Between particularity and the construction of the world. Mimesis in video games – levels, types, and contexts

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Abstract

The category of mimesis is not a very frequent subject of video game analysis. The literature within this field includes only a few studies devoted to it. In this article I will focus on various extents of mimesis in games as well as factors that have an impact on the mimetic relations. I will also propose several sub-terms, which can define specific types of mimesis in games: from particular mimesis through fractal to the holistic one. The selected games, both the up-to-date ones and those popular in the past, will serve as case studies.

Keywords: *games, simulationism, mimesis.*

Introduction

It seems that mimesis, a term used in narratology for hundreds of years, constitutes a particularly difficult category in game studies. Its challenging status is twofold. On the one hand, the common assumption of simulationism in games would point to the equally common presence of imitative relations. In other words, according to this presumption every game is in one sense or another mimetic. This would classify mimesis as a pan-category, the usage of which would be highly disputable due to its broad meaning and lack of precision. On the other hand, mimesis as a narratological category may not be a term suitable for the ludological analysis, which by definition rejects the narrative capabilities of games. Possibly, due to the above reasons, mimesis is not very often the subject of interest for video game researchers. There are only a few studies devoted to the relationship between mimesis and games. The most significant one has been conducted by Ginger-Sorolla (1998, see FOLKERTS, 2011).

Since video games are diverse genre and technological constructs, the problem of simulationism may turn out to be complex and present on multiple levels. In this article, I will attempt to systematise this diversity and point to the factors that exert the biggest influence upon simulationist capabilities of games. I will also use a few sub-categories, which define the specific mimetic relations in games, such as fragmentary, holistic, and fractal mimesis. I will demonstrate how those relations may become distinctive factors for certain groups and categories of games. The selected games, both recent and historical titles, will serve as case studies.

1 Mimesis and the narratology-ludology antagonism

Adopting mimesis as a useful category in the analysis of video games, I shall emphasise that in the narratological research it is often contrasted with diegesis. Therefore, the relations between those two oppositions should be scrutinised, and connected to a well-established division into ludology and narratology. It turns out that, depending on the theoretical perspective, the conclusions derived from the application of those terms into games, may be quite different.

In accordance with the classical understanding of the above concepts by Plato and Socrates (see KIRBY, 1991, HALLIWELL, 2002), the division into mimesis and diegesis refers to the storytelling modes (third person narration and direct speech) present in two opposite literary genres – epos and drama. This differentiation may be translated into two research contexts present in video game studies.

The first one refers to various perception angles of the presented fictitious world – third person perspective (TPP) and first person perspective (FPP). Analysing such modalities in games from the point of view of mimesis and diegesis may become fruitful. On the other hand, in its more general sense, diegesis seems to be a solid foundation for scrutinising games from the narratological standpoint.

However, mimesis understood as the modality of direct speech (the act of

showing as opposed to retelling) characteristic for drama, seems to be related to the ludological perspective, which focuses on the act of "happening" unbound by the narratological framework. Genette (1983) introduces the category of proportions to understand the difference between mimesis and diegesis. According to his theory, mimesis assumes maximum of information and a minimal presence of the one who informs. Diegesis activates quite the opposite mechanism. Frasca (1999), emphasising the difference between the narratological and ludological thought, points to the active role of the player and the passive role of the observer participating in the narratological session (registered gameplay). In this case, we may assume that Genette's mimesis could comply with the ludologicial perspective, and diegesis with the narratological one.

However, Genette's differentiation based on proportions points to the fact that we are dealing with a certain continuum, which represents a more lenient standpoint in the narratology-ludology debate (BOGOST 2009). It should also be emphasised that the acts of observing and playing cannot be easily divided, as gameplay requires the player to build micro narrations, which summarise their previous actions and accumulate the information necessary for further gameplay[1]. Micro narratives refer to the issue of fragmentation of gameplay, realised by means of saves and the issue of memory and memorising the up-to-date progress by the player (ATKINS 2007, NITSCHE 2007, MUKHERJEE 2011). It should be noticed that the problem of repeating gameplay sessions triggers additional mimetic contexts, which stem from the fact that the player very often performs "auto-imitation". A certain gameplay strategy is repeated as long as it guarantees success. Thus, it involves the old elements (imitation) and the new ones (modification). Also, of great importance are the motivations and strategies, which make the player replay the whole game. In this case the previous gameplay influences the current one, and as such takes into consideration the critical aspect of imitation.

