

# MIMICRY – PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIGITAL GAMES THEORY

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## ABSTRACT:

The article focuses on man's identity in the environment of digital games. Special attention is given to clarifying one of Roger Caillois's game principles (*mimicry*) and its application into the process of creating digital games. The author defines corresponding terminological axis and works with an assumption that the reflection on identity transformation related to digital '*mimicry* games' remains a subject of discourse analysis in the dimension of digital game studies. One of the aims of the article is thus to define the term "game" from the position of game studies, taking into account its multidisciplinary character. The analysed game principle *mimicry* is specified in greater detail; the existence of direct connection between '*mimicry* games' and simulated, interactive or fantasy games represents an important base for further inquiry and is placed in the centre of the author's attention. Based on the defined theoretical outlines, the author has an opportunity to apply the acquired information directly on specific games that may be classified as digital '*mimicry* games'. The primary goal of the article is therefore to address the given phenomenon by explaining its presence and meaning in the context of various digital games.

## KEY WORDS:

digital games theory, game principles, game studies, identity crisis, mimicry, principle of identity transformation, Roger Caillois

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## Introduction

From the time immemorial we have longed for new worlds and new places to explore, comprehend and use them to our advantage. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is no exception. The tendency to be utterly 'absorbed' by the world of virtual reality represents a journey to 'new worlds' to us. Technological shifts and new developments related to virtual reality give us an opportunity to discover a new 'universe' and thus find and explore renewed versions of our own identity. Digital games have become excellent means of experiencing this extension. They involve abstract structures and images, allowing players to explore other worlds; playing a digital game is an activity that builds upon a certain feeling of 'stepping outside the common reality'. R. Caillois's game principle *mimicry* is a unique integral part of this process. The principle is based on attracting the attention of audience;



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viewers must perceive the author's performance as believable. Players (i.e. actors) use inventiveness, masks, costumes and other types of disguise during their performance. However, whether a player creates a successful portrayal of a role or fails to give a convincing performance, there are no serious real-life consequences. In extreme cases, the apparent 'harmlessness' of such a game can lead to believing that 'virtual' is 'real' and vice versa. If this situation occurs, the concerned individuals are able to notice only abridged and isolated phenomena; the original understanding of *mimicry* is distorted. A crisis of identity is what follows; 'mimicry games' (mainly the digital ones) ostensibly 'liberate' us from laws, make 'everydayness' special and symbolically transform human bodies into perfect shapes and forms. Digital games are also thought of as late-modern phenomena that have helped transform the older forms of narcissism; their other supposed effects include marginalisation of space, banalization of the past and future time, etc.

The main goal of the article is to address the issue of identity transformation from the viewpoint of digital game theories, with emphasis on application of the *mimicry* principle within game environment. Specialised literature on the topic and theoretical reflection on the acquired knowledge help us to fulfil this goal. Relevant methods of logical textual analysis are used in order to better explain various contexts of the given issue. Using logical analysis, synthesis, comparison, inductive and deductive research methods is purposeful and aims to point out the most essential changes which influence the transformations of human identity in the environment of digital games.

The article is based on the author's own reflection on the topic, but it also minds the existing body of theoretical knowledge in this field of study. The primary information sources are the works by J. Huizinga, R. Caillois and R. Bartley. Another valuable source is available online – the website titled *The Imagination of Mimicry* helps us clarify some of the related issues as well. The first part of the text briefly explains key game theories that function as a basis for studying digital games. The term "game" is defined here from various points of view, i.e. in accordance with different authors' approaches and several scientific disciplines. Then we analyse *mimicry* (the game principle of identity transformation) in the context of the French sociologist and anthropologist R. Caillois's widely used typology of four game principles. Special attention is paid to the last chapter that focuses on applications of *mimicry* in the environment of digital games. The offered case studies aim to clarify the influence of digital games on (trans)formation of multiplied forms of human existence.

## Theory of Games as Basis for Studying Human Identity

The phenomenon of games has recently become an important part of research inquiry; its current relevance crosses the common boundaries of different scholarly fields of interest. Game theory is necessarily connected to the knowledge of economy, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology as well as to political sciences, logic, biology, computers sciences, etc. One of the reasons behind this immense scientific interest is the fact that game studies represent an important starting point of looking into the issues of human identity – it is this identity that is unrealised (unconscious), multiplied and in specific cases also threatened.

