plot are linked and there are no elements unrelated to the plot. In the plot every element has meaning in the light of the whole. It is *complete* because together the elements give the narrative closure. In a nutshell, the plot has a beginning, a middle, and an end (Aristotle, 1984, vol. 2, p. 2321). Ricoeur calls this the meaningful configuration created

by the plot *concordance*. However, this concordance is no static state, but is continuously jeopardized by *discordances*, such as reversals of fortune that threaten the meaningful closure of the narrative. A story is the representation of an act that is continuously frustrated by more or less unforeseen settings and happenings. This makes the story a *dynamic* whole. For that reason Ricoeur calls the story a discordant concordance (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 141).

The third step in the construction of narrative identity, *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>, consists of the reflective application of the narrative configuration on the self, resulting in an identification with the *characters* of the story. The unity of the story—the plot—is closely connected to the *characters* figuring in it. Telling a story is telling who does what and why. In the story we witness how the character develops. Just like the plot, characters show a dialectic of concordance and discordance. In the character, contingent events get a narrative coherence. From a psychoanalytical point of view, we could say that the identification that characterizes *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>, consists in the internalization of the object of desire—the state of concordance obtained by the characters in the story. This is not a simple imitation, but an appropriation or assimilation that results in a change in the identity of the identifying person (cf. Freud, 1953, vol. IV, p. 156).

However, just as in the case of the plot the stability obtained by this internalization is rather shaky, as it is continuously confronted by the return of the heterogeneous, which threatens the concordance of our identity. A sublime love, a personal vendetta, a crisis or addiction, illness and death—these are all happenings that give our life story unexpected turns, that keep challenging the concordance of the character and ultimately may destroy it. Until its very end the (life) story it is characterized by this dialectic between concordance and discordance.

The theory of narrative identity helps us to better understand the above mentioned relationship between the same and the self on the one hand, and between the self and the other on the other hand. The tension between the *same* and the *self* turns out to be no other than that between concordance and discordance in our life stories. Every story can be located somewhere between the extremes of stories in which the character simply remains the same (such as is often the case in fairy tales with its stable roles) and stories in which the character completely disintegrates in its confrontation with the heterogeneous. Ricoeur mentions Robert

Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* as a novel in which the self completely loses its identifiable characteristics. Because of the close connection between plot and character, it does not surprise that the crisis of the character in this novel correspond with a crisis of closure of the story. For that reason, *The Man Without Qualities* perhaps represents the crisis of Western culture in which the grand narratives have lost their persuasiveness (Lyotard, 1984; cf. De Mul, 1999).

The narrative model of identity also throws an elucidating light on the social dimension of human identity. By telling our life story we are always already entangled in the dialectics between the *self* and the *other* (Ricoeur, 1992). The other is present in different roles in the stories we identify our selves with. In the first place, we identify with ourselves with the others that appear in the stories that are being told in our (sub)culture. In the second place, the other is constitutive for our identity because it is always part of our life story, as relative, lover, neighbor, colleague, employer, stranger, enemy, and so on. In the third place, are we always actors in the stories of others. All these dialectical relationships mean that we are continuously entangled in a multiplicity of stories and that our identity, as a result, is a "tissue of stories" (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 356). Just as in the case of Mead's account of the self and Turkle's investigation of our identity in the age of the Internet, in Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, the self is a multiple self.

Ricoeur emphasizes the constructive role of literary narratives. But doesn't this mean that he neglects the difference between life and story? After all, "stories are not lived but told" (Mink, 1970, p. 557). Ricoeur argues that it is just because our life is not a story, because it is unarticulated, poly-interpretable and without closure, that we need the concordance of stories to control the continuous threat of the heterogeneous. This confirms that narrative identity is no sheer representation of an already given entity, but a construction. As this construction is foremost a creation of our imagination we can agree with Hume and Dennett that our narrative identity is a (literary) fiction, but we should immediately add that it is no theoretical abstract, but a meaningful nexus that we experience and live. Our identity might be called virtual, in the sense that it is a fiction that creates real effects in our daily lives (cf. Heim, 1993).

#### *Broadening Ricoeur's Theory of Narrative Identity*

Later, I will try to demonstrate that Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity offers a fruitful conceptual framework

for an investigation of identity formation that takes place in playing computer games. However, first I have to discuss some problems that stand in the way of a successful application of Ricoeur's theory in the domain of computer games. The first one, which I will now address, has to do with Ricoeur's rather restricted conception of narrativity. The second problem, which I will discuss in the next section, is more fundamental and concerns the question whether we can approach computer games from a narrative perspective at all.

