ACTION! PLAYABLE MEDIA AND PERSISTENT GAMES FOR THE CREATION OF ON-LINE ALTERNATIVE REALITIES AND CROSS NARRATIVES (Cooperation *versus* Competition)[1]

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the possibilities of "written" cooperation in playable, persistent and cross media environments generated from the web. It analyses the form in which dynamic systems are designed and *human-machine* interaction may be taken into consideration, balancing mechanisms that encourage both altruism and competition among opponents in digital spaces. Mixed strategies that associate individual trends of *zero-sum games*, or competition, *versus* cooperative *prisoner's dilemma* type games. It is deemed important to stimulate active participation in the discussion and conception of narratives dependent upon different distribution processes (web, mobile phones, print, etc.) and to present projects that help to contextualize contemporary digital tribes.

This article suggests some trends that the art and design of interactive systems may consider in order to generate greater collaboration and cooperation among the different agents who work with digital products. Accordingly, some works of playable media are analyzed which involve various participants in emerging *happenings* and in narratives that are open to participation and to altruistic behaviour. It is considered that these works insert the players in a symbiotic relationship with the machine, thereby constructing part of the fiction and interactive work. We can summarize the system of mixed relationships and crossed realities that the simulation culture imposes in four words: configuration, game, narration and action! Understanding and researching the form in which shared and collaborative authorship may be generated online is fundamental for the implementation of dynamic environments in which different people participate and interact[2]. In this context, it is necessary to stimulate active participation in the discussion and conception of digital *cross media*[3] narratives that may depend on different distribution processes (web, mobile phones, print, TV, DVD, software, virus, advertising panels, T-shirts, among other possible modes of support).

The activism inherent to *human-machine* design consists of the creation of simple books of rules that generate greater complexity as inputs are received from numerous individuals. These strategies prompt us to consider some playable and subversive practices: the hacker as a digital culture model may be considered as a creative element in the creation of gaming sites where playable practice allows access to "crooked" characters. In this context, it is considered that "where once art was at the center of moral existence, it now seems possible that play, given all its variable meanings, given the imaginary, will have that central role" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 144). Games and playable spaces for the enjoyment of multiple participants, due to the inherent ambiguity and richness in the production of possible senses, may represent environments conducive to group "writing".

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[2] Also see the author's text regarding this subject matter: "*Paraísos artificiais: autoria partilhada na criação contemporânea e na era dos jogos em rede*" (Artificial paradises: shared authorship in contemporary creation and in the era of online games), II Ibérico, Communication Sciences Acts of Congress. In http://www.labcom.ubi.pt/livroslabcom/pdfs/ACTAS%20VOL%201.pdf, pp. 567-576, Covilhã, (accessed in December 2008), 2004.

[3] *Cross Media* narratives are stories constructed to be "read" from different platforms. They jump from medium to medium and merely continue the routes generated from dispersed blocks of text so that the points of connection from these fragmented stories may be understood and followed.

In giving evident emphasis to entertainment, the perpetual upgrade and technological mediation, digital culture impels us towards the constant need to acquire new products and gadgets that must be configured by the experience's agent, e.g., the participant/player/reader. This aspect leads us to consider the concept of interactivity while configuration; these "products" no longer have a cinematic character, typical of more immersive practices that imply a distance between the spectator and the work, in order to begin involving a participant actively in its production, who not only configures his or her systems[4] in a customized manner but also produces his or her own narratives and fiction. Accordingly, a digital art approach to design is suggested where design mediates art and technology (Flusser, 1999; Bolter & Gromala, 2003). The dilution of boundaries between different disciplines and an evident criticism of modernist categories allows for the removal of some very prevalent twentieth-century dichotomies, now overcome, such as popular art *versus* elite art, art *versus* entertainment, art *versus* design, art *versus* handicrafts, etc., in a shift from the concept of art to the concept of gaming. Therefore, the following question is posed: what elements materialise in narratives emerging from such elite cultures and what elements are truly original in the culture of current tribes?

The frequent disparagement of ornamentation and spectacle as forms of excellence in popular culture and the valuation in intellectual terms of "high genres" promotes a recurrent notion, which assumes that only objects of a certain wise and profound culture are worthy of academic analysis. In this context, an analytical "reading" of products and the surfaces present in digital culture is proposed, assuming that these elements may be at least as interesting as those emerging from so-called "high" or "noble" arts. Michel Maffesoli believes that online creativity is conducive to digression and does not value the projects and ideas with final character but rather favours the process of work and the dissemination of concepts, generated in a changing form and with great plasticity. It may be considered that the sense of searching beneath the surface of things is favoured

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[4] For example, see the work of the German artist, Olaf Val, and his *Mignon Game Kit*. This configurable console allows each player to create the design, program and build his or her own device. Some online workshops and instructions help players to conceive their own games. This do-it-yourself console style allows experiences to be created with microelectronics but also may be used as a platform to build computer games, unlike traditional systems such as Nintendo's Gameboy. The player develops a personal relationship with the device through a self-production process that determines the individual programming of games. For more information, see the website: http://www.olafval.de/mignon/english/ (accessed in December 2008).