The spheres of cultural studies and media studies once perceived game studies only as a "history of toys". The attention of interested scholars was thus focused on gaming devices and accoutrements and the nature of games was thought to have little to no importance. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, few academics and researchers in the field actually thought that games would be attributed any cultural value.<sup>1</sup> The situation changed when the Dutch cultural historian and anthropologist J. Huizinga published his fundamental work *Homo ludens* (first published in 1938) and expressed his opinion that games were, in fact, older than culture; in addition, he claimed that culture had arisen from games. J. Huizinga labelled the whole domain of games by the term *ludus – ludere*. Etymology of this word is based more on imbalance, delusion and ridicule, but also

includes children's games, competition, liturgy or scenic performances.<sup>2</sup> This cultural-anthropological approach and related 'ludological' approach emphasise the presence of games in individual historical periods of humankind's existence and socio-cultural development.

At present, the notion of *ludus* can be applied also in the sphere of digital games. The same way a game bound to social reality determines the 'birth' of a certain culture (e.g. gladiator clashes contributed to formation of the Ancient Roman culture), a game in virtual reality results in the construction of new virtual cultures and subcultures that refer to socio-cultural potential of the given digital game (e.g. the game series *The Sims* and its impact on creation of a subculture involving the game's fans and supporters).<sup>3</sup>

Theoretical outlines of the study necessarily have to take into consideration philosophical methods of studying games and their nature – for example, phenomenology of E. Fink is one of these approaches. E. Fink expressed his opinions on the nature of games in publications titled *Oáza štěstí* (originally published in German as *Oase des Glücks* in 1975) and *Hra jako symbol světa* (in German *Spiel als Weltsymbol*, first published in 1960). The author emphasises interconnections between a game and a man's symbolical world; however, the reality of games themselves is far less important to the author. The aim of E. Fink's research is therefore to explore the existence of games within a philosopher's metaphorical thinking. "Playing", as the author remarks, is some kind of impetuous behaviour; a game lacks direct connection to the ordinary reality, it is not binding and has no inevitable consequences. The act of playing a game can be interrupted at any time, while in real life no noticeable change takes place – a human being gets rid of 'life worries' for a while and temporarily returns to the carefree times of childhood.<sup>4</sup>

The work *Hry a lidé* (in French *Les jeux et les hommes*, first published in 1958) by the French sociologist and anthropologist R. Caillois is inspired by J. Huizinga's *Homo ludens* and thus represents 'one generation younger' theory of games. According to R. Caillois, a game based on imitating life (*mimicry*) follows certain rules. A player would hardly follow any rules that are not (at least in some way) incorporated into the ordinary reality, but on the other hand, any game is accompanied by clear awareness of the players that their behaviour during the act of playing is only pretended. To offer a better understanding of games, the author discusses their structural similarities and differences and also divides them into four main types, each of them being terminologically anchored in the game sphere – whether it is football, chess (*agon*), roulette, dice (*alea*), creation of a peculiar state of losing orientation and awareness of exact limits (*ilinx*, *vertigo*) or simply imitation, i.e. impersonation of another person (*mimicry*).<sup>5</sup> *Agon* represents competition, *alea* is based on taking chances and believing in good fortune, *ilinx* can be defined as rapid movement that results in the feelings of ecstasy or dizziness, and *mimicry* is linked to simulation, assuming roles and fantasy.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, it is not adequate to exclude the possibility of creating various combinations of these principles (this matter is further discussed in the article's fourth chapter titled *Application of Mimicry in Game Environment*). Respecting this typology, R. Caillois defines a game as a free activity no one can be forced to participate in. A game is, in his opinion, excluded from the everyday life and takes place within precisely defined fictive time and space. It follows rules which suspend the effect of common laws so only the new regulations, i.e. game rules are in force.<sup>7</sup>

It can seem that playing is an aimless activity that does not give anything to either the society or individual players. However, it is important to consider the fact that during a game, a player acquires different knowledge and skills, imitates various elements of human activity and behaviour and often even creates products. P. Hartl and H. Hartlová's psychological definition of a game claims that games are one of the most prominent basic human activities that bring their participants feelings of satisfaction, joy and, of course, also negative emotions (in case of losing). As for children, we speak about learning how to work or about sensory

1 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 76.

2 HUIZINGA, J.: *Jeseň stredoveku. Homo ludens*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990, p. 222; CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 77, 245.

3 BUČKOVÁ, Z.: Reflexia (digitálnych) hier z hľadiska interdisciplinárneho prístupu. In *Mezinárodní Masarykova konference pro doktorandy a mladé vědecké pracovníky*: Hradec Králové: Magnanimitas, 2015, p. 1464.

4 For more information, see: FINK, E.: *Hra jako symbol světa*. Praha: Český spisovatel, 1993; FINK, E.: *Oáza štěstí*. Praha: Mladá fronta, 1992.

5 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 30-34, 42.

