Digital Media, Society, and Culture

Angus A. A. Mol
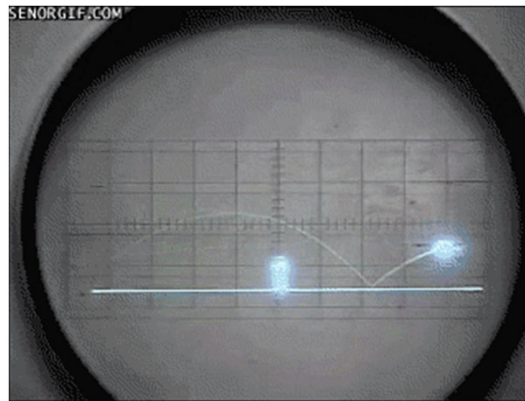
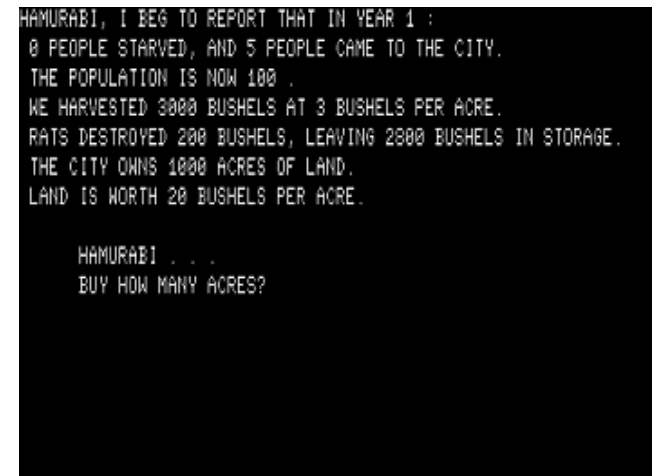# Video games are ancient...
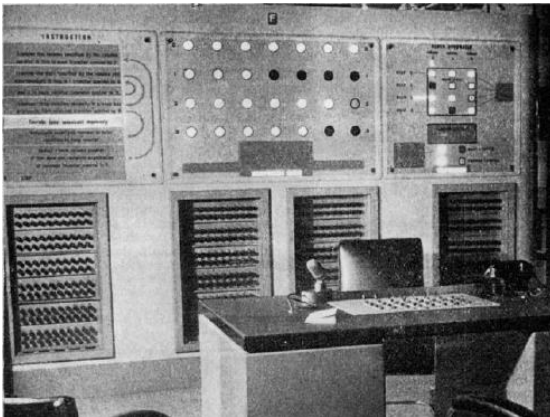
Nimrod (1951), world's first videogame-playing computer
Check it out

Tennis for Two (Brookhaven, 1958)

HAMURABI, I BEG TO REPORT THAT IN YEAR 1 :
0 PEOPLE STARVED, AND 5 PEOPLE CAME TO THE CITY.
THE POPULATION IS NOW 100 .
WE HARVESTED 3000 BUSHELS AT 3 BUSHELS PER ACRE.
RATS DESTROYED 200 BUSHELS, LEAVING 2800 BUSHELS IN STORAGE.
THE CITY OWNS 1000 ACRES OF LAND.
LAND IS WORTH 20 BUSHELS PER ACRE.

    HAMURABI . . .
    BUY HOW MANY ACRES?
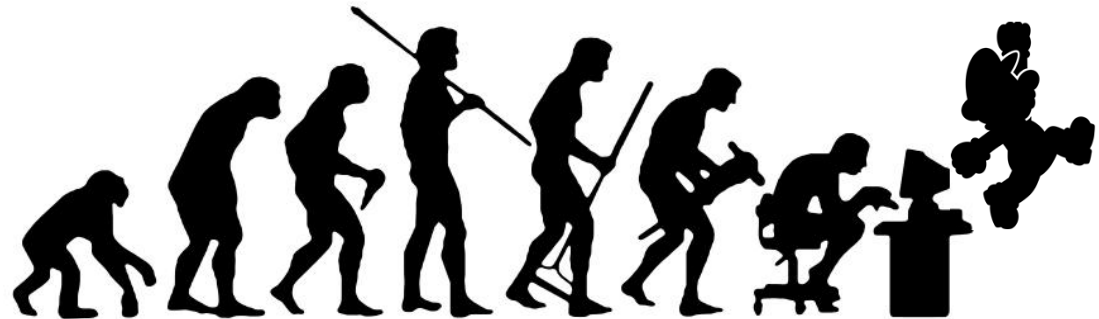
The Sumerian Game(1964)

