Tues, 11.08.2015 – Sun, 17.04.2016
Global Games
ZKM_Atrium 1 + 2

With the *Global Games* exhibition ZKM | Karlsruhe is responding to the increasing relevance of and latest developments in computer gaming. Having impressively proved the artistic potential of the computer game with the ZKM_Gameplay (2013) exhibition, computer games are categorised as expressive media in the overall context of the GLOBAL art event with *Global Games.* The effects of globalisation and digitalisation and references to the real world are clearly reflected in computer games. Games deal, among other things with the Syria conflict, the use of drones in war zones, the global economic context of the globalised financial market and the situation of refugees at European borders. Computer games are certainly not to be construed as a purely western phenomenon but rather a global medium. It's not just users that play globally networked to each other but games are also produced all over the world.

Global Games is designed to be interactive: games can be played in the exhibition. A so-called *Let's Play video* is also presented with each game that shows how the game works.

Computer games as a child of the digital revolution
Computer games are a child of the digital revolution and therefore a medium that has been produced by the Infosphere. Besides this, the scientification of our culture and orientation toward new tools as part of the Exo-Evolution, as well as a new alliance between art and science is also shown by the apparent paradox of the serious game – a renaissance 2.0. Computer games are a popular format through which the socially relevant processes of globalisation, media upheavals and digitalisation can be vividly presented. Computer games also serve science and have didactic potential. They serve research and in doing so can help to make complex contexts understandable. In short: computer games are powerful new tools. *Global Games* reveals their different significances.

Computer games as a political medium
Computer games transport content, meanings and ideologies and can accordingly be political and social media in a positive, educational as well as in a seductive, propagandistic sense. The effects of globalisation and references to the real world are clearly reflected in computer games. Games deal, for example, with the Syria conflict, the use of drones in war zones **(Unmanned)**, the global economic context of the globalised financial market and the social consequences **(Cart Life)**, surveillance in light of the NSA scandal **(Vigilance 1.0, TouchTone)**, the situation of refugees at European

borders **(Frontiers, From Darkness)**, social misunderstandings produced by turbo capitalism **(Outcasted)**, the military-entertainment industrial complex and much more. They raise moral questions **(Papers, Please)** and give history lessons **(The Cat and the Coup)**. They can also be used as a learning resource, for example **Kerbal Space Program** or **Ludwig**, which is used in physics lessons in schools. The game **Die Müll AG** wants to educate on waste separation in Karlsruhe and make citizens of the city more aware of the issue. Games are new tools for new tinkerers in the so-called maker culture. They make them visible, vivid and tangible **(Room Racers, Choosatron)**. Computer games introduce utopias and make you think about new (possible) tools, in the sense of science fiction too **(Portal),** and become new tools themselves **(Minecraft)**. Or you control real microorganisms using light impulses in a football match **(Biotic Games).**

In the **Phone Story** game for the iPhone you play the production processes of a smartphone with pear logo over several levels. The game has its own consciousness: during the game, the phone itself pipes up time and time again and accurately explains its development in friendly words. The content is vicious: you mine for rare earth in Africa under the threat of violence with its slave workers, you rescue suicide victims from Chinese factories (or maybe not) and you launch the new product to the public using smart marketing strategies; you kill your customers. What is controversial about Phone Story is that it brings the dark side of the iPhone to light and that is precisely why it has been censored and banned by Apple in the App Store. In the *Global Games* exhibition you can play Phone Story on an iPhone – just as it's supposed to be.

What is clear: computer games are political media that deal with social topics and themes relevant to global politics using their specific resources. On the one hand they do this in an enlightened way to produce change and generate learning effects in a positive sense using their rhetoric. On the other hand though computer games are used as propaganda as the game America's Army proves, which is commissioned by the US government and provided free of charge to act as a recruitment tool.