6 NEWMAN, J.: *Videogames*. London, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 22-26.

7 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 31-32.

and motoric activities motivated by acquired experiences. For adults, a game has binding roles, a goal that is pragmatic but incorporated in the game itself.<sup>8</sup> We can claim that a game takes place in a certain circle – at the beginning it is an expression of resolution, of arousing belief in our abilities. Certain abilities are preferred (e.g. strength, persistence, intelligence, imagination) and consequently a feeling of relief comes, a joy of ‘escaping’ the ordinary reality is experienced. Climax manifests itself in the forms of catharsis or burnout.<sup>9</sup> Many attempts of different psychologists to categorise games in accordance with different criteria have eventually led to the psychological typology of games – games may be based on manipulation or motion, they may be thematic, constructive or didactic.<sup>10</sup>

Game studies were recognised as an important part of general trends in media research in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the dynamic development of the Internet and other digital technologies brought new questions and issues that needed to be addressed. Some of these issues were discussed in terms of escapist theories related to media reception and were able to offer partially updated understandings of media audiences and their activity. This line of thought includes influential theoretical works by the American media scholar H. Jenkins, particularly his publications *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (first published in 1992) and *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (published in 2006). These books outline the issue of so-called “convergence culture” and “transmedia storytelling” (the same content spread by different media simultaneously and followed by new instalments, sequels and extensions that are available across multiple multi-media platforms).<sup>11</sup> The ability of digital technologies to expand original narratives through different media platforms consequently resulted in the birth of new (digital) game theories and studies at the brink of a new millennium. One of these multidisciplinary approaches is based on discussing game theory from the perspective of the scholarly field of computer sciences.

The Uruguayan game designer G. Frasca is a renowned promoter of multidisciplinary digital games studies (*Ludology Meets Narratology*; first published in 1999). He called this newly-established approach *ludology* – a science about games – and thus significantly contributed to establishment of an independent scientific discipline.<sup>12</sup> J. Juul, E. Aarseth and many other distinguished ludologists later tried to define the term in more detail. In general and based on their theories, we can claim that the core of ludology, i.e. of game studies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the effort to find the means of expression, structural elements and formal distinctions that make digital games different from other media – despite their ‘transmedia’ nature. The study by American designers K. Salen and E. Zimmerman titled *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* mentions F. A. Beach’s words. He defines the means of expression related to the game environment as follows:

- games are connected to releasing the excess of energy,
- they are a place where the expression of overall enthusiasm dominates,
- libido, sexuality, aggression or player’s anxiety are promoted,
- they imitate lives of other people,
- they are linked to the desire for inquisitiveness and experimentation,
- they become the means of socialisation, the tools for self-expression, but may result in misuse as well.<sup>13</sup>

The effects of a digital game’s means of expression manifest themselves in varying intensity – the intensity is always conditioned by the type of a game. B. Cowley was the first to point out the inseparability of fantasy and interactivity in simulation games; he considered this factor to be the most important aspect of users’ inter-

est.<sup>14</sup> This statement from 1980 seems to be valid even today. It is simulated digital games that ‘drag’ a player into an unreal world which imitates the reality. By constructing their in-game representatives (avatars), players expand their own identity outside the real world, outside the idea of being ‘here and now’. The ability of these means of expression to influence players is easily perceivable.

The ‘identity transformation’ game principle called *mimicry* functions as an extension that allows an individual to ‘step’ into the virtual world. Its application in simulated, interactive and fantasy games is preferred by many game designers – its aim is to ‘overwhelm’ the target audience by the possibility of living a life based on their own ideas. We should not forget that game producers are very well aware of the already mentioned game studies and their key pieces of knowledge; digital game production always implies these games’ cultural, ludological, philosophical, sociological, psychological and multi-media nature.

## Roger Caillois and the Principle of Mimicry

R. Caillois uses the term “*mimicry*” in the context of insects’ ability to imitate, to adapt to the environment. The word “*mimicry*” therefore underlines the natural origin of motives, on basis of which an individual player’s fictive, role-playing behaviour is triggered. The identity transformation principle *mimicry* implies all characteristic features of games even more than any other game principle; it initiates free activity, respects the specified time and space and follows an ‘agreement’ that results in elimination of the common reality. The genuine everyday reality is “disguised” here and a different reality takes its place. There is only one important rule – players who engage in a ‘*mimicry* game’ must fully capture the viewers’ attention. For the viewers, this means that they devote to the illusion – they will believe all the artificiality, decorations and masks to be real. Simply said, they will trust the game the same way they trust the everyday reality.<sup>15</sup>