In the books and articles in which Ricoeur has developed his theory of narrative, he refers to various narratives in order to develop and illustrate his theory. However, it is striking that he takes hardly any other narratives into account but linguistic ones. It has to be admitted he is not completely alone in this. Some narratologists hold that narratives only exist in language. Mieke Bal, for example, in the first edition of her *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, restricts narratives to narrative texts, and defines a text as "a finite, structured whole composed of language signs" (Bal, 1985, p. 5). She further defines a story as "a fabula that is presented in a certain manner" and a fabula as "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors" (Bal, 1985, p. 5). Moreover, she adds as defining characteristics that in narrative texts there are always two types of speakers, one that has no specific function in the history narrated, and one that does have such a function (though the narrator and actor can be united in one person) and that with regard to narratives can three levels always be distinguished: text, story (which—following Aristotle and Ricoeur—have been called plot in the foregoing), and history.

However, given this definition of narrative the restriction of the analysis to linguistic texts is not evident and even not very convincing. It is not clear why a stage play, a dance, or a movie could not count as a narrative. As Barthes notes, narrative is a code or form that can be expressed in various media or substances:

Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances: narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think

of Carpaccio's *Saint Ursulla*), stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. (Barthes, 1982, p. 79)

For that reason it is not that strange that Bal in the second edition of her book broadens the spectrum of her theoretical model to include discussions of visualization and visual narrative, and gives various examples from art and film (Bal, 1997). In this broad conception of narrative, computer games are not in principle excluded from having a narrative dimension and as such play a similar role in identity construction as novels, stage plays, films, and comics. And, as we will see in the next section, many computer games in fact do have a narrative dimension.

Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity is not only constrained by his exclusive focus on linguistic narratives, but also by the fact that even within this already restricted domain he hardly takes any other narratives into account than novels belonging to the modern, Western tradition. This is surprising in the light of the fact that with Barthes, narratives are international, transhistorical, and transcultural. In the globalized and multicultural societies that characterize present Western culture, we not only are increasingly in contact with narrative traditions from other cultures, but immigrants also import and assimilate these traditions in our own culture.

This constraint in Ricoeur's theory should be mentioned, because Ricoeur's preference for the classical, Western canon is connected with a preference for a specific cultural and historical determined type of narrative, that has, as we will see, less in common with the structure of computer games than some of the transcultural narratives that presently are developing in multicultural cultures. Though Ricoeur talks about discordant concordance, it is clear that the emphasis is mainly on concordance. In "Life in Quest of Narrative," he frankly speaks about "the primacy of concordance over discordance" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 22). This primacy also comes to the fore in the interpretations Ricoeur gives in *Time and Narrative* of the modern novels of Woolf, Mann, and Proust. In his interpretation of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, for example, we see that he does not recoil from some interpretative violence. Though the two protagonists in the novel, Clarissa and Septimus, because of insoluble conflicts between their personal and public life, respectively, end up in an existential crisis and in suicide, Ricoeur does manage to present the story as a story about authentic self-realization in which concordance finally

has the last word. Examples such as this show that Ricoeur remains chained to the classical, Aristotelian tradition, which is characterized by a desire for closure.

Ajit Maan has argued that Ricoeur seems to presuppose that this Western type of narrative is the universal model for human identity (Maan, 1999, p. 84). Everything that does not fit in this model would be considered disassociative at best (p. 57). Maan argues that specific spatial and temporal continuities are no intrinsic characteristics of personal, sexual, ethnic, or cultural identity, but social and political constructions instead. In her view "assuming that narratives structure affects action and identity, narrative choice should include not only alternative plots in terms of content but also alternative formal structures" (p. 16). In this context she discusses the "internarrative" novel *Fault Lines*, by Meena Alexander. In this novel, Alexander—born in India, raised in Egypt, and now living and working in the United States—gives an account of her life, offering the different aspects of her multiple identity equal rights. The organizational principle of this novel is not so much temporal continuity but rather spatial discontinuity. The result is a heterogeneous fabric with multiple beginnings recurring repeatedly throughout the narrative. "Even the final chapter contains a re-telling of a beginning. These beginnings do not lead to a middle. There is no middle that leads to a resolved ending" (Maan, 1999, p. 45).

This structure, which reminds of the organizational principle of computer games and other hypermedia, prevents that certain aspects of her identity are being suppressed or sacrificed to other aspects. Although Alexander describes herself as "homeless, shelterless, with no fixed place to belong, and a blabber of multiple tongues" (Alexander, 1993, p. 177), her narrative is no expression of sheer chaos, but rather an impressive attempt to reconfigure this chaos in a liveable nexus (Maan, 1999, p. 37).

This experience of contingency and heterogeneity of the migrant could be extended to life in our present postmodern culture, which is being characterized by multiphrenia, "the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments" (Gergen, 1991, pp. 73–74). The concordant unifying narrative Ricoeur is talking about is no longer able to express the fragmented identity of the postmodern citizen, to which Turkle referred. As Maan argues, new narrative structures might be better capable to express and to make livable the new forms of identity. And perhaps computer games are expressions of these new forms of identity too.