While mainstream computer games in the AAA league, such as *Call of Duty* or Battlefield appear to welcome, embrace and support this military-entertainment industrial complex, the first signs of a conscience for anti-war games are developing on the independent scene, as for example the German game *Spec Ops: The Line* shows. In the *Global Games* exhibition we are showing **This War of Mine** by the Polish developer 11 Bit Studios, which brings the events of a war to life from the perspective of civilians.

Computer games comment on what is currently happening all over the world. All the possible so-called news games that refer to current happenings relevant to the news are compiled at www.newsgamevault.com. These

usually small short games are often comparable to political caricatures and exaggerate the news in their gameplay. The **September 12th** game by Gonzalo Frasca from Uruguay shows the spiral of violence that is still being initiated and has been cemented by the American war on terror in a simple, caricature way. You can only lose in the game: by bombarding a village in the Middle East new hate arises and terrorism always flourishes.

The **Yellow Umbrella** game directly refers to the latest protests in Hong Kong. Another example of a caricature in the *Global Games* exhibition is **Faith Fighter** by Paolo Pedercini. In Beat 'em up, which is based on classics in the genre such as Street Fighter II and ironically picks up on the stereotypical and even racist representation of fighters all over the world, representatives of all the major world religions compete against each other. Jesus fights against Buddha and Mohammed, among others. Mohammed's portrait is of course censored in the process.

Computer games are certainly not to be construed as a purely western phenomenon but rather a global medium. A prolific computer game culture is blossoming in Asia, particularly in Japan and South Korea. The relevance of professional, sporting competition in so-called e-sport is also always pointed out in this context. In South Korea professionals vie for highly endowed prize money in tournaments that are even broadcast on television.

Computer game productions from the Arabian region and the Middle East are less well known. Two examples from Syria and Iran: *Shooter Under Ash* (2001) and its successor *Under Siege* (2005), published by the Syrian Dar al-Fikr publishing house, stage the battle against Israel from a Palestinian point of view during the second Intifada between 1999 and 2002. The Iran Computer & Videogames Foundation funds Iranian games and also appears at computer game trade fairs such as Gamescom in Cologne.

The only games from the former DDR can also be experienced at *Global Games*: the *Bildschirmspiel 01* home console and *Poly Play* slot machine with games such as *Hirschjagd* and *Hase und Wolf*.

The computer game and gender issues

Makers of digital games have recently been picking up on socially relevant topics for example, gender issues, which they explore using the specific resources of the computer game. The **Dis4ia** game by Anna Anthropy, for example, deals with the designer's hormone treatment that prepared her for a sex change. The transsexual Anna Anthropy was born as a man and turns her sexuality and search for her identity into a topic in the form of a short essayist sequence of short games like a diary. In doing so she uses metaphors in gameplay, such as Tetris blocks that simply will not fit regardless of which way you rotate and turn them.

Lea Schönfelder's **Perfect Woman** is a feminist game. Using a camera that can detect movements in a room, the designer forces gamers into all kinds of poses in front of the screen and therefore into a gameplay metaphor. The

aim of the game is to fit as closely as possible into clichés and decals of women's roles.

Serious games such as the puzzle games **Foldit, EyeWire, EteRNA** or **Nanocrafter** are based on scientific data and deal with these in their gameplay. Gamers are transformed into networked citizen scientists. Playing with the games generates data that is incorporated back into science and may provide important results. Important knowledge was gained in this way about the structure of a protein that triggers AIDS in apes using the puzzle game **Foldit**. In addition, important progress was made in decoding the totality of all neurones, the so-called connectome, using the **EyeWire** game by mapping the nerve cells in the eyes of mice during the game. In this context we talk about citizen science. This means the outsourcing of scientific work to (scientific) amateurs. Citizen scientists help by making observations, analysing data and taking measurements. If this is done disguised as a computer game the pretend work is definitely much easier, this phenomenon is known in turn as gamification.

Stephan Schwingeler

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ZKM is taking the medium's global nature into account by sending the *Global Games* exhibition off on a tour around the world. In partnership with the Goethe Institute, *Global Games* will be on tour in several countries all around the world from 2016. The first stop is the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg on 20th August.

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A project as part of the
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