Let us now focus on Genette's division of diegiesis into extradiegetic, intradiegetic

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1. I scrutinised micronarrations in Chapter IV of *Alien vs. Predator? Gry komputerowe a badania literackie* (Stasienko 2005).

and metadiegetic levels to see, whether it is possible to implement the same division into games. The extradiegetic level involves the basic narrator of the story. It is, however, difficult to transfer the literary narrator directly to video games. Such a narrator may appear in video games sporadically, usually in introductory scenes (cut-scenes), which constitute the non-interactive content.

In some titles, particularly adventure games, the players are informed about their tasks and the selected aspects of the story. In this case we may also assume the presence of the extradiegetic level. An interesting example of the extradiegetic level in video games points to *Dear Eshter* (THECHINESEROOM 2012). Here the construction axis involves the narration, accompanying the journey of the first person player-character (PC), which is triggered by the letters from a dying sailor to his beloved. The intradiegetic level, on the other hand, is oftentimes present in video games as it refers to the act of happening. And finally, the meta-diegetic level occurs in the form of narration performed by the non-player characters (NPCs), and visible in such in-game elements as notes, diaries, video records, and others. These elements, however, should be differentiated from the ones, which are located directly in the gameworld, becoming part of the same diegesis. A unique example of in-game meta-diegesis would involve the mechanism of a game within a game. Such a convention has been used for instance in *Machinarium* (AMANITA DESIGN 2009), where meta-games are located at a few stages of the main gameplay thread. *Machinarium* involves an intricate system of internal instructions on how to solve the following gameplay stages. The instructions become the award obtained after a successful completion of the mini platform game, where the player needs to navigate the moving key amongst the predatory spiders. Meta-games are also located within the gameworld itself. During the exploration of the city the main character (the robot) has to operate arcade game machines. Another meta-game occurs in the final gameplay stage and is placed inside the town mayor's "head".

In accordance with the film-based (METZOWSKI) definition, diegesis constitutes "the sum of the film's denotation: the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and consequently the characters, the

landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denoted aspect" (METZ 1990, p. 98). In this understanding, diegesis forms the film's storyworld by means of the camera lens.

In video games, where the gameplay is also mediated through a certain camera perspective, we may speak of pan-diegesis. On the other hand, the presence of such mediation allows perceiving games as narrative constructs. Following this path, we may assume that every game has a narrative in its core as it involves the mediation of the camera[2].

I would like to make the above differentiations and contexts in game studies the starting point for the typology of mimetic acts, which centre on such a mimetic functor as a level. The proposed typology is homogeneous as it takes into consideration various types of mimesis without implementing the above mimesis/diegesis distinction. It is also a logical consequence of it.

2   The level of mimesis (particular and universal mimesis)

The quality of mimetic relations in video games derives from the designers' intentions to create such relations in the first place. It is located between two poles – universal and particular – which define two distinct types of mimesis.

Building the theoretical foundation for this distinction, I would like to refer to Marie-Laure Ryan (2001), who differentiates between two text metaphors: the text as world, and the text as game. According to Ryan (2001), both categories explain the stages the worldwide prose has gone through. The text as world is the domain of realistic novels, while the text as game defines the mature prose of the XXth century.

In her description of the evolution of the novel's structure, Ryan uses the cosmological rhetoric: "Textual worlds reached their greatest expansion and maximal consistency in the novels of Balzac, Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Proust. Then

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2. Taking into account those reasons, I am proposing such a definition of narration which involves the mediating characteristics: narration is the subject-centred way of presenting the storyworld as opposed to narration being the author's way of presenting the events (STASIENKO 2005, p. 247).

they began to collapse under their own weight. In the second half of the twentieth century, a process of shrinking, fissuring, splitting, and multiplying worlds within a larger textual universe reduced big worlds to little worlds or dismantled them into heterogeneous fragments. Their scattered remnants could no longer build a coherent imaginary space and time, but they provided the perfect material for play" (p. 176).