Check it out (Hamurabi, BASIC version)
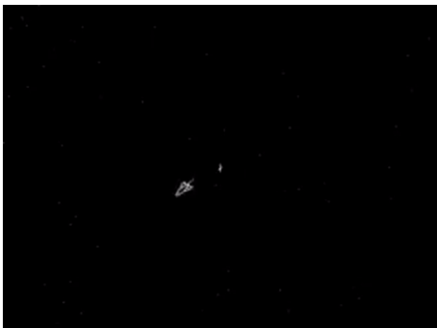
Spacewar! (MIT, 1962)

… Video Games are now!

Among Us (2018)

Animal Crossing: New Horizons (2020)

In the 20th Century, the moving image was the dominant cultural form.
While music, architecture, the written word, and many other forms of expression flourished in the last century, the **moving image came to dominate**. Personal storytelling, news reporting, epic cultural narratives, political propaganda – all were expressed most powerfully through film and video.
The rise of the moving image is **tightly bound to the rise of information**; film and video as media represent linear, non-interactive information that is accessed by a viewer.
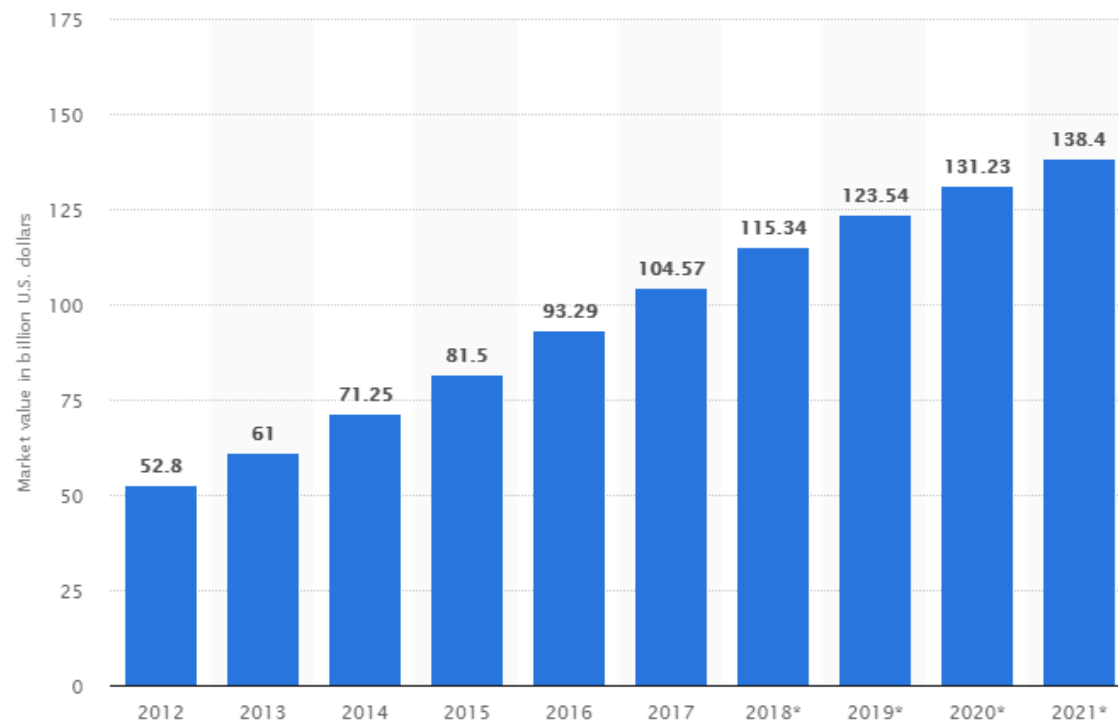
The Ludic Century is an era of games.
When information is put at play, game-like experiences replace linear media.
Media and culture in the Ludic Century is increasingly systemic, modular, customizable, and participatory. Games embody all of these characteristics in a very direct sense.
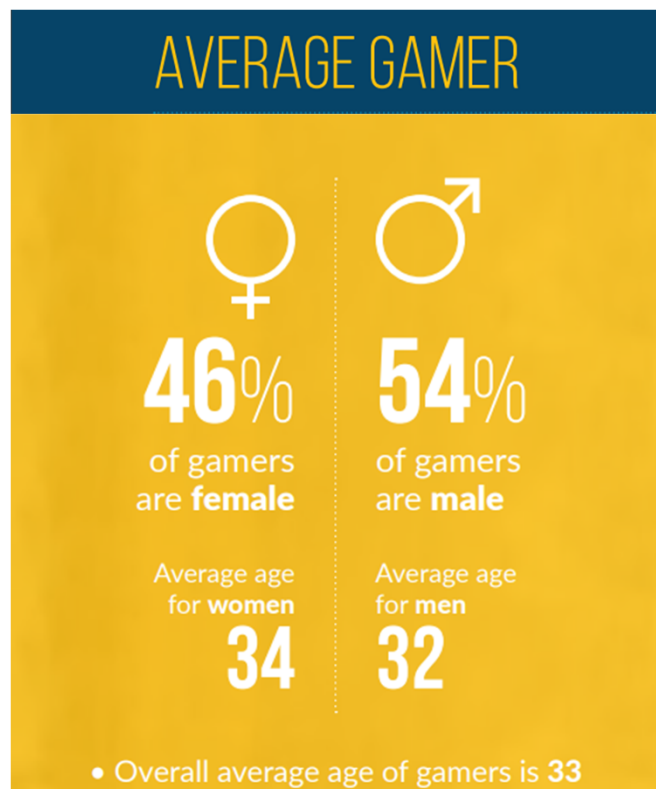
~ Eric Zimmerman, Manifesto for a Ludic Century