## Computer Games: Narrativity and Beyond

By broadening Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity to include nonlinguistic and nonstandard Western narratives, I hoped to make this theory more suitable for the analysis of identity construction in the playing of computer games. However, according to many theorists in the field of computer games, narratives and computer games are so fundamentally different in their "grammar" that their study requires an essentially different conceptual apparatus (Juul, 1998; for a more nuanced account see his contribution in this volume). In order to be able to judge this critique, we have to compare the ontologies of narratives and computer games.

### *Play, Games and Computer Games*

It doesn't seem to be a sheer coincidence that Wittgenstein illustrated his notion "family resemblance" with the help of the concept of "game." Just as in the cases of "identity" and "narrative," the concept of "game" does not refer to one essential characteristic, but to a series of similarities and relationships. Card games have some things in common with board games, which in turn have some things in common with ball games. Not all games are amusing, and not all involve winning and losing. What counts as skill and luck varies among them. Even when we restrict ourselves to computer games, we can distinguish various types and genres. However, this does not mean we can give no description of games and computer games.

Games can be regarded as a subclass of play, that is, (mostly) joyful activities that are often temporally and spatially set apart from everyday life. What is merely play is not serious; it has no goal other than itself. However, as Gadamer notices in his phenomenological analysis of play in *Truth and Method*, play has its own, even sacred, seriousness (Gadamer, 1989, p. 102). It fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in play. "The movement of playing has no goal that would bring it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition" (p. 102). Most games present the playing person with a task. Moreover, play has its own type of intentionality: we are always playing *something* (p. 107). However, play is not a so much a re-presentation of that something but rather a presentation: "Its mode of being is self-presentation" (p. 108).

When play transforms into structure, it can become either drama (a stage play) or game. In both cases it gets a *specific structure* that makes the play into something independent from the player(s). However, in order to be, they have to be played. The game can

therefore—following Huizinga's famous definition—be defined as "a free act that takes place within a specially designated time in a specially designated place, according to specific rules which are strictly adhered to" (Huizinga, 1970, p. 13). Like play, games present the players with a specific task, often in a competition. The outcome of the game depends on the actions of the player(s).

Often in plays and games we use attributes such as balls or cards. Computer games distinguish themselves from other games by their technological mediation (see the contribution of Britta Neitzel in this volume). In the case of computer games, the distinctive game space is a *virtual space*, which can be manipulated with the help of various input devices (mouse, joystick, and so on) of which the effects can be viewed on an output device (monitor). The monitoring process gives the computer player the possibility of continuously observing the results of the action. It is, as Neitzel defines it, "a process of self-observation with continuous feedback." This distinction between the *point of action* and the *point of view* enables the player to reflect upon the self as another—as the avatar. Another aspect Neitzel points at is that computer games as we know them represent action in which humans could participate. Although this is often not true for puzzles (*Tetris*) and simulations (*Sim Life*), it is for most action and fighting games (*Tomb Raider*), adventures (*Alice*), role playing games (*Final Fantasy Mystic Quest*), sports games (*Formula 1*), and strategy games (*Civilization*). As Neitzel justly notes, it is this connectedness of the level of action to the level of representation that links computer games to narratives, as these are as well representations of a real or fictional chain of actions.

### *The Narrative Dimension of Computer Games*

We can formulate the following minimal definition of a narrative. It is the representation of a series of logically and chronologically related events in a specific setting, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and caused or undertaken by actors. The closure that characterizes most stories is connected with the fact, first described by Tzvetan Toderov, that they represent a transformation in which (1) a state of equilibrium at the outset is (2) disrupted by some event (action or happening), (3) the recognition of this disruption by the (main) character, followed by (4) an attempt to repair the disruption, and finally (5) the reinstatement of the initial equilibrium (Branigan, 1992, p. 4). In this narrative scheme we recognize Ricoeur's dialectics between concordance and discordance. At first glance this description is

also applicable to many computer games. Most of these games have this kind of quest structure—designated by Frye as the master genre of the romance (Frye, 1957)—in which the protagonists undergo a series of trials in order to achieve their goal. Moreover, in many games we also find existents (characters and settings) and events (happenings and actions).

Let us take as representative example of a standard third-person action game *Enter the Matrix* (2003). As in the movie *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), on which the game is based, the initial state of equilibrium—man ruling the world—is disturbed by machines taking control and attempting to destroy the human population. The task of the characters—Niobe and Ghost, two side characters in the movie, acting against the setting of the locations of *Matrix* the movie—is to reinstate the initial equilibrium. It opens with the character or avatar of your choice—Niobe and Ghost have different skills and subtasks—in a post office, trying to get a specific PO box to retrieve some information. As you make your way through the game, you have to chase airplanes, rescue captured rebels, navigate through a sewer system, destroy a nuclear power plant, and fight off a sentinel attack from aboard your hovercraft, the *Logos*.