An ideal example of how the game principle *mimicry* works is a human hand. We often use the middle and index fingers to imitate human walking. We pretend that these two fingers are legs of another person. This kind of ‘acting’ represents expressions or rather movements of a real human being. We can see that almost all games involve certain elements of *mimicry* – the key element they all share is the players’ belief that they are someone else. This type of behaviour is typical for children’s activities, but the *mimicry* principle markedly extends to adult life as well. It is present in every kind of entertainment that is experienced by an individual who wears a mask, costume or other disguise. R. Caillois claims that the theatre and drama interpretation may be included in this game principle, too.<sup>16</sup> At present, the extension of children’s role-playing into the adult world is most visible in the environment of digital games. While playing the games based on the identity transformation principle, users ‘become children’ once again; *mimicry* acts as a really powerful tool that allows this extension to happen.<sup>17</sup>

K. Salen and E. Zimmerman divide digital ‘*mimicry* games’ into two categories: so-called “*role-playing games*” (heroic games) and “*make-believe games*” (simulation games). Both elements work with identity transformations and their popularity and openness are based on the opportunity to freely represent something or someone else.<sup>18</sup> Digital ‘*mimicry* games’ are often played via the Internet (they can be designed in a ‘*multi-player*’ game mode to involve groups of players), alternatively as a ‘*single-player*’ (a role-playing game played by only one player), or as a combination of these two modes. The digital game genre known as ‘*massively multi-player online role-playing game*’ (*MMORPG*) nowadays represents an interesting commercial concept. Thousands of players are connected to central servers to share a fantastic world, in which they fulfil heroic tasks while being able to communicate, cooperate or fight each other. They do not have to meet in the real world, i.e. in person and they rarely do.<sup>19</sup> We offer a more detailed overview of the genre classification of ‘mimicry games’ in the following chapters of the article.

8 HARTL, P., HARTLOVÁ, H.: *Psychologický slovník*. Praha: Portál, 2004, p. 195.

9 BUČKOVÁ, Z.: Reflexia (digitálních) hier z hlediska interdisciplinárního přístupu. In *Mezinárodní Masarykova konference pro doktorandy a mladé vědecké pracovníky*. Hradec Králové: Magnanimitas, 2015, p. 1468.

10 ZACHAROVÁ, E.: *Základy obecné psychologie*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2012, p. 8.

11 For more information, see: JENKINS, H.: *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, 1992; JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, London: New York University Press, 2006.

12 FRASCA, G.: *Ludology Meets Narratology: Similitude and Differences between (Video)games and Narrative*. [online]. [2016-07-22]. Available at: <<http://www.ludology.org/articles/ludology.htm>>.

13 SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. London, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004, p. 309.

14 COWLEY, B. et al.: Toward an Understanding of Flow in Video Games. In *ACM Computers in Entertainment*, 2008, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 2.

15 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 30-44.

16 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 42.

17 BARTLE, R. et al.: *Beyond Game Design: Nine Steps Toward Creating Better Videogames*. Australia, Brazil, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, UK, USA: Course Technology PTR, 2009, p. 116.

18 SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. London, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004, p. 308, 335.

19 ŠVELCH, J.: *Pražské sociálně vědní studie: Počítačové hry a jejich místo v mediálních studiích*. Praha: FSV UK, 2007, p. 20.

# Application of Mimicry in Digital Game Environment

The simplest (of course, non-digital) examples of the game principle *mimicry* are construction kits. These are classical games of illusion, in which a subject (player) puts together different parts and pieces (objects) in an arbitrary manner. However, a deeper connection between the subject and the objects does not take place. Theatrical performances offer an example of substantial integration of *ludus* (type of games that reflects moral and intellectual values of a certain culture) and *mimicry*. R. Caillois claims that in this connection, games can show how much culturally valuable they truly are.<sup>20</sup> This conclusion follows J. Huizinga's statement about the impact of games on forming a certain culture.

The game principle *mimicry* is particularly applicable in the sphere of so-called digital entertainment. While R. Caillois speaks about actors (performers) and audiences, in digital role-playing games both are represented by the same person – a player. Players control their game avatars and watch their activities at the same time; they become both actors and spectators.

R. Bartle considers the game titled *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (released in 1989) to be the first digital game composed and structured in the sense of breakthrough trends and principles of *mimicry*. It is important to note that the identity transformation principle was not represented in its full scale here. Its true strength manifested itself through the success of *Sim City* (published by *Maxis* in 1989), mostly thanks to the immense level of interactivity (players could build their own city, work in it, etc.). The game *Sim City*, however, was still bound by certain limitations, among which we include emotional distance, inner 'messiness' and limited number of players.<sup>21</sup> By creating *The Sims* in 2000, the company *Maxis* solved these imperfections, which had positive influence on their profits from sales. Even though the first version of *The Sims* was released more than a decade ago, the series is still one of the most successful digital games of all time. It is also interesting that it was the first game in this format designed for women.<sup>22</sup>

One of the biggest global companies producing game consoles and digital games, *Nintendo* was quick to recognise the value of digital 'life simulators'. They have applied the *mimicry* principle in its pure form, i.e. without any connection to other game principles several times – for example, in digital games such as *Animal Crossing*, *Doshin the Giant* in 2002 and *Nintendogs* in 2005.<sup>23</sup> In these cases players based their gaming pleasure on the opportunity to show their skills.