It is interesting to see what happens, if we take Ryan's diachronic distinctions of the evolution of the novel and use those metaphors to form categories describing the general storyworld. It seems that such distinction may refer not only to the ways of building narrative constructs, but it may also determine the frameworks for the reality created in the storyworld. The first case, referring to the text as world, seems to point to such a type of imitation, which stems from the observation that in the reality created both, within the gameworld itself and within every other cultural concept, we may find intention to create the whole universe. Following this thought, we may assume that a different kind of imitation would refer to the world as a whole, and a different one would relate to a fragment challenging the holistic vision.

Global imitation leads to the creation of worlds not necessarily mirroring the real ones, but also enclosed worlds, which function in accordance with concrete rules. Thanks to this type of mimesis we are building basic and simple realities, but at the same time coherent and meticulous ones. Such mimesis, due to its properties, becomes a "universal" one. Ginger-Sorolla (1998) develops this thought further in his article. The scrutinised crimes against mimesis refer to various inconsistencies in the structure of the gameworld. Those may involve placing props that are out of context in a given gameworld, building the game's setting in accordance with genre characteristics rather than the story, or artificial puzzles not strongly related to the story and the problems present in the real world. Amongst other delinquencies against mimesis, the author also mentions the abundance of tasks focused on finding the keys, and their hiding places which are of little credibility. In certain cases the non-player characters (NPCs) are underdeveloped and simplified, and as a result do not resemble living beings. Sorolla's argument finishes with a remark about second-person narration in games. It seems to activate an anti-mimetic difficulty in identifying

with the character, when the game refers to the player as "you", and their character's personality does not match the gamer's nature.

The second type of mimesis may be related to "fragmentary" imitation, which focuses on mirroring only part of one selected aspect. Here, we are facing two possibilities.

The first one occurs when the partial mimesis is connected with an intention not to imitate the whole world. In this case, the game may represent laws of physics influencing the objects or the shape of the elements. However, such texts (or games) do not represent the relations of the represented world. In other words, they do not imitate the universe as a whole or an internal space filled with elements surrounding it. Therefore, such a type of mimesis is referred to as a particular one.

The second type of fractal mimesis, which is based on reconstructing a selected part of the world, may be called "pseudo-particular" as it does not stand in opposition to the universal imitation. It is all about filling in the gaps, while assuming the holistic picture on the basis of its incomplete parts. It is thus a specific type of universal mimesis, which may be referred to as a fractal one.

The simplest logical and arcade games may contribute to the discussion with some important observations, confirming the universal mimesis. Surely, the category of the storyworld may not be used in the analysis of titles such as *Tetris* (NINTENDO 1987), whose aim is to assemble the falling blocks. However, when we think of the simplest arcade games such as *Pong*, it becomes possible to scrutinise them, taking into consideration the storyworld. Why is it that in similar most primitive productions based on schematic and simplified graphics, in some cases it is possible to find the references to the storyworld, and in others it is not? It turns out that the answer does not lie in evolving technological possibilities (it may be easier to imitate the storyworld in current titles). Nor does it depend on the video game genre. Logical games do not seem to have the need to recreate and imitate any storyworld. And yet, there are puzzles, which evoke the storyworld, and elaborate productions, which do not intend to build one. There are a lot of casual titles for smartphones and other mobile devices with elaborate graphics and an intricate level system, but the category of the storyworld is not relevant in their

case (compare *Bubble Blast*, MAGMA MOBILE 2012, *Electric Box* TWINKLE STAR GAMES STUDIOS 2010, *Sugar Sugar*, ARMOR GAMES 2011). A similar conclusion may be drawn with reference to PC-based pool or bridge. Unless there are some human-like characters and other elements imitating real contexts, it becomes impossible to recreate reality. An interesting example of subtle changes in the game's environment, which evoke the storyworld, points to *3D Perfect Pool* (MEGAWARE MULTIMEDIA B.V. 2001). The game includes the option to turn the surroundings of the pool table on and off. Such a simple mechanism activates both, the particular and the holistic imitation, depending on the selected option. The overview of the poolroom is not a prerequisite to run gameplay, but when it is turned on, a enclosed imitation takes place. A completely different attitude is presented in *Worldchampionship Snooker* (CODEMASTERS 2001), in which the creators' aim was to simulate the venues for snooker gameplay. As one of the reviewers points out:

> A game of snooker may take place in a pub or in a studio filled with audience, exhibiting different behavioural patterns depending on the selected venue. In the studio, the observers follow our moves and spontaneously react to them. Until now I have not realised how big an influence a simple sneeze may have on the outcome of the game. Now, I know it may be a serious distracting factor! The audience in a pub is a different story altogether – everyone lives their own live. Some drink up their beers, others exchange small talk". (MURMUR 2001)

The above citation supports the assumption that we are dealing with a completely different kind of imitation when the game's universe is presented only partially as opposed to its holistic perspective.