Video games are big business

Source: Statista

Everyone and their mother plays video games

AVERAGE GAMER

♀ 46% of gamers are female

♂ 54% of gamers are male

Average age for women 34

Average age for men 32

• Overall average age of gamers is 33

Gamers feel that video game play has a positive impact on their lives

79% of gamers say games provide mental stimulation

78% of gamers say games provide relaxation and stress relief

Gamers are more likely to

have a creative hobby (drawing, singing, writing, etc.)
56% / 49%

play a musical instrument
32% / 27%

meditate regularly
32% / 27%

be vegetarian
17% / 13%

Source: ESA 2019 Report

What are video games?

- "Any forms of computer-based entertainment software, either textual or image-based, using any electronic platform such as personal computers or consoles and involving one or multiple players in a physical or networked environment" (Fraschi 2001, in line with OED)

- Seems simple, but videogames are also "artifacts that evaluate performance" (curious about this and other definitions, see here)

Table 2.1 The elements of a videogame

Graphics	Any images that are displayed and any effects performed on them. This includes 3D objects, 2D tiles, 2D full-screen shots, Full Motion Video (FMV), statistics, informational overlays and anything else the player will see.
Sound	Any music or sound effects that are played during the game. This includes starting music, CD music, MIDI, MOD tracks, Foley effects, environmental sound.
Interface	The interface is anything that the player has to use or have direct contact with in order to play the game . . . it goes beyond simply the mouse/keyboard/joystick [and] includes graphics that the player must click on, menu systems that the player must navigate through and game control systems such as how to steer or control pieces in the game.
Gameplay	Gameplay is a fuzzy term. It encompasses how much fun a game is, how immersive it is and the length of playability.
Story	The game's story includes any background before the game starts, all information the player gains during the story or when they win and any information they learn about characters in the game.

Source: Adapted from Howland 1998a.