As Juul has argued, in these kinds of narrative games the story is in a sense external to the playing of the game itself—provided in advance or in breaks between the playing, written on the package, in the manual or in introduction and transition movie-sequences—and as the ideal story the player has to realize (Juul, this volume). But the actual playing is not narrative. In fact computer games such as *Enter the Matrix*—and as said before, this game seems to be representative of the mainstream of action and fighting games, adventures, role playing games, sports games, and strategy games—show that these games in fact are a hybrid *combination*, and not so much an integration of game and narrative.<sup>6</sup> It is true that a narrative unfolds, but this does not occur in the game itself. Of course, this is not to say that these kinds of hybrids are a failure. What the great success many of these games demonstrates is that you can add narrative elements to a game in a creative manner without spoiling the game. The narrative framework in which the game elements are presented even enhance the pleasure of playing the game. For fans of the *Matrix* movie trilogy, the narrative context will enhance the pleasure of playing the game,<sup>7</sup> also offering the modes of identification by the reflective application of the narrative configuration on the self, as discussed earlier.

However, this does not elucidate yet the distinctive contribution of the game elements of the computer game to identity construction. In order to analyze this contribution, we have to focus on the aspects of the computer game that do not overlap with narrative. This is where we are not concerned with the point of view of the player, but with his point of (inter)action.

#### *Computer Games versus Narratives: Interaction versus Interpretation*

If there is one single characteristic that distinguishes (computer) games from narratives it must be (inter)action. Whereas the reader (or viewer) of a narrative is presented with a chain of events imagined by the author (or director) of the story, in the computer game the chain of events is the result of the player's action. This is not to say that the reader is a passive consumer of the story; with regard to the reading of narratives the reader plays a double role, occupying at the same time a *passive point of view* and an *active point of interpretation*. As has become a standard presupposition in narratology, a story only comes into being when the reader actively constructs it by interpreting the narrative elements by linking them to each other. In this sense, readers have a certain freedom of interpretation and different readers can read different stories, depending on their foreknowledge. However, with the exception of certain avant-garde texts such as Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (Cortázar, 1987; cf. De Mul, 2000), in the case of narratives the order of the narrative elements or *lexia* is determined by the author and not by the reader. In computer games, on the other hand, the player is (inter)active in the sense that he or she determines the sequence of the elements that appear on the monitor.

A narrative is *linear* and the elements of the narrative are linked together by a narrative *causality*. Narrative speaks the language of fate, every action and event is caused by the preceding actions and motives. It is thanks to this specific chain of actions and events that a narrative in a book can be translated into a film. Both media share the same narrative grammar. Conversely in a game a player has relatively great *freedom* to determine the sequence of actions himself. The game, therefore, is necessarily *multilinear*; if the player cannot choose between various options there is no game at all.

Of course the freedom of the player is not absolute. Like every game, there is a set of rules that determine which actions can be undertaken and which not. In this context the distinction Joyce makes between ex-

ploratory and constructive hypertexts can be applied to games (Joyce, 1995, p. 42). Explorative games are games in which the nature and the number of lexia is fixed and the freedom of the player is restricted to the sequence in which they are presented during the game. In the case of constructive games, however, the player is able to change the nature and number of lexia. We can think of *Doom*, for example, where players are able to construct their own settings, or of the *Star Trek* game, which was hacked by players in order to add homosexual characters to the game. These games are versions of what they are becoming, a structure for what does not yet exist. In these cases there is what Andy Cameron calls *real interactivity*, “the ability to intervene in a meaningful way within the representation itself, not to read it differently” (Cameron, 1995). Cameron elucidates his point by stating that interactivity in music would mean the ability to change the sound, interactivity in painting to change colors, or make marks, interactivity in film the immersion of the spectator in the scene and the ability to change the way the movie ends. Real activity in computer games is the ability to change the representation and/or rules of the game.

The multilinearity of the game that is connected with its interactivity has important consequences for the temporal and spatial organization of games, compared to that of narratives (Juul, 1998; cf. his contribution in this volume). The narrative has three temporal levels: that of the plot (the signifier), that of the related narrative (the signified), and that of the reader or viewer. A sequence of shots in a film, lasting only a few minutes, can cover many years of the narrative. When watching a film, both temporal layers are interpreted together by the viewer. Because the times of the plot and the narrative are different, the narrative also has the three dimensions of time. It does not only take place at the time of the reading, but by means of flashbacks and flash forwards, the plot also presents the past and the future.

Computer games such as *Enter the Matrix* lack this temporal stratification. Where the reader or the person watching a film undergoes great temporal mobility by means of flashbacks and flash forwards, the computer game player is inevitably confined to the present. Because he finds himself in an eternal present, he is able to carry out the same actions over and over again. Other than the protagonist of a narrative, who sooner or later inevitably dies, the player is immortal. In *Enter the Matrix*, every time you are shot dead, you can begin the game again.