Taking into account this binary mimetic relation, the tropes of which are searched for within video games, it may be interesting to analyse simpler games, such as a computer version of chess or flipper. In the first case, the selective imitation refers primarily to the names of the pieces. Although, they are not essential for the gameplay as such – it is not important whether the piece is referred to as knight or horse. The change in the outlook of the pieces does not alter the gameplay experience either. The *Chessmaster 11th Edition* (UBISOFT 2007), one of the most recent productions, offers a dozen of chess board layouts. However, it is enough for the animated pieces to move

on the board in accordance with the rules in order to talk about the storyworld. Flipper uses gravitation, which makes the pinball fall towards the pads. The table's layout refers to a concrete space – a film, a certain literary genre, or other characteristic spaces. However, the interchangeability of the boards does not influence the gameplay. The storyworld is not en essential part of the gameplay.

It seems that particularity is especially well aligned with casual games, which reflect selective processes and the imitation process is extremely limited. To support this observation, let us have a look at such titles, in which the gameplay focuses on killing the insects with a finger (*Kill Bug,* FREE SAYOOJ VALSAN), hammering nails (*Hammer a Nail*, GIMIGAMES) or squeezing pimples (*Pimple Popper*, ROOM CANDY GAMES). The mimetic effect is further intensified by implementing the touch screen technology.

Let us now focus on the abovementioned fractal mimesis, which occurs when we reconstruct the storyworld on the basis of its fragments. We may assume that fractality is subject to gradation. There are quite a few games (for instance RPGs) with a pre-set storyworld, in which the gamer's task is to fill in the gaps. Sometimes, at the beginning the player may only have pieces of reconstructed reality at their disposal, and their task is to reconstruct the surrounding world. In extreme cases, we are dealing with a simple concept of the storyworld, restricted to one selected process. The most popular example of such a procedure is *Myst* (BRODERBUND SOFTWARE 1994), whose main character is teleported to a solitary island. Their aim is to escape by acquiring information about various machines and inventions located on the island, and the reasons behind its inhabitants' exodus. A similar strategy has been employed in *Omikron: The Nomad Soul* (QUANTIC DREAM 1999). The PC, similarly to the *Myst*, moves to another dimension and the question of escaping it is dependant upon whether the character manages to find the murderer and the way the world functions.

There is also a group of games build upon the idea of fractality, but focused on educational aspects, for instance *Physicus* (RUSKE PUHTERMAIER 2002). It involves both, reconstructive and mimetic aspects of the storyworld. In this case, the

space of action is a planet, which does not spin around its axis due to a meteor fall. A scientist builds a canon, whose aim is to set the planet back in motion. Unfortunately, he dies so his work has to be completed by a young researcher embodied by the player. In order to complete the task, one needs to familiarise oneself with various devices and solve Physics puzzles. The main idea in the game is to recreate physical laws governing the planet.

One of the most interesting examples of fractal mimesis is the notorious game *Marriage* by Rod Humble (2006). Here, the rough and conventional framework of the represented storyworld is very much visible. The mimetic process focuses on the interaction between two geometrical objects, representing a married couple. The relation between them has been simplified by means of graphic design. The storyworld represents the reality constructed predominantly by the game's title, which is so unequivocal and clear that it represents the idea of a pseudo-particular mimesis.

The pseudo-particularity may also be realised in video games, which may be related to a well-known literary genre of nouveau roman. Here, I am evoking such titles, whose authors build the storyworld upon critical foundations, that is they create the gameworld as an ironic reality – illogical, incomplete and contradicting the rules. An accurate example of such a game is *Revenge of the Sunfish* (2007) by Jacob Buczynski. The title is based on intentional inconsistencies and irrational situations, which seem to be an experiment carried out on the communicative capabilities of the game. The character steered by the player is a human being, but after the first "death" they turn into a strange monster and do so in every new location. The locations alter unexpectedly and do not depend on the player's performance in the previous ones. Quite on the contrary, they stem from the lost sessions. The author mixes various genres, adding unsophisticated graphics and absurd dialogue lines. In one of the locations the player has to eat dirt in order to save the human race, and in another one they need to tame the keyboard by stroking the space key.