online (Maffesoli, 2008). Recognition and acceptance of work depends, as Sónia Rodrigues tells us, upon the repertoire, on the horizon of expectations and upon whoever is reading. The receipt of the trivial narrative may be extremely creative and the receipt of cultured literature may be repetitive, confirmative and passive. Saying that the production of popular merchandise is trivial conceals the fact that sometimes trivial represents the acceptance of these works by those not well prepared to receive them (Rodrigues, 2004:150). Popular culture always was "capable of producing 'types' so well refined that they spanned centuries" and it becomes even more difficult for this rationale to define cultured literature. Now: "if both are capable of creating more than types, symbols, what really distinguishes them?" (Rodrigues, 2004: 146). Sónia Rodrigues tells us:

> "Mass culture assumes the existence of the market economy, which allows access to various social sectors and a plurality of material goods and imaginary consumption. It also assumes overcoming the dichotomy or polarization between high culture and popular culture and is characterized by the inclusion of its messages to daily society in an inconsistent manner, separately from the will of the people" (Adorno cited by Rodrigues, 2005:143).

The digital artist is forced to master the ever larger group of narratives (economy, marketing, technology and culture[5]) and the theorization relating to *human-machine* interaction yielded the term *playability*, a central theme to digital experience and aesthetics. Cyberculture allows life to be rendered into a work of art, art lived through daily existence (Maffesoli, 2008:135). Online cooperative interactions that constitute an immediate, fluid, decentralized and playable "day-to-day art", takes us to the return of aesthetic dynamism that seems to prevail in our lives, all of which is a basis for mutual experience (Maffesoli, 2008:96). In digital ecologies, there is a recurrent relationship between competition, in the sense of group discovery, and cooperation, completion of tasks and objectives through cooperative interactions.

The manner in which *media studies* are articulated as so-called *new media studies*, may be summarized by reviewing some fundamental points in the distinction between the two (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006). Therefore, in the case of *media studies*, the social effects of technology are considered to be socially determined. The audiences are

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[5] Regarding the dynamics between marketing, technology and culture in digital contemporary rhetoric, see, for example, the book *Digital Play, The Interaction of Technology, Culture and Marketing*, by Kline, Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter.

passive, and a greater emphasis is placed upon interpretation and representation, in a process that centralizes spectators and treats them as consumers and workers. In the specific case of *new media studies*, the nature of society is considered to be technologically determined. The consumer gives rise to the interactive systems participant where configurative experience and simulation are imposed in a culture in which media are ubiquitous, participants are co-creators of works and there is an evident and recurrent permanent system of games.

Without delving into distinctions that separate *media studies* and *new media studies* into different groups, a more diluted inclusion is chosen between the two and, accordingly, the World Wide Web, virtual reality and graphical computation are not divorced from previous media but rather pay them homage, compete with them and imitate the media which preceded them. In this context, there is incorporation and "remediation", where photography reinvented painting, film reproduced theatrical, literary and photographical aspects, television incorporated film, vaudeville and radio. Simulation arises as the new visual arts paradigm: change of the visual order which was produced between the figurative regime of *representation* and that of *simulation* and which profoundly affected the visual arts (Couchot, 2003). Simulation as procedural representation ("happening") is a "game of life", where unforeseeable effects and emerging narratives may be initiated simultaneously by numerous individuals in different geographical locations.

Furthermore, it is deemed necessary to stimulate the capacity of systems to generate shared knowledge by multiple agents, applying the concept of emergence as well as variation and surprise. Artists or designers of interactive fiction systems only build a set of rules, which are later amplified, developed and recreated by participants. Interaction is processed not only with the board or playing field but also with other people. A definition of emergence must consider that the key features of an emerging system have two fundamental components: an opening to the environment and the ability to measure or make changes within it. Accordingly, it is of fundamental importance to generate the capacity to process adaptive changes and consider the emerging autonomy of the machine. Therefore, conceiving dynamic platforms and interfaces that allow for the appearance of unplanned standards requires thinking about emergence as cooperation

versus competition and dividing the relationship between both trends in a balanced manner.

In *Field of Play*[6] (2007) *Australian artist*, Troy Innocent, created an online board game easily recognizable as the classic children's game of "rock, paper and scissors". Participants from various locations around the world may play together and see their actions reflected online at a Melbourne gallery. According to Troy Innocent: "the game became an integral part of contemporary experience" and *Field of Play* is an urban art environment where three iconographic languages (orange, blue and green symbols), inspired through electronic networks, digital games and tribal cultures, appear integrated so as to generate an interaction in two different public spaces - virtual space on the web and the real space of the gallery.