With regard to spatial organization, the narrative and the game also differ significantly. The situation here, however, is the other way round. In contrast to film, the game has a spatial stratification. It has three spatial dimensions. Interactivity means that you can go in various directions—to the left or right, forwards or backwards, up or down. Just as in the narrative there is a difference between the time of the plot (the signifier) and the time of the narrative (the signified), in the game there is a difference between the space of the game interface (the signifier) and the virtual space disclosed up by the game (the signified). And also in the game there is a third dimension in which both these spaces are interpreted together—that of the player. In contrast, in the narrative, the three spatial dimensions implode into a one-dimensional, that is to say sequential, path that the protagonists tread through the narrative space. Their fate is that they are doomed to wander this single path. From the notion of the spatial dimension, the game and the narrative are as chess and a game of chess. The rules of chess enclose a space within which an unlimited number of different games of chess can be played.

We can also illuminate the difference between narrative and game by looking at the relationship between plot and action. In the narrative, the plot determines the action. Whereas in the narrative the action is motivated by the plot, in the computer game the plot is dependent on the action. When at the right moment the player of *Enter the Matrix* pulls the trigger of his gun and shoots the sentinel, he can enter the next room where another challenge awaits him. When he shoots too late and is himself shot dead, he changes the plot. The discursive causality here seems to be reversed—the action determines the plot, or seeks for it in vain (Aarseth, 1994).

When, finally, we look at the “pleasure bonus” that the narrative and computer game respectively offer the reader, viewer, and the player, again we see an important difference. In the classic narrative the pleasure lies in the satisfaction it gives to know how the narrative ends. From a psychoanalytical point of view, we should call it an end-pleasure (Freud, 1953, vol. VII, p. 209; cf. De Mul, 1999, pp. 180–182). When, understood in Aristotelian terms, there is no ending, the reader is frustrated. The game, however, does not have an end. Without doubt one can stop *Enter the Matrix* after having gone through all levels, but then in fact we stop because of the closure of the accompanying narrative. Games that have no or hardly any narrative context, such as *Tetris*, invite us to play again in order to beat

our personal record. Of course, after some time we will stop playing the game, for example, because we are exhausted or bored, but only to continue our playing after a while. The lust provided by the computer game is never an end-pleasure but necessarily always remain a fore-pleasure. This is one of the reasons that playing computer games easily leads to addiction. This fore-pleasure is connected with phantoming the rules of the game and improving one's skills in order to improve the personal record.

### Ludic Identity

Now that I have described the main difference between narrative and computer games, I am able to analyze the implications of this difference for the formation of identity and give a tentative answer to the question how computer games affect our personal identity.

#### *Ludic Identity Formation*

In the previous section, we noticed that narratives and games have a number of characteristics in common. The same can be said for the formation of narrative and ludic identity. Just as narratives, computer games are expressions that, among other things, play a function in the formation of our identity. They are able to do this because both give expression to important aspects of human life that structure our lived experiences and by doing that enable the reflective identification with this structure. With regard to the construction of ludic identity we can discern three stages, which I will call, following Ricoeur's notion of threefold mimesis, play<sub>1</sub>, play<sub>2</sub>, and play<sub>3</sub>.

Play<sub>1</sub> refers to the ludic prefiguration of our daily life. We experience nature and the human world as playful, for example, when we notice the play of light or waves, when we see the play of animals and children, or experience the play of sexual seduction. Everywhere in our world we experience movements backwards and forward that renew themselves in constant repetition. Varying the words of Friedrich Schlegel, we could say that the (computer) games we play are nothing but a remote imitation of the infinite play of the world (cf. Gadamer, 1989, p. 105).

The expression of this experienced pre-ludic coherence in (computer) *games* forms the level of play<sub>2</sub>. Central here is the *set of rules* that determine the possible movements backwards and forwards that determine a specific play. The result is not so much, as in narrative, a causal chain of events, but a playing field (*Spielraum*), that is a *space of possible action*. This playing field can be regarded as an *infinite whole*. The game of Tetris

for example, consists of a finite set of existents and constitutive rules that disclose an infinite number of different game sessions. It does not have a closure, but is always fundamentally *open* to further (renewal of) action. We always want to beat the present high score. Unlike the narrative, of which the end is always already determined (every narrative refers to a story that already took place, even when the story is situated in the present), the outcome of a game is fundamentally indeterminate.

In the third stage of the formation of the ludic identity, play<sub>3</sub>, the player identifies with the space of possibilities disclosed by the game. The field of possible action is reflectively applied to the self. The infinity of possible outcomes, connected with the constitutive rules, is internalized. As in the case of the reflective application of the narrative to the self, in the case of ludic identity there is no simple imitation of these rules, but they are being appropriated or assimilated and as a result change the identity of the player.

As in the case of narrative identity in the construction of ludic identity there is a constant dialectic between concordance and discordance. Every game can be located somewhere between games in which with every single action the number of possibilities increase and those in which they decrease. Whereas in many action games and adventures that are designed according a "tree of death" with every choice the number of possible outcomes is reduced (the initial choice for Niobe or Ghost in *Enter the Matrix* restricts the number of possible actions, as each of the characters have a distinct set of tasks and skills), simulation games often do increase the number of possible outcomes with every choice made. However, when we compare narratives with games in regard to the balance of concordance and discordance, the dominance seems to be opposite. Whereas in the case of narrative identity the predominant tendency is toward an increase of closure and thus concordance (novels such as Robert Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* remain an exception), in the case of ludic identity the predominant tendency is toward an increase of openness. In every situation the ludic self is in search for new possibilities in order to increase the field of possible action. In this sense the temporal dimension of narrative and games is opposite. Whereas narration, although taking place in the present, aims at an understanding of what have happened in the past, playing, which also takes place in the present, is directed at future possibilities.