Pong

a game is *not*:

- A bunch of cool features
- A lot of fancy graphics
- A series of challenging puzzles
- An intriguing setting and story

(Rollings and Morris 2000: 19–20, original formatting)

From Newman's *Videogames* (2010)
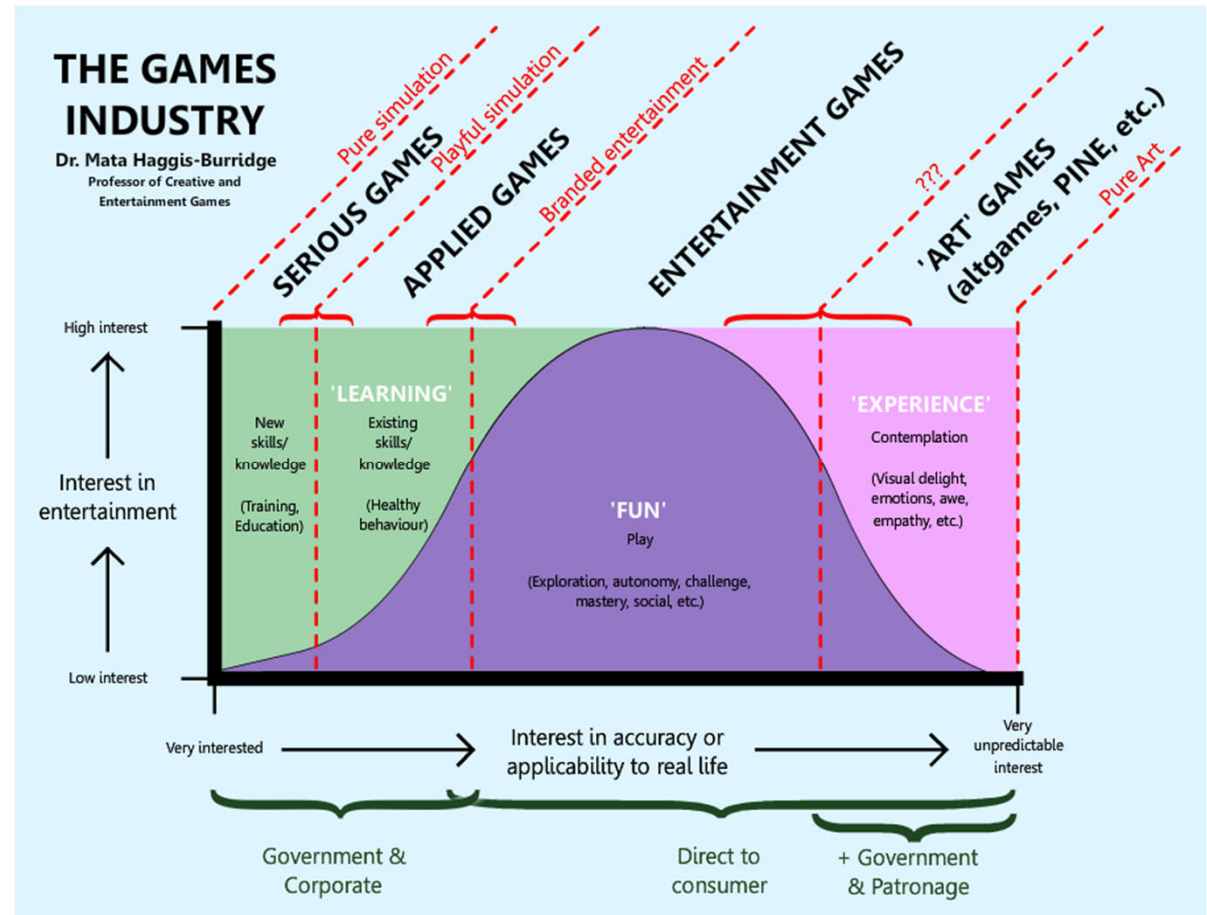
Video games come in many shapes and sizes

[Oregon Trail](): The 'only' successful edutainment game


Mata Haggis-Burridge ([BUAS]())

Disciplines "involved with" videogames

- Computer Science & Engineering
- Game Design
- Game Studies
  - Game Studies Journal
  - Games and Culture
  - Ludology vs. Narratology
- Media Studies
  - Media Archaeology
- Game Journalism
  - Many news outlets
    - Kotaku, Rock, Paper Shotgun, Eurogamer, Polygon
  - Declining number of print magazines
    - Edge

Spacewar!