If *Field of Play* created a system that assembles participants from different locations around the world, in the 2005 *Ludea* project, the artist creates a system that assembles participants in a single location. Inspired by the classic board game Ludo, *Ludea* is a version of the same game, geared towards the twenty-first century. On the streets of Melbourne, three warrior cultures fight to conquer territory. According to Troy Innocent, "Ludea is a micro-nation where language and culture are generated via play. On the streets of Melbourne three warring cultures struggle for territory: Neo-Materialists use traditional forms of communication such as words; Post-Symbolics communicate only through images; Post-Humans are reliant on machines for communication. Each tribe gathers resources and tags in colour - Neo-Materialist orange, Post-Symbolic green and Post-Human blue. Victory goes to the clan that achieves the widest domain[7]." The idea of this project is based upon the construction of a space, *Ludea*, which explores three different ideologies that by themselves define territories and different lines of communication and are immersed in their own digital playable culture. Innocent states:

> "The Ludeans come from a generation that has grown up with games, abstract machines and digital processes as second nature. It has become second nature for them to make abstractions of reality in terms of systems, processes, flows, and models. Ludea explores the post-human condition and unstable nature of contemporary reality through the construction of three different experiences of place. These experiences occur through

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[6] For more information about this project, go to: http://www.fieldofplay.net/ (accessed in December 2008).
[7] Interview of Troy Innocent available at
http://www.boutwelldrapergallery.com.au/imagesart/bdg_Innocent_LUDEA_Text.pdf
(accessed in December 2008).

signs and symbols that are mapped onto the real world locations. The aim is to create meaningful connections and experiences between three different public spaces – virtual, networked and physical. It also draws on theories of 'possible worlds' generated by the combination of artificial intelligence (AI), digital games, and idea of 'world building' through invented language and culture. On a more metaphorical level, the new work creates interactive spaces and systems that manifest experiences of a world characterised by uncertainty, multiplicity, complexity and connectivity - thus it makes us aware of the changing nature of reality."[8].

In *LifeSigns* (2004), Troy Innocent built a multi-player game laid out on 4 individual LCD displays and a global projector on the gallery floor where all elements converged. His research leads us to question the manner in which virtual worlds may be vehicles for new forms of communication and expression. The codification of processes related to Artificial Life, in this case exploratory software of digital creatures with their own lives, mixed with semiotic, computational aspects, had already been addressed by the author extensively in *Icónica*[9] (2002). *LifeSigns* presents a study of systems and codes of meaning in digital media and in interactive games with an emphasis on playable aspects and the manipulation of process and space. The result of this recombination strategy is a hybrid that expresses a form, structure, information related to colour, sound, movement, surface and behaviour. In *LifeSigns*: a world is played out and an emerging language is explored, the idea that new meanings may be generated through interaction between humans and digital agents.[10]

The inclusion of participants interacting in different global locations not only in the physical environment but also in digital space is present in the majority of works by the German artist, Andrea Zapp[11]. In *The Imaginary Hotel*[12], (2002), the author builds an exhibit in a gallery which simulates a hotel room. In this room, online visitors may change and configure two different walls through a back office, choosing the paint or wallpaper, changing the portraits in the frames, or even calling visitors to interact with them. The exhibition space may be viewed on the project website, allowing remote access of the environment generated by the entrance of visitors who actually visit the

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[8] Ibidem.
[9] For more information about the *Icónica* project, go to: http://iconica.org/transforms/index.htm (accessed in December 2008).
[10] For more information about the *LifeSigns* project, go to: http://iconica.org/lifesigns/index.htm (accessed in December 2008).
[11] Andrea Zapp's website is available at the following address: http://www.azapp.de/ (accessed in December 2008).
[12] For more information about *The Imaginary Hotel* project, go to: http://www.azapp.de/tih_01.html (accessed in December 2008).

gallery. Andrea Zapp has a background in Film and Television and her work is characterized by a need to conceal technology as much as possible in order to provide greater emphasis of narrative and dramatic scenic aspects.

In *Unheimlich*[13], from 2005, Andrea Zapp collaborated in the creation of a telematic performance, with the notion of the "uncanny" as a point of departure. In a collaborative space, we come across the following narrative: "It's 1 a.m. in Manchester, England, but two enigmatic sisters have stayed up late to see you, and to (telematically) greet you with a kiss as you step into their space, in real time, thousands of miles away."[14]. In real time, a new character may enter the space where the two virtual sisters are located, so many kilometres away. Somehow, the two will be there waiting to involve the new person in their eccentric games, rituals, secrets and conversations. All of this takes place in an environment of fantastic landscapes inspired by images from digital games or in traditional living rooms, at the discretion and whims of the two creatures.

In *Human Avatars*[15], also from 2005, Andrea Zapp imagined a media art facility in which a dialogue was created between the real and the virtual. In this context, visitors of the exhibition discover a small wooden house in which they are invited to enter. A live image of the participant's body is projected onto a remote version of the model in the same house, but this house has furniture, where other visitors can see the films generated on a small scale and through a window. This facility's architecture and setting are somewhat childish, but the immediate interactive experience is controversial since it includes a voyeuristic strategy behind the idyllic aspect, in a dollhouse atmosphere where there is a mapping and surveillance system that controls the participant's movements and actions in the experience.