Summarising the discussed differentiation into various kinds of mimesis, it should be noticed that the universal mimesis would refer to the holistic, logical, systematic and representation-based defining aspects. In the case of partial imitation, the most

important determinants include: fragmentation, disintegration, meta-textuality, and coincidence. Comparing both types of imitation, we may conclude that although universal mimesis is responsible for the creation of storyworlds, it is particularity that influences the mechanism behind the construction of reality.

3   Levels of mimesis – worlds, materials, styles

Let us scrutinise further contexts of mimesis stemming from the analysis based on such categories as the game's level and layer. The first level may involve the imitation of reality, a mimetic aspects which seems to be *de modé* due to its links with the XIXth century realism in literature. Such a strategy is employed most often in simulation games, in which the designers' aims concentrate on the most accurate representation of the mechanisms involved, be it automobiles, or the environment they operate in. However, it should be noticed that such a simulation of reality refers to Baudrillard's simulation of the non-existent. Although such games imitate the real world mechanisms, the created reality becomes much more attractive, and accumulates extreme and unusual situations in order to supply the games with the most attractive stimuli possible. It may be assumed that the highest level of mimesis may be observed in professional flight simulators and in serious games, where the most crucial issue is simulating the real processes and operation methods of various mechanisms. When deprived of their ludic context, serious games may raise doubts (see FRASCA 2007). Irrespective of the above, it is such types of interactive products that employ high levels of imitation, even at the cost of their decreased entertainment attractiveness or its lack whatsoever.

The second level of mimesis may be referred to as the mimesis of the storyworld. Here we should enumerate all the intertextual relations between games and the worlds recreated in other media, such as film, literature, graphic novels, RPG systems, and elements drawn from other games. It is difficult to assume that such a strategy would fully comply with its source due to the differences in its nature and other aspects of adaptation procedures. Therefore, we need to consider such functors as the level of imitation, critical references to the storyworld, and the selection of the source element

(the entire world, single characters, selected story strands). The imitation process is disputable in the cases, when there are a few products based on the same idea of the storyworld, for instance: a film, a video game, and a comic strip. As a consequence, such integrated activities are analysed as cultural products representing the same storyworld. Such is the case with reference to Marsha Kinder's (1991) entertainment supersystems or Jenkins' convergence culture and transmedia storytelling (2006).

The third level of imitation is connected with emulating cultural genres and forms beyond the field of video games. It may be assumed that a considerable number of video game genres imitate other non-computer based games and entertainment technologies, such as RPG, computer-based board and logical games, flippers and pub games. In this context it is also worth mentioning the imitation processes of informational genres, the so-called news games, which have been scrutinised by Ian Bogost (2010). Other examples involve titles being ludic versions of poetry, such as I *Wish I Were the Moon* by Daniel Bermengui, *Today I Die* or *The Majesty of Colors* by Gregory Weir.

The fourth level involves the imitation of repetitive conventions of various type and range. As far as artistic styles are concerned, we may refer to film noir present in *LA Noir* (TEAM BONDI 2011), *Grim Fandango* (LUCAS ARTS 1998) or the legendary black and white *Deja Vu* (ICOM SIMULATIONS INC. 1985).

If we narrow down the definition to a graphic style, its imitation may be analysed in the context of such games as Orisinal Ferry Hallim's series referring to children books or a logical game (referring to black and white abstract graphics) *We Are All Birds* (NINJA KIWI). The imitation relations may be discussed with relation to individual style as well as patterns in interface design, locations, and armour types which are transported between various titles (GEIKOWSKI, 2012).

The fifth level may involve the medium itself. Making games similar to other cultural constructs is one of the most interesting imitation relations, which surpasses simple references to graphical or musical style.