At the beginning of the new millennium, '*mimicry* games' were exposed to sharp criticism due to their imperfect visual appearance ('unrealistic' form). The leading producers in the sphere of digital entertainment (*Microsoft*, *Sony*, *Nintendo* and others) therefore started to employ various previously unseen graphic elements in their production procedures and constantly improved them.<sup>24</sup> The efforts to create so-called "Euclidean universe" (three-dimensional models of avatars and the virtual environment) made the computer-generated graphics the essence of the digital game production. Certain manifestations of the "Euclidean universe" are clearly visible, for example, in the game *Far Cry* (*Crytek*, released in 2004). Nowadays, game aesthetics is heading towards hyper-realistic imagery (perfect lighting, sophisticated three-dimensional graphics, visual effects, ultra-high resolutions and others) that, at least in some ways, makes a better impression than the (ordinary) reality itself. Game characters and their visual features are becoming more and more realistic, but the general scenery of digital games (fictional environments, elements of fantasy or science-fictions) is keeping its hyper-realistic nature.

For instance, the world-famous massively multi-player online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft* (*Blizzard Entertainment*, 2004 – present day) includes various hyper-realistic elements. Playing this game requires Internet connection, i.e. it is an online game. More than 240 000 customers from the United States bought *World of Warcraft* right after the game's official release in 2004, more precisely in less than twenty-four hours after its public release. *World of Warcraft* became the fastest selling digital game of all time. Records were broken in the *MMORPG* genre as well. More than 200 000 players created their accounts during 'the day one' and more than 100 000 people met on the servers at the same time.<sup>25</sup> More than 13 million players from all around the world connected to *World of Warcraft*. Their task was to identify themselves with various positive and negative mythological characters. The players created communities to cooperate with other players as their key goal was to fight together against a common enemy. The storyline was situated in two fictive worlds where a vicious fight between two fractions was taking place.<sup>26</sup> *World of Warcraft* represents an imaginary version of the next stage of development of the human society, in which the future of people is in hands of trolls. The game's characters are fully fictional and scenery also keeps distinct hyper-realistic features. The exceptional long-time success of this game has led to creation of various re-makes, updates and expansions; these are mainly based on continual improvement of the graphics. The new, better and more detailed procedures of character animation seem to be the most significant innovation (*World of Warcraft: Warlords of Draenor*, 2014). The players' reviews published on various popular game websites<sup>27</sup> clearly indicate that the users see the game as digital entertainment of exceptional formal and content quality.

A similar technique of precise work with computer-generated imagery is also typical for next continuations of the above-mentioned game series *The Sims* (*The Sims 2*, 2004, *The Sims 3*, 2009, *The Sims 4*, 2013).<sup>28</sup> *The Sims* series is a 'simulator of life' that offers the opportunity to experience a virtual form of everyday reality in a visually compelling online world. What is more, such life simulators fulfil all criteria of R. Caillois's concept of *paidia*, i.e. 'game for a game', a game that cannot be won. *The Sims* series is one of digital '*mimicry* games' that are based on application of so-called 'virtual game playground'. It means that they offer spaces in which players are free to explore the virtual world. The digital game series *Grand Theft Auto* (1997 – present day) is based on a similar principle. The latest instalments of this series are considered to be the most commercially successful digital life simulators ever made. We speak specifically about releases from 2003 and 2005 – *GTA: Vice City* or *GTA: San Andreas*,<sup>29</sup> but mainly about the latest one – *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013). The massive global success of *Grand Theft Auto* series lies in its main feature – the ability of assuming a role of a criminal who lives in a city ruled by organised crime. There is also a storyline within which players fulfil assigned tasks. Avatars can perform any activities (they can steal a car, beat pedestrians, rob a shop, seek prostitutes, but also watch the sunset or go on a date, etc.). This allows the series to be commercially successful, but it is also exposed to a great deal of legitimate criticism because of the extent of its unethical and immoral content.

The exceptional success of *The Sims*, *Grand Theft Auto* and other similar digital games lies in the players' ability to manipulate with almost unnoticeable game interface, which evokes extraordinarily realistic impression. Digital games designed for the *Microsoft Xbox 360* console (first released in 2001) and its high-tech successor *Xbox One* (available since 2013) are, in our opinion, results of even more detailed work with digital visual imagery, simulation and hyper-reality. The built-in spatial camera *Kinect* allows real-time scanning of players' movements and therefore combines highly realistic environments with convenient management of individual game elements.<sup>30</sup> The game *Harry Potter for Kinect on Xbox* (*WB Games*, 2012) is based on a similar

20 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha : Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 52, 53, 80.