The use of the web to generate critical and reflexive interpretations over the nature of contemporary experience is evident in projects such as the game *Agoraexchange / make the game, change the world*[16], assigned to Jacqueline Stevens and Natalie Bookchin by

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[13] For further information about the *Unheimlich* project, go to the following address:
http://creativetechnology.salford.ac.uk/unheimlich/ (accessed in December 2008).
[14] Ibidem.
[15] For further information about the *Human Avatars* project, go to:
http://www.azapp.de/ha_01.html (accessed in December 2008).
[16] The URL for *Agoraxchange / make the game, change the world* is
http://agoraxchange.org/index.php?page=218 (accessed in December 2008).

the Tate Modern in London. *Agoraxchange* is an online community dedicated to the design of a *massive multi-player* game that addresses matters related to global politics, with the intent to challenge violence and inequality underlying current political systems. The game was introduced at Tate Online on 15 March 2004, and has since received contributions from various individuals in the construction of its rules and ideas. According to the game's online statement: "We put forward agoraXchange to elicit collaboration for challenging a world in which myths about birthright result in violence and suffering within and among nations and families. We urge eliminating the laws responsible for nation and marriage because we believe that these institutions misshape our material and psychic lives and constrain the imagination in ways that stunt us all[17]".

Online systems for multiple players may help to stimulate collaboration and competition in a form of dialogue that takes into consideration some basic premises, namely the need to establish a prolific debate that generates action-based behaviours and incorporating contributions of a systemic nature where more complexity is obtained from simple rules. Emerging complex behaviour arises as a result of relatively simple interactions. Two possible examples from *game studies* are the case of Chess, common in Western societies, and its equivalent in Eastern societies, Go. There are fewer rules in Go, compared to Chess, and some professional players of the former say that it has assumed greater complexity as rules continue creating plays according to possible strategies. Furthermore, as we indicated before through the concept of emergence, it may be considered that simple rules generate greater complexity.

Complex emerging behaviour arises as a result of interactions between relatively simple subsystems and is based upon a set of direct and indirect models and synergies. The new paradigm is to model the world that organizes itself through a process of synergy, a frequent phenomenon in nature and human societies. In direct interactions, the individual contributes in real time and in a group setting with other individuals to develop the system, and these interactions may be considered as a mechanism of biological, sociological, psychological and physical self-organization. In indirect interactions, there is cooperative interaction in which an individual contributes to the modification of an environment, opening up the possibility of another individual

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[17] Go online for a possible reading of the entire statement:
http://agoraxchange.org/index.php?page=233#233 (accessed in December 2008).

subsequently responding to that environment with a new input (Ramos, 2002). The existence of altruistic behaviour arises alongside another type of behaviour, competitive behaviour, which is also characteristic of human societies and biology. Artificial ecologies present two different problems, or rather, the cooperation and competition of virtual creatures, which, like humans, adopt different interaction strategies.

If the cooperative organization leads us to analysis of altruistic behaviour, or rather, behaviour that benefits the "other" organism or individual, an important phenomenon both in nature and human societies, then competition was also identified as an important factor in biological structuring. Cooperative behaviour normally depends on some degree of altruism and may be of fundamental importance for understanding online interactions (Lindgren & Nordahl, 2000: 15) but competition likewise generates new configurations and strategies due to the dispute between two opponents. The root of the word "compete" goes back to the Latin *con petire*, which means, "to seek together" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004: 256). Therefore, it may be considered that competition is fundamental to encouraging and generating new configurations and stimulating opponents to produce better results in a constant striving that generates unexpected effects in game system design.

The Israeli artist Uri Tzaig, cited by Janet Abrams in the text "Other Victories"[18], takes us to a football game where two balls are introduced to change the focus of vision that is normally centred on just one. In the context, the artist constructs a new game in which the structure is subverted by the inclusion of two elements, redefining the rules of traditional games such as football and basketball in which any behaviour of attendance becomes decentralized. This change in the conventions of the game, two balls, two centres of attention, prompts us to lose the ball's centralizing power. It is the rigid structure that persists in our sporting matches that Uri Tzaig seeks to study and deconstruct.

There are two types of behaviour identified in the global economy "game" (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1997), those practiced in western *versus* eastern society. These behaviours may be explained by the difference between so-called finite games,

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[18] Abrams, Janet, "Other Victories", *If/Then Play*, Netherlands Design Institute, pp 232- 247.

zero-sum games where the object of the game is to determine who wins or who loses, and infinite games or collaborative games, i.e., the prisoner's dilemma type, where the importance lies in the evolution of the game itself. If in the first case of zero-sum games, we face a Darwinist metaphor of progress in which the unit of survival is the individual and the board game is a neutral space, in the second case, the winning player and losing player are the same, and we face behaviour that favours the individual in the game played. It may then be considered that the objective in finite games is to survive, such that the winners exclude the losers and normally win everything. These board games are relatively simple and the rules are defined in advance. On the other hand, in infinite games the objective of the playing process arises from the development of the game itself and the winners show losers other ways to play. In this case, there is a shared victory and relative complexity in which the rules may be changed.