EDGE
The Legend Of Zelda:
Breath Of The Wild
#304
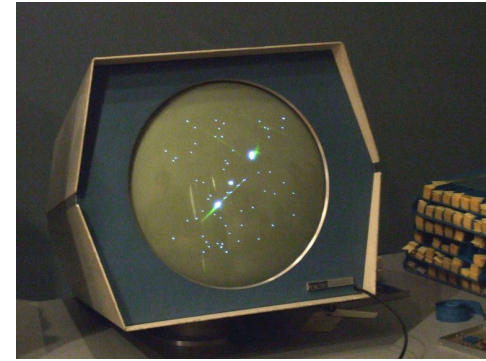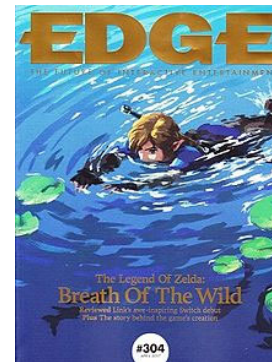
EUROGAMER

ROCK PAPER SHOTGUN
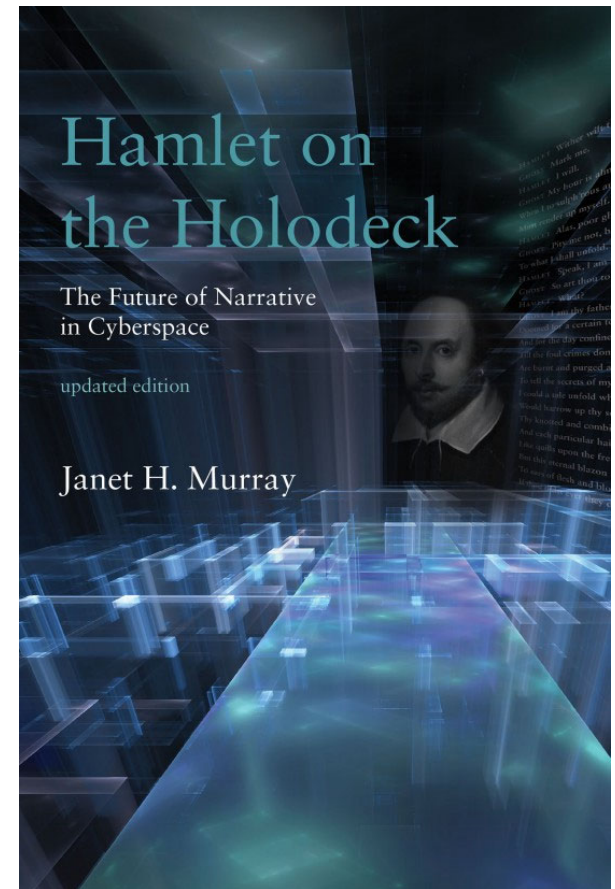PC Gaming since 1873

KOTAKU

Homo Ludens (Huizinga 1938)

