WHY SHOULD AN ARCHITECT CARE ABOUT COMPUTER GAMES?

AND WHAT CAN A GAME DESIGNER TAKE FROM ARCHITECTURE?

Computer games are part and parcel of our present; both their audiovisual language and the interaction processes associated with them have worked their way into our everyday lives. Yet without space, there is no place at which, in which or even based on which a game can take place. Similarly, the specific space of a game is bred from the act of playing, from the gameplay itself. The digital spaces so often frequented by gamers have changed and are changing our notion of space and time, just as film and television did in the 20th century.

But games go even further: with the spread of the Internet, online role-playing games emerged that often have less to do with winning and losing and more to do with the cultivation of social communities and human networks that are actually extended into "real" life. Equipped with wireless technologies and GPS capacities, computer games have abandoned their original location – the stationary computer – and made their way into physical space as mobile and pervasive applications. So-called "Alternate Reality Games" cross-medially blend together the Internet, public phone booths and physical places and conventions in order to create an alternative, ludic reality. The spaces of computer games range from two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional spaces to complex constructions of social communities to new conceptions of, applications for and interactions between existent physical spaces.

In his 1941 book *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, Siegfried Giedion puts modern architecture and its typologies in their social and chronological context. Today, we again face the development of new typologies of space – spaces that are emerging from the superimposition of the physical and the virtual. The spaces of the digital games that constitute themselves through the convergence of "space," "time" and "play" are only the beginning.

What are the parameters of these new spaces? To what practices and functional specifications do they give rise? What design strategies will come into operation because of them?

In *Space Time Play*, authors with wholly different professional backgrounds try to provide answers to these questions. Practitioners and theorists of architecture and urban planning as well as of game design and game studies have contributed to the collection. The over 180 articles come in various forms; in essays, short statements, interviews, descriptions of innovative projects and critical reviews of commercial games, the synergies between computer games, architecture and urbanism are reflected upon from diverse perspectives.

Space Time Play contains five levels that – played on their own or in sequence – train a variety of skills and address a range of issues:

The first level, **THE ARCHITECTURE OF COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES**, traces a short, spatiotemporal history of the architecture of digital games. Here, architects are interested in the question of what spatial qualities and characteristics arise from computer games and what implications these could have for contemporary architecture. For game designers and researchers, on the other hand, it's about determining what game elements constitute space and which spatial attributes give rise to specific types of interaction. Moreover, it's not just about the gamespaces in the computer, but about the places where the games are actually played; playing on a living-room TV is different from playing in front of a PC, which, in turn, is different from playing in a bar.

Many computer games draw spatial inspiration from physical architecture. Like in a film, certain places and configurations are favored and retroactively shape our perceptions. Computer game players also experience physical space differently and thus use it differently. Newer input possibilities like gesture and substantial physical movement are making this hybridization of virtual and real space available for the mass market, thereby posing new questions to game designers and bringing the disciplines of built and imagined spaces closer together. Computer game design is thus not just about the "Rules of Play" anymore, but also about the "Rules of Place."

In the second level, **MAKE BELIEVE URBANISM**, the focus of the texts is shifted to the social cohesion of game-generated spaces – that is, to the ludic constructions of digital metropolises – and the question of how such "community spaces" are produced and presented. At the same time, the central topic of this level is the tension between the representation of the city in games and the city as metaphor for the virtual spatialization of social relations. How can sociability across space-time be established, and how will identity be "played out" there? The communities emerging in games, after all, constitute not only parallel cultures and economies, but also previews of the public spaces of the future.

The third level, **UBIQUITOUS GAMES**, on the other hand, demonstrates how real space – be it a building, city or landscape – changes and expands when it is metamorphosed into a "game board" or "place to play" by means of new technologies and creative game concepts. Here, a new dimension of the

notion and use of the city becomes conceivable, one which has the potential to permanently change the composition of future cities. What happens when the spaces and social interactions of computer games are superimposed over physical space? What new forms and control systems of city, architecture and landscape become possible?

The migration of computer games onto the street – that is, the integration of physical spaces into game systems – creates new localities; games intervene in existent spaces. Game designers are thereby made aware of their social responsibility. Ubiquitous games fulfill not only the utopian dreams of the Situationists, but also the early 1990s computer-science vision of a "magicization" of the world. As in simulacra, the borders of the "magic circle" coined by Johan Huizinga blur, and the result is ludic unification.

In the fourth level, **SERIOUS FUN**, the extent to which games and game elements also have serious uses – namely, as tools for design and planning processes – is examined through examples from architecture and city planning. The articles in this level demonstrate how the ludic conquest of real and imagined gamespace becomes an instrument for the design of space-time. For the playing of cities can affect the lived environment and its occupants just as the building of houses can. In this sense, playing is a serious medium that will increasingly form part of the urban planner's repertory and will open up new prospects for participation. Play cannot replace seriousness, but it can help it along.

The concluding fifth level, **FAITES VOS JEUX**, critically reflects upon the cultural relevance of games today and in the future. Which gamespaces are desirable and which are not? Which ones should we expect? Life as computer-supported game? War as game? The possibilities range from lived dreams to advertisements in gamespaces to the destruction of cities in games and in today's reality of war and terrorism.

What is the "next level" of architecture and game design? Both these creative worlds could benefit from a mutual exchange: by emulating the complex conceptions of space and design possibilities of the former and by using the expertise, interaction, immersion and spatial fun of the latter.

Game designers and architects can forge the future of ludic space-time as a new form of interactive space, and they can do so in both virtual gamespaces and physical, architectural spaces; this is the "next level" of *Space Time Play*.