An objective of this text's author has been to reconcile the two playable tendencies, cooperation *versus* competition, in a balanced manner that allows for the application of interesting strategies from the perspective of aesthetic fruition. In this sense, three different art and design projects were created: a playable media exhibit called *The Prisoner's Dilemma Game*[19] (2008) which was part of the 2008 Interparla Festival[20] in Spain (figures 1 and 2); an email game, *JOV, Joga Outra Vez*, or "Play It Again" (2005), which relied on the participation of around 20 individuals (18 active and two passive participants) and stimulated discussion surrounding various issues related to technology and virtual spaces (figures 3 and 4); and a blog for dissemination and collaborative writing called *Mouseland* (2006-08). This space for dissemination and critical debate is touted as a site for discussion relating to aspects associated with digital culture in its playable, cinematographic and musical dimensions. *Mouseland* is a persistent world, which relies upon a full-time collaborator (Rafael Gouveia) located in Paris, France, and upon various contributions from visitors who submit content and actively respond to games, puzzles and texts, which have been available there for two and a half years (figures 5 and 6).

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[19] This project was conceived and produced in partnership with Ivan Valadares of the firm Ydreams Portugal. For more information about this software engineer consult, for instance, http://www.ydreams.com/ydreams_2005/index.php?page=44&view=team:Details&zepp_obj_id=242 or the company website at http://www.ydreams.com (accessed in December 2008).

[20] For further information about this festival, go to: http://www.lamundial.com.es/interparla/ (accessed in December 2008).
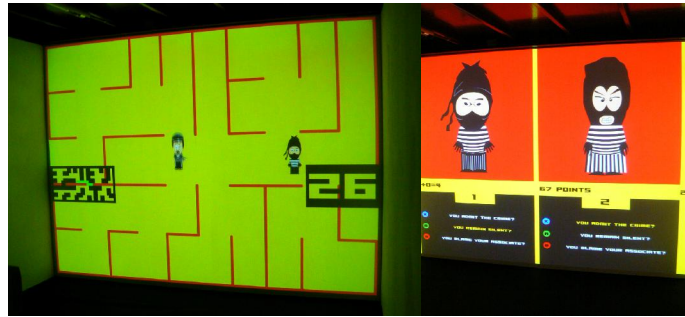
Figure 1 – "***Game or prisoner's dilemma***" exhibit screen
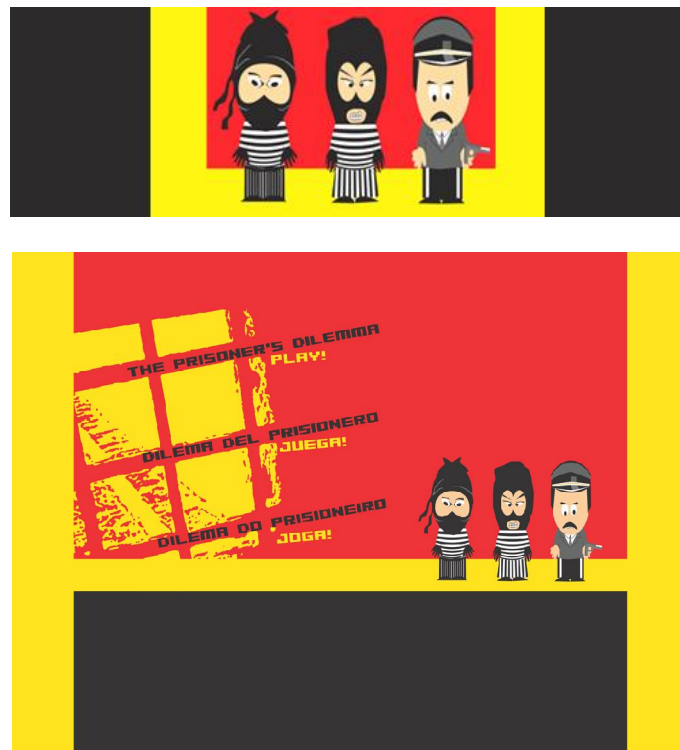*Interparla Festival*, February 2008 (Patrícia Gouveia and Ivan Valadares).

Figure 2 – Graphical interface images from the "***Game or prisoner's dilemma***" exhibit
Interparla Festival, February 2008 (Patrícia Gouveia and Ivan Valadares).