In the case of ludic identity there is an additional dialectic between the self and the other. The other is al-

ways present, not only as a player we want to identify ourselves with, but also as opponent or teammate, as enemy or lover, the other present possibilities for reciprocal and/or collective action.

A possible objection could be that life is no game, but we could formulate an analogue answer as Ricoeur did in reply to the critique that life is no story. Just because our life is no game, not always joyful and full of possibilities, we need games to oppose the continuous threat of closure. And just as in the case of narrative identity, ludic identity is a creation of our imagination that creates real effects in our daily lives.

#### *Growing Dominance of Ludic Identity?*

Narrative and ludic identity do not represent alternatives that mutually exclude each other, but are two identity formations that co-exist and are entangled in many ways, in the same manner as stories and games. We could perhaps clarify their relationship a bit further by returning for a moment to Heidegger's analytics of human existence. Earlier I noted that according to Heidegger, existing in time means that living in the present, we are always oriented toward our future possibilities, and at the same time we are always constrained by the possibilities we have realized in the past. In a concise formula, Heidegger calls man a thrown possibility (*geworfene Möglichkeit*) (Heidegger, 1996, p. 135). However, our attitude toward our past and our future possibilities is not the same. We interpret and narrate our past and we play with and act upon, our future projects. Of course these dimensions are not completely separate. Our past is not simply behind us, but continuously effective in our present acting, and in our interpretations we continuously revise our past. The choices we make in our actions are always grounded in our past. It is for that reason that narratives and games are often narrowly entangled. Though situated in the past, stories can inspire new future possibilities. Though oriented toward the future, games often repeat possibilities from the past. As we already noticed, human beings tend to identify themselves with the choices made in the past and for that reason become less playful as they grow older. However, oriented toward past and future, they are the expressions of two fundamentally different dimensions of human life.

This does not mean, however, that they are always in balance. In Western culture, since the age of modernity there seems to be a growing dominance of the projective dimension of our existence above our thrownness. In the modern era, man understands him-

self predominantly as an autonomous, free acting subject. The modern subject can be conceived of as a *Homo volens*, that shapes life autonomously. Modern technology has given this autonomous subject powerful means to increase the power to choose and act. The computer game can be regarded as a popular derivative of this modern ideology. In this light it is no coincidence that interactivity became the buzz word in amusement industry. No less in the computer game than in the "game of life," the modern subject continuously has to make choices. Whereas in the premodern culture most choices—your life partner, occupation, religion—usually were made for you, as a modern subject, you continuously have to choose. Whether it concerns the simple choice between the left or right door in a computer game or the choice for a certain lifestyle, every time the emphasis is on the volitional dimension of our personality. As we already noticed with Turkle, this necessitates a flexibility of our selves.

Of course, computer games do not cause this change in identity. This transformation of the modern self is a complex process in which, among many other things, social, political, economic, and technological developments play a role.<sup>8</sup> However, the massive dissemination of computer games in Western and westernized cultures without doubt is also part of this complex process. It demonstrates that in our culture on the level of the existents there has been a major shift from settings to character and on the level of the events from happenings to actions. Reflection gradually has shifted from interpretation of meaning to reflective feedback on action.

Without doubt this transformation partly has been on the ideological level only. That modern subjects, following Descartes, regard themselves as autonomous entities does not mean that they really *are* autonomous. Modern history is characterized by a stream of happenings that has demonstrated that many things are still not yet or—in the age of increasing autonomic technologies (Kelly, 1994)—no longer under our control. Even in our computer games we constantly face the possibility that the game will be over. However, they also promise us that we always can start all over again.

Connected with the shift from narrative and interpretation to game and action we can discern a shift from temporally organized identity to spatially organized identity. Earlier, we saw that human identity has these two dimensions. But also in this case there is no eternal—ahistorical or acultural—balance between these dimensions. In an age where the number of different roles increases so much that some sociologists