21 BARTLE, R. et al.: *Beyond Game Design: Nine Steps Toward Creating Better Videogames*. Australia, Brazil, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, UK, USA : Course Technology PTR, 2009, p. 102.

22 STONE, T.: *The 25 Best Simulation Games Ever Made*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015. [online]. [2016-07-22]. Available at: <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2015/05/15/best-simulation-games/>.

23 BARTLE, R. et al.: *Beyond Game Design: Nine Steps Toward Creating Better Videogames*. Australia, Brazil, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, UK, USA : Course Technology PTR, 2009, p. 102.

24 BARTLE, R. et al.: *Beyond Game Design: Nine Steps Toward Creating Better Videogames*. Australia, Brazil, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, UK, USA : Course Technology PTR, 2009, p. 103.

25 CHRAPPA, J.: *Obrovský úspěch Word of Warcraft už v první den predaja*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2004. [online]. [2016-07-22]. Available at: <http://tech.sme.sk/c/1845332/obrovsky-uspech-world-of-warcraft-uz-v-prvy-den-predaja.html>.

26 GÁLIK, S.: Cyber-spirituality as a New Form of Religion? In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2015, Vol. 11, No. 6, p. 88.

27 For more information, see: *World of Warcraft: Warlords of Draenor*, 2014 – review. [online]. [2016-07-22]. Available at: <http://www.sector.sk/recenzia/30521/world-of-warcraft-warlords-of-draenor.htm>.

28 BERNE, E.: *Jak si lidé hraji*. Liberec : Dialog, 1992, p. 10-11.

29 *The Imagination of Mimicry*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2006. [online]. [2016-07-17]. Available at: <http://onlyagame.typepad.com/only\_a\_game/2006/01/the\_imagination.html>.

30 NICOLAU, P. G.: Enriching Online Board Games: An Anthropological Perspective. In RIHA, D., FISHER, R.: *Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment*. Oxford : Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010, p. 8.

system. It offers a function of ‘scanning’ a player’s face with the aim to create his/her virtual doppelganger (avatar). The *Kinect* also includes speech recognition technology, which enables the players to use their own voices to interact with the virtual environment.

Not only digital games designed for *Xbox*, *PlayStation* and other game consoles, but also smartphones and tablets are important parts of the process of producing believable simulated realities and multiplied virtual identities. For example, the mobile application *Pokémon Go* (*Nintendo Co’s*, 2016) has become a worldwide phenomenon. Its main point is to look for Pokémon animated fictional animals from the well-known Japan television series of the same title. Pokémon can be seen and eventually caught through a phone’s camera in real-life environment. *Pokémon Go* uses the global positioning system (GPS) and built-in cameras in order to create so-called expanded or augmented reality. G. Kipper and J. Rampolla define the “augmented reality” (AR) as a certain variation of virtual reality which, using advanced technology, allows its users to immerse into a synthetic world that crosses the common boundaries of real and virtual.<sup>31</sup> In other words, a game based on AR works with the real environment, but combines it with a virtual, i.e. imaginary content (e.g. water Pokémon can be found only near a real river or a lake). It is the first digital game of its kind and it has achieved massive user popularity. The producer of this application, *Nintendo Co’s* is experiencing the greatest success on stock market since 1983.<sup>32</sup>

As for *Pokémon Go*, we cannot speak about a ‘genuine *mimicry* game’. Despite the fact that various elements typical for *mimicry* (multiplied identities, simulation, interactivity, playing roles, fantasy) are applied, partial connection to another R. Caillois’s game principle *ilinx* can be perceived. *Ilinx* is linked to seeking dizziness or other change in the common perception (e.g. acrobatics on a flying bar, quick rotation, sky-diving).<sup>33</sup> Due to the existence of augmented reality, players are able to ‘penetrate’ the world that exists on the borders between the real and the virtual. Entering this space, the players roam the real-life environments such as streets and parks to compete and fight against real opponents, but their weapons animated Pokémon – are virtual and therefore non-destructive. Such interconnections between the game principles *mimicry* and *ilinx* may cause merciless unleashing of passions and complete obsession. This argument gains its validity and severity in context of many cases when people get injured because of playing *Pokémon Go*. The most serious case is associated with the story of a teenage boy who was shot and killed while trying to break into a random house in order to catch Pokémon.<sup>34</sup>