The first project, *The Game or Prisoner's Dilemma*, shown in figures 1 and 2, was conceived in partnership with Ivan Valadares and sends us to a playable digital application through images projected on a wall and arranged from a computer. Interaction is possible through the control of two joysticks and two players must cooperate in order to finish the three available levels. These levels consist of three different platforms/maps: fleeing from the police (labyrinth), responding to a questionnaire and eliminating the agent in combat through collaboration. This application was inspired in the classic prisoner's game introduced by the theory of

games and emphasizes aspects related to logic and mathematics, facilitating an understanding that cooperation is fundamental for progressing in a board game.

The Game or Prisoner's Dilemma emerges as a non-zero-sum game in which the total points distributed between the players depends upon actions chosen in the game. The result or objective of the actions is the maximization of points, which is not so much a matter of defeating the opponent. This game has the following structure: we start with two prisoners who were incarcerated and suspected of committing a crime together. Unless one of them confesses, there is no way to convict them. The party responsible for their imprisonment offers a price to whoever confesses the crime. If one of the prisoners confesses the crime, the other will receive a lengthy sentence. If both confess the crime they will be imprisoned for a shorter period of time. Finally, if both remain silent, they will be freed due to a lack of evidence. The game is fast and requires a certain degree of diplomatic skill. The digital application is created in three languages: Portuguese, Spanish and English.

"Joga Outra Vez" (figures 3 and 4) was a game created in the context of a doctoral thesis with the same name and was created for e-mail. The concept introduces us to the games of the *Tour de Jeu*[21] explained in the article, "Des jeux d'adultes? Corporéités et sociabilités dans les cyberespaces ludiques", by Manuel Boutet[22]. These e-mail games are heirs to postal mail games in which there is an immense amount of discrete time, allowing for a game of chess, naval battle or other game to be played remotely if players are in different geographical locations. Therefore, each of them sends a game by post with a "board" where the plays of two or more participants playing that game are indicated. Currently, this possibility is broadened, in terms of speed, by the use of the web and e-mail such that the number of games proposed is limitless: strategy, role-playing games, simulation, etc., with historic, comedy, realistic or other subjects. The trick that makes these interactions possible is that the players do not play in real time, at the same time, but rather one at a time, *tour par tour*. The qualities required from players are explicit: patience and attendance. The main advantages presented: freedom

[21] http://www.tourdejeu.net/ (accessed in November 2006).
[22] Boutet, Manuel (2004), "Des jeux d'adultes? Corporéités et sociabilités dans les cyberespaces ludiques" edited in *La Pratique du Jeu Vidéo: Realité ou Virtualité?* (organized by) Mélanie Roustan, Dossiers Sciences Humaines et Sociales. L'Harmattan, Paris, pp. 99-111.

(played when there is time, but upon selecting the type of game to be played, a time estimate must be made in order to get involved) and environment (a game sometimes lasts for months). The "one-at-a-time" aspect of connected players, contrary to the majority of online games, allows more time for reflection and creative expression in which the player must demonstrate compliance, perseverance, patience and common sense.

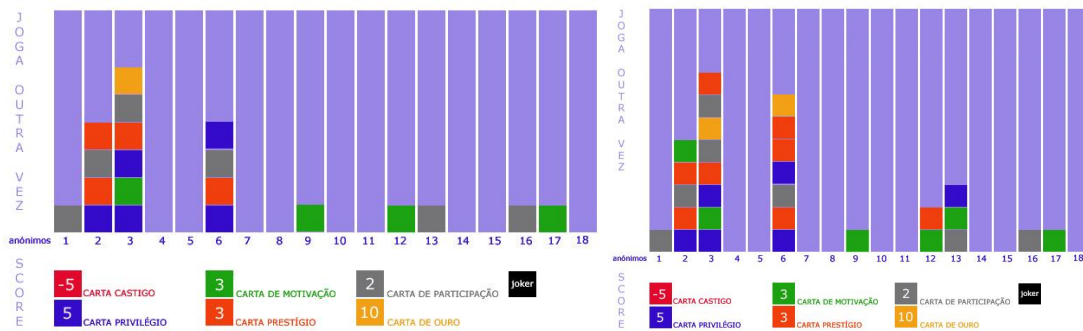Figure 3 – Letter of reflection regarding the suffragist movement / "Joga outra vez" (2005).

Figure 4 – Graphs of points and progression by eighteen anonymous players / "Joga outra vez" (2005).