It should be noted here that there were a few attempts to imitate painting techniques, by adopting a certain graphical convention and referring to the idea of an art piece coming to life. A good examples is the game Art is Dead (2000) created by the Small

Rockets studio. The player takes up a role of the inheritor of the paintings, including the most precious pieces of world's art. Their task it to protect the paintings against various unusual attacks. For instance, Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* are devoured by pests that need to be got rid of. The characters in *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* by Breugel have to escape the UFO raid. The protagonists in Andy Warhol's painting, on the other hand, have to shoot towards tomato soup cans. The ironic mechanism of this game refers to playing with the conventional idea that art is non-interactive. *Okami* is another ambitious game, whose graphic style refers directly to Japanese water-colours. Not only is the game visually pleasing, but also each stroke of brush has an interactive function and evokes diverse responses. Another clear motive of imitating a piece of art is also visible in *REZ* (UNITED GAME ARTIST, 2002) and *Child of Eden* (QENTERTAINMENT, 2011).

May Payne (3D Realms 2001), on the other hand, imitates the style of the comic strip – the main character's responses comply with a dark crime fiction and the cut-scenes refer to graphic novels. Another game incorporating comic strip elements is *Freedom Force* (IRRATIONAL GAMES 2002). The references are visible on many levels: storyworld, character creation, fighting styles, and graphic style with dialogues placed in characteristic speech balloons. However, the most interesting comic strip reference occurs in *XIII* (UBISOFT 2003), where the graphics resembles pencil strokes. The representational layer is not confined to the character's lines in speech bubbles, but is also visible in onomatopoeic subtitles accompanied by sounds.

A very unusual idea has been also employed in *Pencil Wipped* (CHISELBRAIN SOFTWARE 2000). The first person shooter (FPP) convention is juxtaposed against pencil sketches. The title explores the idea of a game between meta-textual elements and a 3D convention – allegedly the attractiveness of the show depends on the presence of a three-dimensional environment. In this case, instead of applying the traditional colourful graphics, the creators decided to use pencil strokes imitating hand drawn pictures. The flat bodies of the defeated enemies are left on the battleground to demonstrate the one-dimensionality of the gameworld.

4 Mimesis in the game's structural elements

At this point, it is worth analysing those structural elements in games, which realise the most vivid version of mimesis. I would like to refer to two examples of such elements, which by definition are founded upon the category of imitation.

The first such mimetic process refers to training missions and tutorials, constituting the initial stages of gameplay, where the player gradually familiarises oneself with the interface and the way the gameworld functions. In the introductory part of the *Sacrifice* (SHINY ENTERTAINMENT 2000), the rules of the game are presented to the player by a special guide (personified bird). In *Baldur's Gate* (BIOWARE CORP. 1998) the answers to the player's questions are given by monks, standing in the most significant parts of the city, which is the starting point in the PC's journey. A lot of games involve tutorial missions, in which the instructions are presented in the form of speech balloons or dedicated screens. Tutorial is a specific phenomenon involving partial disillusion. In order for the player to familiarise oneself with the gameplay and gameworld rules, it is necessary to demystify the world by means of a meta-textual activity. At the same time, the tutorial includes the information about the interface, which operates on the level of the software and created reality. The mimesis of the tutorial stems from the fact that it imitates the actual gameplay, and in allows the player to make mistakes in a safe laboratory setting.

A particular type of mimesis may be realised in other informative parts of the gameplay. For instance, *New Super Mario Bros Wii* (NINTENDO 2009) includes a Super Guide option, which allows the player to finish a given level without taking active part in the gameplay. Ortega and others (2013) claim that in order for such a solution to take place, the game mechanics needs to be based on credible AI protocols, displaying advice so that it matches the player's gameplay style. Such AI scripts are referred to as human like. Thus, a mimetic relation is build with reference to artificial intelligence scripts, which in the case of typical opponents display non-human like characteristics, and when substituting the player, need to imitate a human like gameplay style.

The third aspect that ought to be discussed, includes guidelines for completing each stage of the game.[3] It may be assumed that such instructions demystify the game's mimesis as they refer the player to the meta level of gameplay rules, which should not be revealed in order not to break the make believe convention.

On the other hand, we may assume that such types of ludic elements illustrate the idea of imitating the mechanics. The abovementioned *Machinarium* involves all the imitation stages hidden in the meta-game. They may be perceived as imitations of the whole stage of gameplay, and include a set of instructions on how to pass a certain level. In order to solve all the puzzles, the player has to follow the in-game instructions. Various gameplay hints in many other titles fulfil a similar role – they set standards for imitating a given gameplay rule.