even talk about a “saturation of the self” (Gergen, 1991), the number of activities we are engaged in at the same time increases no less, and, moreover, these roles and activities keep changing all the time over time, the spatial organization of the many changing aspects of our selves becomes more and more important. The personal computer with its many windows open all the time is a moving metaphor for the way we try to deal with this change in our selves, and at the same time seems to be a device that stimulates this change and at the same time enables us to cope with it. The same counts for the remote control, that increasingly is primarily used not to determine the sequence of the images on the screen, but rather to follow different channels at the same time. Computer games, with their spatial rather than temporal organization, play a no less important role in this transformation of our selves toward and of our world view. The world itself is no longer conceived of from a sheer historical perspective, but rather as a database, a playing field that enables us to (re)configure all kinds of different worlds. The evolution of life on earth is no longer a narrative in the sense that it is a causal chain of events, but rather a database full of genes that can be recombined in an infinite number of possible worlds. Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* offers a still fictive but far from implausible view on this brave new world. Likewise, genetic manipulation, aesthetic surgery, and the like make our bodily and psychic characteristics less and less to our narrative fates and increasingly objects of choice. Again, this view has a strong ideological dimension, so we may expect that stories about what went wrong will also continue to be told. Our future selves probably will remain a more or less hybrid mix of narrative and ludic identities. But as we have seen in the discussion of Alexander’s internarrative novel, even these narratives are gradually becoming more spatial in their organization and structure. The historical consciousness that emerged in the last centuries and from which the art of the novel also sprouted, will at least be contrasted with a spatial consciousness that does not think in terms of past decisions but rather in terms of parallel possibilities.

### *Three Pedagogical Afterthoughts*

In the previous sections I have mainly restricted myself to an exposition of the (partial) transformation of narrative identity into ludic identity that, in my view, can be discerned in our present culture and in which computer games play—already for quantitative reasons—an increasingly important role. As I believe it is important

to understand before one judges, I have tried to postpone an evaluation of this transformation. Though it is not my intention to give a comprehensive evaluation in this last subsection (it is for the reader to judge), I do want to provide three pedagogical afterthoughts about some aspects of the process described that, at least in my view, may be important for further evaluation.

First, it is important to keep in mind that computer games are not “just games” but play a constitutive role in our cognitive development and in the construction of our identity. This role may even be more fundamental than in the case of narratives, because the emotional involvement in computer games is very strong. Some decades ago Sherry Turkle explained that this is connected to the fact that computer games are about action: “When you play a video game you enter into the world of the programmers who made it. You have to do more than identify with a character on the screen. You must act for it. Identification through action has a special kind of hold. Like playing a sport, it puts people into a highly focused, and highly charged state of mind. For many people, what is being pursued in the video game is not just a score, but an altered state” (Turkle, 1984, p. 83). For that reason the exposure to possible undesirable contents of computer games (such as violence, sexism, or racism, see Herz, 1997, p. 183), might be more intense than in the case of narratives. However, this does not already have implications for the effect, because in case playing violent games has a positive effect of catharsis, this may be for that very reason stronger than in the case of reading violent novels or watching violent movies. Anyway, we should not forget that computer games are ontological machines in the sense that they, just like narratives, not only structure our (concept of the) world, but also (our concept of) ourselves.

Next, connected with the strong involvement in computer games is the danger of addiction. This danger is reinforced by the fact that because of the predominantly fore-pleasure oriented satisfaction of computer games they already have an inherent stimulus to repetition. More in general, computer games are part of a technological world that has a strong addictive character as a whole. The modern ideology of makability results in a heavy dependence on technological means, independent of their success. However, as serious as an addiction may be, we should not exaggerate this danger in the case of computer games. In my opinion, an addiction to computer games is closer to a passion for reading novels or watching movies than an addiction to alcohol or crack. Reading stories, watching movies, and

playing games are activities that are not instrumental but rather have their goal in themselves. They share this feature with an addiction to alcohol and other drugs. However, as these kinds of addiction can ruin your life, in the case of a passion for narratives and games, the opposite is the case. That narratives and games take place in a time and space beyond the seriousness of everyday life does not mean that they have no value. In so far as they are ontological tools that sharpen our imagination and enable us to construct new images of ourselves and the world, their value for our lives cannot easily be exaggerated! Because of its long history and respectable status not many people are inclined to designate a passion for literature as an addiction, and movies have emancipated themselves in a relatively short time from a fairground attraction to an art form comparable to literature. We value novels and movies, although we know that many trivial novels and cheap movies do not fulfil the ontological promise of great art. I would not be surprised if computer games follow the same path, so that in the future, in the midst of an ocean of game pulp, we will encounter wonderful games that will disclose new worlds and new modes of self-realization for its players.

Finally, if there is a danger connected to computer games, it will not so much lie in the depiction of violence or other undesired behavior or in the addictive qualities of these games, as in the impact they might have on human world openness. In the previous section I referred to Heidegger's definition of human existence as thrown project. Having possibilities require the more fundamental possibility to disclose a world. By "world" Heidegger means the all-governing expanse of an *open* relational context (Heidegger, 1975, p. 42). That means that even within a strict finite world, an infinite number of relations can be disclosed. As human beings we not only exist in time, but also in space. This means that we are not simply in space (as the stone is in space), but that we continuously discover and found space: geographical space, but also room to move and to imagine (Heidegger, 1996, gbf.).