However, this kind of transversality of digital games occurs quite often – it is definitely not limited to combining *mimicry* and *ilinx* elements. Active engagement, development of imagination, interpretation abilities and other features, which are promoted in ‘*mimicry* games’, can be compatible with elements of *agon*.<sup>35</sup> Digital portrayals of worldwide popular sports events (typical for *agon*) in combination with *mimicry* allow their players to become participants, users and audiences as well. To explain these matters, we have chosen the game *Le Tour de France 2016* (*Focus Home Interactive*, 2016) that simulates the most renowned professional cycling event in the world in a very realistic form. If multiple players compete against each other under the same conditions, we may say that the essence of the game’s form and content is primarily based on *agon*. On the other hand, we should not forget that the realistic imagery of the game (e.g. cheering audiences, their gestures, shouts, mimics, initial and final ceremonies, interviews and other aspects) can be seen as a form of *mimicry*. According to R. Caillois, under these circumstances, the audience experiences mimetic competition that is situated outside the scope of the pretence itself; this competition comes into being as an “almost identical twin” of the real *agon* related to playing fields or racing tracks.<sup>36</sup>

31 KIPPER, G., RAMPOLLA, J.: *Augmented Reality: An Emerging Technologies Guide to AR*. Massachusetts: Elsevier, 2013, p. 1.

32 REPOVÁ, L.: *Pokémon Go je populárnejší ako Twitter a Tinder*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016. [online]. [2016-07-22]. Available at: <<http://www.startup.sk/pokemon-go-popularnejši-twitter-tinder/>>.

33 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 45, 93.

34 For more information, see: ZACHAR, L.: *Prvá smrť spojená s Pokémon Go: Chlapca (†18) zastretili, keď sa snažil vlámať do domu*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2016. [online]. [2016-07-22]. Available at: <<http://androidportal.zoznam.sk/2016/07/prva-smrt-pokemon-go-chlapca-zastrelili/>>; PALÚŠ, T.: *Pokémon GO spôsobil 136 % nárast vo vyhľadávani Poképornu na Pornhubu*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016. [online]. [2016-07-22]. Available at: <<http://androidportal.zoznam.sk/2016/07/pokemon-go-136-narast-pokeporn/>>.

35 BUČKOVÁ, Z., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: Historical Reflection of the game Principle Agon and Its Application in the Current Creation of Media Reality. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2016, Vol. 12, No. 5, p. 37.

36 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 43.

The multi-genre character of digital games has become the most important, central element of producing digital entertainment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, the game series *Call of Duty* (*Infinity Ward*, 2003 – present day) partially involves all four game principles. First of all, *Call of Duty* contains elements of *mimicry* (e.g. simulation of WWII environment, realistically designed characters voiced by professional actors). Secondly, *alea* is involved too as the course of actions during the game is partly based on luck and coincidence (e.g. finding weapons, ammunition, medical kits during the time of need). Thirdly, *ilinx* is experienced (e.g. rapid alternation between fear of ‘death’, suspense and excitement). Finally, the players encounter a number of virtual enemies and thus need to be quick, precise and clever enough to eliminate the opponents, or else their avatars will get hurt (*agon*).

The above-mentioned production strategies such as combination of several game concepts, using various advanced technologies related to computer-generated imagery or creation of so-called augmented reality are all tied to the producers’ effort to unify the virtual environment and the real world into a highly convincing, immersive communication space. When experiencing such a ‘universe’, players can lose awareness of the reality and their minds may partly or fully ‘remain’ inside the imaginary world even after the game has finished. There is a very thin line between cultural forms that balance at the edge of established social mechanisms (carnival, theatre, cult of stars), highly institutionalised forms integrated into the society’s life (uniforms, etiquette) and deepening fragmentation of one’s identity related to cyberspace (alienation, multiple personalities and aliases, unhealthy involvement with fictional personas or places), and nowadays it is too easy to cross this line.<sup>37</sup> For this reason, digital game audiences should not forget that virtual reality is a fabricated, artificial and less genuine reality and only then they can eliminate the possibility of experiencing a crisis of their own identity.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

The field of game studies provides the phenomenon of game and its inquiry with a necessary theoretical framework. Cultural anthropologists (J. Huizinga), philosophers (E. Fink), anthropologists and historians (R. Caillois), ludologists (J. Juul, G. Frasca, J. Huizinga), media scholars (H. Jenkins, K. Salen, E. Zimmerman), psychologists (P. Hartl, H. Hartlová) and analysts (B. Cowley) all see games and digital games from different points of view, but the essence of their research remains the same. Whether we speak about games bound to the ordinary socio-cultural reality (theatre or live action role-playing) or about digital games (single-player and multi-player role-playing games), in all these cases the focus is on the changes in one’s identity that may occur during the individual stages of game activity.