According to Carl Therrien (2011) all the elements discussed above constitute a complex set of support guidelines for the player. On the one hand, this assistance is supposed to keep the player engaged while the interface and gameplay aims are too complex and difficult. On the other hand, such a support is mimetic in nature – every form of assistance refers to the idea of imitation. The player mirrors the actions presented in the tutorials by, for instance, imitating the movements in games equipped with motion sensor.

5   The construction of the storyworld and the pragmatics of imitation

It is difficult to assume that the differentiation into particular and holistic mimesis is an objective element referring to the relations existing in a given text. Such a situation results from the pragmatic aspects of imitation, which is further emphasised in the contemporary theories. Ryszard Nycz (1993), for instance, attributes the changes in academic perception of imitation to the shift of researchers' interest from the level of ontology towards the general category of its existence. A similar problematic issue is

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3. It seems that the issue of imitation should also take into consideration instructions and gameplay solutions, which are not part of the game itself, but are prepared by the players and made available in various locations.

discussed by Edward Kasperski (1992), according to whom "the mimetic activity not only refers to the act of imitating »something« (that is a specified object) but is also the act of imitation designed »for someone«, for a specific recipient" (p. 77). When discussing video games, the above list should be supplied with one more aspect. In his research, Kasperski indicates that mimesis should focus predominantly on two aspects: "the way imitated works influence their recipients by producing certain effects" and "the types of those effects" (p. 77). It seems that those two questions deserve yet another one. It is of paramount importance to establish who is in charge of the final mimetic relationship. In other words, we assume that mimesis is a subjective action with textual communication. It is also crucial to realise that the presented imitation is oftentimes the effect of collaboration of numerous subjects.

The internal game between designers and players becomes visible when the latter take up various strategies in order to counteract the intention to apply holistic imitation. Those strategies are referred to as subversive (see STASIENKO 2005 p. 222-223, AARSETH 2007). Their detailed analysis shows that the player is equipped with a considerable amount of agency to knock down the mimetic intention of the game's creators. It may be assumed that subversive play refers to the opposition of universal mimesis by taking up the strategy related with fractal imitation. The usage of guns in 3D shooters in order to paint the walls, dance events for the characters in the *World of Warcraft*, looping the game by multiplying the characters within an enclosed space, performing illogical actions, deconstructing the games by means of character mods, killing the Sims instead of constantly upgrading their skills – all these are the strategies aimed against the storyworld, resulting from the urge to imitate a demystifying, meta-textual, and ironic process. This is how fractal mimesis overcomes the universal type of imitation.

Certainly, a much richer research of mimesis, surpassing the frameworks of this study, refers to the issues of imitating the gameplay styles and strategies of the professional gamers by those less advanced.

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The usefulness of the category of mimesis in video game studies points to the fact that it should not be a neglected subject. Mimesis as the analytical tool in ludological research may be used to scrutinise the relations between reality and the storyworld. However, it does not refer to the ever-present XIXth century concept of a mirror. Mimesis may be described by means of a metaphor, which makes it a matrix for the creation of the storyworlds. The evolution of video games points to the direction of summoning the full picture of the open and cohesive gameworld. It seems that the value of games as medium is measured by their potential to imitate ever more complex structures and processes.

A historical perspective, not scrutinised in this article, would demonstrate that imitation aspects have existed in games from their very beginning (assuming that *Shark Jaws* refers to Spielberg's film). With time video games have managed to recreate the mimesis of the result (NYCZ 1993) – the simulated worlds are supplied with ever richer and more accurate elements representing the pictured reality. It is a lot more difficult to imitate social processes and those related to the character psychology, but the attempts are ever more successful. Today, mimesis has become a determinant in designing games, and experimenting with inconsistent character behaviours, deeper psychological profiles, and more complicated relations between them. In his analysis of *Fable II* and *BioShock,* Folkerts (2011) demonstrates that games become art only once they manage to consider mimetic relations from the perspective of the act of signifying. We may assume that in the history of video games, some processes have turned out to be easy and some difficult to imitate. The process of signification constitutes the highest possible level to be reached.

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