"Joga Outra Vez" (nomadism and distance[23]) was created with the objective of building different textual bodies/characters: the body of the manager/emigrant/exile (game master) and different anonymous bodies. The anonymous players are in *monologue* with one another but in *dialogue* with the body of the manager/emigrant/exile. The anonymous players are correspondents chosen from a very selective database of persons

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[23] The game's structure of rules was conceived taking into consideration that the author of this environment lived between Lisbon and São Paulo; therefore, the following terms were used: nomadism and distance, emigrant and exile. The game functioned with a connecting link between the author and her community of friends and interests. For further information about this experience, see Phd thesis: Gouveia, Patrícia. *Joga Outra Vez, um conjunto de objectos que contam histórias inteligentes "*(Play It Again, a group of objects which tell intelligent stories")*,* School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, unedited Doctoral Thesis financed by FCT, Lisbon, 2008.

who may share interests, as well as broad and specific discussions. Initially, there is a very narrow connection between the manager and the anonymous players but as the database advances, it is extended to include new connections. Turbulence, chaos (which by definition implies a structural order) and freedom of expression are stimulated, but the system manager exercises censorship rights in the context of concealing the identity of anonymous players and in order to maintain the database's confidentiality. "Joga Outra Vez" (JOV) has ten specific rules and represents the launching of five letters (texts) which are later discussed via e-mail. These general letters allow the manager to assign seven scoring cards (punishment, privilege, motivation, prestige, participation or gold) and accordingly to make the system to evolve. The board game manager generates the individual reflections of participants and assigns points to different contributions whereby participants who generate more reflection and commentary from others receive more points.

The *Mouseland* blog, represented in figures 5 and 6, was created in May 2006 and is installed on the videogames community server at the University of Aveiro in Portugal. This site was constructed for the purpose of stimulating and publishing academic studies about electronic games and is frequently updated. In the blogosphere, "mouseland" has been a site that has lauded and has garnered participation in which not only videogames are discussed, but also subjects relating to digital culture, cyberculture, cyberfeminism, film, exhibitions and other categories. Apart from being a space for the dissemination of digital culture, *Mouseland* organized some collaborative written versions of games where the object was to construct some interactive arguments, or rather, the joint creation of stories and narratives. The result may be examined on the blog under the "scripts" area and includes various banter from soap operas and tv series references.
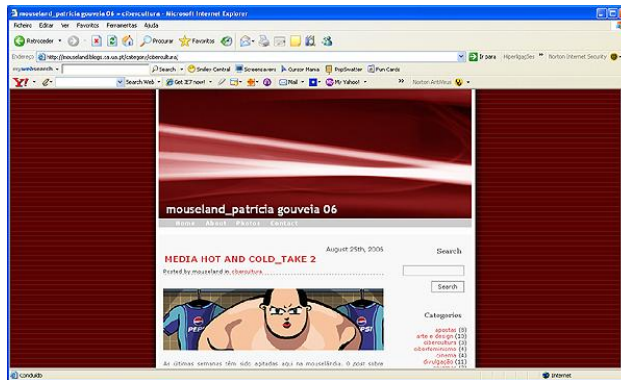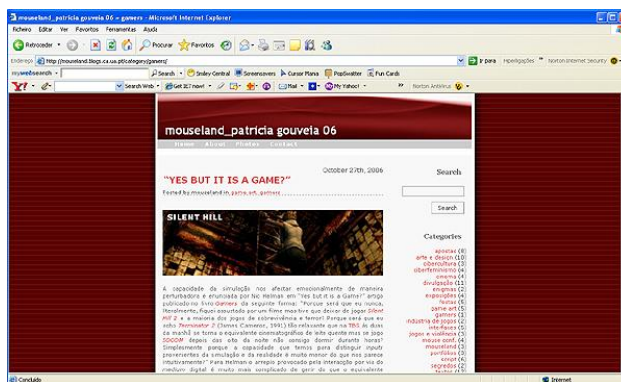
Figure 5 – "Mouseland" (2006)_cyberculture area;

Figure 6 – "Mouseland" (2006)_game art area;

Interactive narratives, according to J. Yellowlees Douglas[24], have a nomenclature similar to that of some *avant garde* and experimental fiction. They are narratives of multiplicity and interspersed with predecessors in traditional print culture, who are present, by way of example, in the works *The Alexandria Quartet*, by Lawrence Durrell, *Rayuela*, by Julio Cortazar and *Pleasure of Text* by Roland Barthes. They are narrative fragments, perspectives in conflict, interruptions. Objects revealed dynamically. Works that mirror our movements in the system, our process for inclusion in the work's space. Unlike the spatial rigidity of printed text, changes always occur to "texts" present in digital products. None of their versions is final, since it may be constantly altered, recombined and remade. Accordingly, a constant dynamism is permitted to facilitate corrections, updates and modifications. Therefore, in losing the rigidity of text, we also lose its unity, which allows us to escape what Gérard Genette, cited by George Landow, denounced as the idolatry and fetishism of written work as an absolute, closed and

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[24] The aforementioned text is available online at: Douglas, J. Yellowlees, "What Hypertexts can do that print narratives cannot" at http://www.nwe.ufl.edu/~jdouglas/reader.pdf
(accessed in December 2008).

complete object (Landow, 2001: 79). Digital objects allow the reader to take various routes through a fixed body of "lexias" but also to construct their own narrative links. Hypertext and hyperfiction ask us to abandon the notion of a unitary text and adopt the idea of dispersed writing. The proposed fragmentation of the body of text in numerous pieces of words and images is explained by Roland Barthes in S/Z, cited by George Landow, in the following manner:

> "(...) we shall therefore star the text, separating, in the manner of a minor earthquake, the blocks of signification of which reading grasps only the smooth surface, imperceptibly soldered by the movement of sentences, the flowing discourse of narration, the "naturalness" of ordinary language. The tutor signifier will be cut up into a series of brief, contiguous fragments, which we shall call lexias, since they are units of reading" (Roland Barthes *S/Z*: 13, cited in Landow, 2001: 64).