Entering the ‘world outside reality’, i.e. the world of games is based on the identity transformation game principle – *mimicry*. *Mimicry*, as one of R. Caillois’s four game principles, masks the authentic reality and temporarily replaces it by a simulated reality. It is important to note that ‘*mimicry* behaviour’ does not relate only to everyday activities (e.g. a child playing a doctor, soldier, teacher), but it also distinctly extends into the virtual world of digital games, digital entertainment. J. Radošinská and S. Hrotková emphasise that the nature of feelings, experiences and emotions, which are connected to experiencing multi-media entertainment, reflects the recipients’ social and cultural identity and their distinctive contact with the everyday reality.<sup>39</sup> Since the process of experiencing media entertainment – in our case digital games – is highly individualised, we consider it to be very difficult to generalise.

*Mimicry* features are implemented into virtual game environments by numerous digital game designers. On the basis of the information acquired and discussed in previous chapters of this article, we are able to summarise the means of expression of ‘*mimicry* games’. Our summary relies on R. Bartley’s classification

37 CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 75.

38 ČÁLIK, S.: *Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka*. Filozoficko-etický pohľad. In ČÁLIK, S. et al.: *Kyberpriestor ako nová existenciálna dimenzia človeka*. Łódź: Księży Młyn, Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2014, p. 9.

39 RADOŠIŇSKÁ, J., HROTKOVÁ, S.: Hedonic and Eudaimonic Aspects of Media Entertainment. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2014, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 158.

system.<sup>40</sup> We have discovered that digital games based on the identity transformation principle *mimicry* offer their players the opportunity to express themselves individually. It is not important whether we talk about an online game (*Pokémon Go*), a game for one player (*Nintendogs*, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* and others), for multiple players (*World of Warcraft*) or about their combination that allows the players to choose between 'single-player' and 'multi-player' modes (*Le Tour de France 2016*). The only thing that (commercially speaking) matters is the size of the audience willing to experience and shape this 'performance' – the bigger the audience, the better. Moreover, the digital game genre known as *massively multi-player online role-playing games* (e.g. *World of Warcraft*) is based on multiple players being connected to central servers and represents an interesting commercial concept. The users fulfil tasks together, communicate and cooperate with each other in order to build a virtual community.

'*Mimicry* games' also offer unlimited possibilities of being challenged. This factor is strengthened by application of the concept of so-called 'virtual game playground', a space in which players are free to discover the virtual world. A similar principle is applied in 'heroic games', also called '*role-playing games*' (*World of Warcraft*) as well as in case of many simulation games or rather '*make-believe games*' (*Sim City*, *The Sims* and other virtual 'life simulators'). Players assume the roles of their game avatars (humans, aliens or animals) and these specific circumstances are subsequently connected to certain relationships. In extreme cases some of the players believe these fictive relationships to be inseparable parts of their ordinary lives. This type of digital games offers direct experience with the *mimicry* principle.

The fact that '*mimicry* games' are, most of all, powered by human curiosity tends to be overlooked. It is true mainly in case of three-dimensional digital games designed in ultra-high resolutions (*Far Cry*). Players' curiosity is stimulated also through experiencing digital games that involve a high degree of interactivity. We emphasise here that the use of so-called augmented reality and advanced technology designed for recording sound and picture (*Pokémon Go*, *Harry Potter for Kinect*) is becoming more and more commercially important in terms of the digital game production. The aim of precise work with computer-generated imagery is to capture the everyday human life as accurately and realistically as possible. This is also the reason why the process of playing digital games tends to contain simulations of real-life elements that represent the physiological and social needs, the needs for security, protection, respect and self-realisation (*The Sims*, *Grand Theft Auto*).

On the basis of what has already been mentioned, we conclude that '*mimicry* games' are in general considered a certain type of 'showing off', during which players work with creativity, look after something or somebody, compete, fight, make friends, simulate human activities or experience a heroic story, having an audience (real or virtual) present the whole time.

While assessing the above-mentioned means of expression of the given type of games, we have also come to conclusion that the virtual environment is able to influence players' real lives. Although the essential part of every single game (digital or non-digital alike) is the free choice to continue or quit, in the world of interactive, simulation-based digital games, this decision is not easy at all. 'Digital universes' may offer too much liberty and freedom; digital games' visuals are often portrayed in highly believable ways so their players might lose the notion of time and space and are no longer able to distinguish between different game principles. These negative aspects can lead to distortion of the original understanding of the *mimicry* principle. This happens when players in digital disguise start to believe that their virtual 'masks' are real, when they are not playing roles of other characters anymore and are convinced that they have already become the other person, the virtual hero. Such a deep loss of real-life identity is, according to R. Caillois, punishment for those who cannot say "no" to the temptation.<sup>41</sup> In this case we can definitely speak about alienation.

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<sup>41</sup> CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a lidé*. Praha : Nakladatelství studia Ypsilon, 1998, p. 69.

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