- Play (1955, p.8-10):
  - **Free**: freeing and voluntary.
  - **Imitates**: is not "ordinary" or "real" life.
  - **Set apart**: is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration.
  - **Rule-based**: creates order, is order.
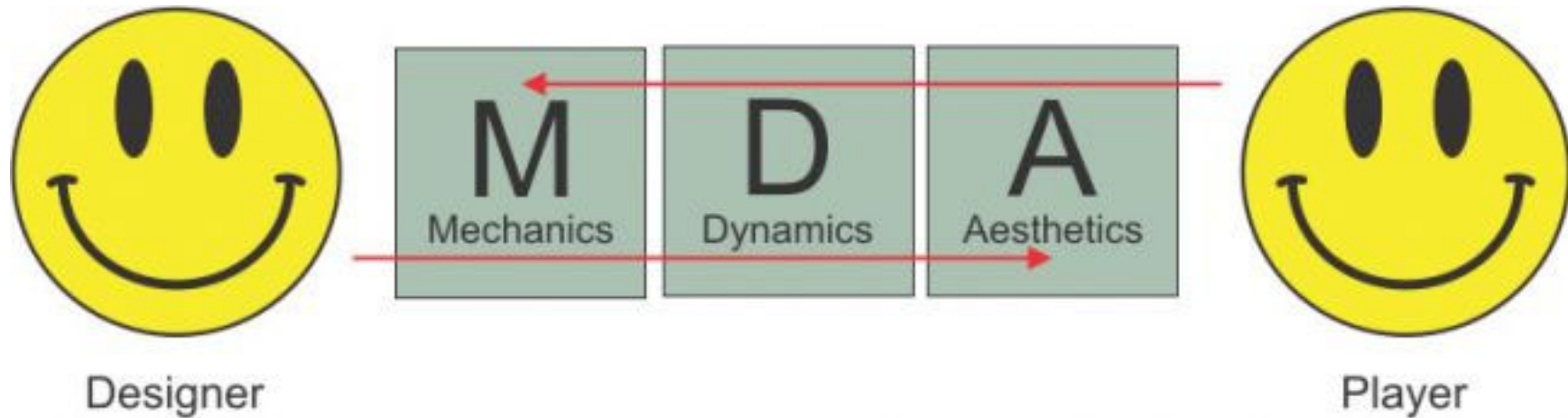 - **Seriously not serious**: connected with no material interest
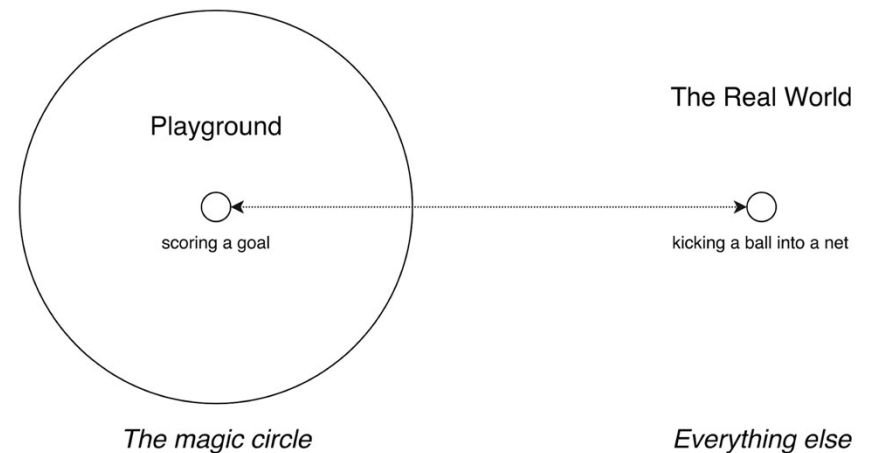
So… What's new?

- Murray suggests digital environments (with reference to storytelling) are:
  - Procedural: computers execute a series of rules
  - Participatory: Computers respond to human interaction
  - Spatial: Computers provide a space for humans to move through
  - Encyclopedic (see quote below)

- Ludological definition: "The only radically novel [thing] about computer games in comparison with analogue games are their ever increasing ability to handle vast amounts of information extremely quickly and the machine's position as referee as well as definer and executer of mechanisms. (Iversen 2010, p. 33)"

Hamlet on the Holodeck
The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace
updated edition
Janet H. Murray
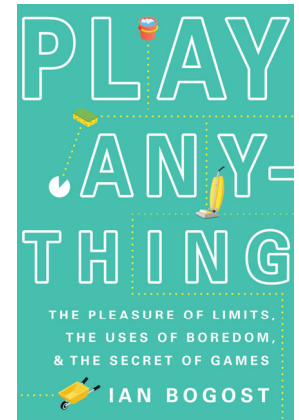
How to think about games?

MDA framework (Hunicke et al. 2004)

Play Anything (Bogost, 2016)

- Builds on *Huizinga's* 'Magic Circle' (*Homo Ludens)*

- Playgrounds: anything with boundaries and content that is experienced as fun.

- Fun: any activity that is related to with commitment, attention, and care.

- For example, the Past *is* a playground.

The Past and Play

- My research at the LUCDH
- VALUE Foundation
  - Playfulness
  - Accessibility
  - Knowledge
  - Interactivepasts.com
  - twitch.tv/valuefnd
- Past-at-Play Lab
  - pastatplay.com

THE **INTERACTIVE PASTS CONFERENCE ONLINE 2**

5-6 November 2020 | www.twitch.tv/valuefnd

VALUE

Knowledge at Play