Furthermore, this article argues that online games may recreate precisely a textually derived structure, contiguous fragments and shrapnel of phrases and words, already present in hypertext and hyperfiction. This structure appears in the genesis of hyperfiction, yet also in a new version closed to the reader from the perspective of creation and configuration and only open to this interpretation perspective. Online games may broaden this trend through the possibility of the insertion of textual excerpts and blocks arising from and created by the very reader/participant/player. This opening of the playable system, through the creation of games which serve to create other games, or the narrative lines which jump from platform to platform, expressively broaden the system of participation and collaboration of interactive fiction. This reader/participant/player may generate his or her own stories from personal narratives, characters constructed, worlds inhabited and remade, and lines of code manipulated and inserted into an existing system. Even other individuals may be invited to share these units of text, code, videos or images, allowing them to be altered, broadened and reconfigured.

The time of the tripartite narrative (the time of the story, narrator and reader) and the game's implosive sense of time (Juul, 1999, 2005) in which everything happens simultaneously, namely, where the story occurs and is lived and recounted in an implosive manner, allows for the reconciliation of narrative structures that merge the avatar or player's action together with the story told "on the fly". The designer of the system, or *puppet master*, who conceives and publishes a book of possible rules so that

the participant subsequently assembles the pieces and solves mysteries, is responsible for this non-linear structure of textual blocks. Interactive fiction lacks the narrative plot to make possible a book of rules open to manipulation and action in an emerging form of narration, which continues to be defined regardless of how the story is lived. It is considered that "creating a good player character within an interactive fiction world involves putting this character in a situation that is motivating for the interactor - but not giving the interactor an actual dramatic script or a role to play" (Monfort, 2007: 140). The immediacy of simulation and the possibility of mixing first-person narratives with stories told in the second and third person (Douglass, 2007) allow for implosive stories from alternative reality games, with greater plasticity and meaning. Favouring the process of game system *mastery* by participants and their capacity to resolve enigmas and puzzles, the design of *human-machine* interfaces includes open fiction and narration that allows the players to create their own style and personal experiences in a collaborative network where they perform as actors in the digital drama.

Cross media narratives in this context are places for fluid, collaborative writing where different forms of support serve as creative material towards the progression of the plot and the definition of digital fiction, in an alternative reality in which the means are used to produce shared and persistent entertainment spaces. Gaming platforms for various participants such as *Second Life*[25] or the *World of Warcraft*[26] but also environments for dissemination and communication such as *MySpace*, *H5*, *Last FM*, *Flickr* or *LinkedIn*[27], among others, may help to generate interesting narrative extensions in the creation of crossover spaces, enigmatic puzzles and numeric drifts. The shared interactive argument gains new plasticity and generates an aesthetic relationship that rests on the shared experiences in which everything is an opportunity to stimulate the collective body, where representations become porous and theoretical systems weaken, accentuating ongoing creativity conducive to digression. As Maffesoli states, fiction in most cases

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[25] Site available at http://secondlife.com/ (accessed in December 2008).

[26] Site available at http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/index.xml (accessed in December 2008).

[27] On February 10, 2007, a Pen was intentionally left in the Lisbon Coliseum during a concert performed by the American band Nine Inch Nails. This Pen was later found by a fan of the band and generated a set of mysteries and puzzles, all created from a narrative structure forged and generated in real time. The marketing strategy was conceived by an agency specializing in alternative reality games and by the band's mentor, Trent Reznor, and relied upon public collaboration. Approximately 30 website and thematic blogs were built, T-shirts were printed and mobile phones were used. The strategy encouraged participation and collaboration in a fiction which involved kidnapping of fans, an appearance by the band at a warehouse, etc. (Rose, 2008).

precedes reality (Maffesoli, 2008: 87-89). Digital ecologies and creatures from games, cross media narratives, the virtual economy of *Linden Dollars*[28] and the *Simlich*[29] language have done much to deeply penetrate real ecologies (cf. Castronova, 2005[30]). Simply by paying close attention to these dynamics of popular online culture, we may understand some social and communicative factors prevalent in various contemporary tribes.

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[28] Currency used in the game *Second Life*.
[29] Artificial language developed for the game *The Sims.*
[30] Regarding intersections between the real and digital economies see Edward Castronova's book, *Synthetic Worlds, The Business and Culture of Online Games*, The Univ. Chicago Press, 2005.

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