However, in many—perhaps most—computer games today, especially those that are sheer exploratory instead of constructive, the freedom to move is rather restricted, as the field of possibilities itself is preprogrammed and finite. When we identify our selves with the help of these impoverished expressions, we impoverish ourselves. Although written more than ten years ago—a long time, given the short history of computer games—the following warning of Provenzo is still topical:

Bettelheim has pointed to the fact that children, as well as adults, need "plenty of what in German is called *Spielraum*. Now *Spielraum* is not primarily 'a room to play in.' While the word also means that, its primary meaning is 'free scope, plenty of room' to move not only one's elbows but also one's mind, to experiment with things and ideas at one's leisure, or, to put it colloquially, to toy with ideas." Video games such as Nintendo, with their preprogrammed characters and their media-saturated images, present almost no opportunity to experiment or toy with ideas... Compared to the worlds of imagination provided by play with dolls and blocks, games such as reviewed in this chapter [meant are a series of Nintendo games] ultimately represent impoverished cultural and sensory environments for the child. (Provenzo, 1991, pp. 93, 95)

In *The Republic*, Plato banned narrative because in his view the artists have a bad influence on their audiences. If he had lived now, he might have made the same conclusion for computer games. In both cases the argument overlooks that we derive our very identity from these expressions. Our humanity is closely linked to the gift of narration and play. Being in principle programmable by the player, computer games can help and even inspire us to disclose new worlds and dimensions of the self. Therefore it would be precarious to condemn them as such. However, it is wise to keep distinguishing the ones that enrich our world and ourselves from those that threaten to impoverish it.

## Notes

1. See Introduction on the impressive rise of the computer game since the eighties.
2. This idea is especially developed in the hermeneutical and structuralist tradition in philosophy and psychology. The German founder of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), Wilhelm Dilthey, introduced the notion of a "nexus of life" (*Zusammenhang des Lebens*) in which the intellectual, volitional, and emotional dimensions are structurally integrated. For a more detailed exposition of Dilthey's hermeneutics, see my *The Tragedy of Finitude: Wilhelm Dilthey's Hermeneutics of Life* (De Mul, 2003). For an exposition of the structuralist theory of cognitive structure and development and its relationship to the hermeneutical conception, see Van Haaften et al., *Philosophy of Development. Reconstructing the Foundations of Human Development and Education* (Van Haaften, Korthals, & Wren, 1997).

3. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition since Locke, this temporal continuity, and the implied role of memory, is central in the theory of personal identity. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke states that memory is determinate for our identity: “For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that, which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of rational being: and as far as consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person” (Locke & Nidditch, 1975, p. 335).
4. Although the emphasis in this chapter is on *personal* identity, we can also distinguish these spatial and a temporal dimensions (as well as the types of discontinuity mentioned) with regard to the identity of groups or cultures. A culture is not a loose conglomerate of elements, but shows a certain nexus. A specific subculture, such as that of fans, has a more or less coherent set of language, history, patterns of behavior, and institutions shared by members of this culture. Because this unity of traditions and habits demonstrates a historical tenacity, here, too, it can be said that there is a temporal continuity. Personal identity never can be isolated from belonging to a certain group or culture. A fan derives identity at least partly from belonging to the subculture of fans. Moreover, personal identity for an important part appears in social intercourse and communication: “We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people. We are one thing to one man and another thing to another. There are parts of the self which exist only for the self in relationship to itself. We divide up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as self apart from this type of experience” (Mead & Morris, 1934, p. 142). In the discussion of the theories of narrative and ludic identity in the following sections we will notice again that personal identity cannot be isolated from this social dimension.
5. Kevin J. Vanhoozer calls this Ricoeur’s “narrative correction of the description of Dasein’s temporality” (Vanhoozer, 1991, p. 45). In this respect, Ricoeur rather takes Hegel’s metaphysics of mediation as his source of inspiration, as well as the hermeneutical transformation of this metaphysics by Wilhelm Dilthey. In his work Ricoeur repeatedly refers to Dilthey’s aforementioned notion of the “nexus of life” (*Zusammenhang des Lebens*) and the idea, connected with this notion, that the understanding (*Verstehen*) of the nexus of our lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) is only possible via the detour of the expressions (*Ausdrücke*) of these lived experiences (see De Mul, 2004, pp. 225–263).
6. That we are confronted here with a fundamental difference becomes clear when we think about the fact that it is impossible to translate narratives in games, whereas it is possible to translate the story of a book into a movie or a play (Brooks, 1984, pp. 3–4). Games will only be recognized as being based on a book or movie if additional narrative context is provided. The fighting scenes in *Enter the Matrix* are only recognizable as a translation of a part of the story of *The Matrix Reloaded* because of the narrative setting and charter derived from the movie, not because of the game action as such.
7. It should be added, however, that the narrative element reduces the games repeatability. Unlike puzzle games such as *Tetris*, if you know the end of the story of the adventure game, then repeatedly playing the game again loses its appeal (Juul, 1998).
8. “Technology does not determine society: it embodies it. But neither does society determine technological innovation: it uses it” (Castells, 1996, p. 5; cf. Hughes, 1994).

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