

Research Article

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Game Logic in the TV Series *The Walking Dead*: On Transmedial Plot Structures and Character Layouts

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Abstract: This paper discusses plot structures and characters of the *The Walking Dead* TV series which can be traced back to the influence of computer games and gameplay. It shall prove that the series' narration as a transmedial phenomenon is characterised by ludic logic, although interactive aspects are omitted due to the intermedial change from games to a TV series. The characters' twin layout as both civilised and archaic, the permanent necessity to make live-or-death decisions, as well as the struggle for survival, simulate aspects of adventure games in particular. The long duration of the series and its repetitive structure rely on PC gamers' habits.

Keywords: convergence culture, zombies, game studies, adventure games, intermediality

Post-apocalyptic scenarios challenging humanity and social systems are frequent in the history of film and television (Voigts-Virchow; Hoffstadt), and quite often zombies are the projection screen of disruptive experiences and crises (Proctor; Kleiner; Stiglegger). *The Walking Dead* makes this into a seemingly interminable series (Platts 294). In eight seasons to date,¹ humans fight against the undead, but more important is the fact that different characters experience the most diverse processes of personal affirmation and that different types of socialisation, e.g. democracies, dictatorships, packs of wolves, constitute and destroy themselves. In essence, the series focuses on the simple proposition that human beings are able to do anything in extreme situations (Sulimma), because there is only a thin layer of civilisation protecting us from ourselves and it cannot be taken for granted that it will be easily restored once it has become sufficiently unstable. The zombies are only a mean of disruption that helps to install a strange world with strange rules, where human beings and human society are challenged as such. This post-apocalyptic state is staged as an archaic one. A party of survivors in Georgia led by sheriff Rick Grimes tries to muddle through outdoors in the forest avoiding the civilisation of big cities. The motley group of characters—ranging from racist white trash rednecks to an energetic female civil rights lawyer and members of diverse ethnical groups—is object of a social experiment. Lacking vital resources and information due to a total breakdown of production and economy as well as of the media and communication infrastructure the party has to fight for survival out of nothing, but what is even more important is that they have to negotiate what a life worth living really is (Kleiner 235). “Dramatizing the struggle to redefine values in a potentially violent future is the business of *The Walking Dead*” (Tenga 1281). There are hints in the series that this design not only corresponds to the logic of experiments, but also to the logic of games, especially computer games. The following statement by the figure Eugene Porter—the professed scientist and nerd who joins Ricks group—suggests that *The Walking Dead* includes characteristics of computer games: “I’ll have them thinking we’re playing their

1 This article was written before season eight has been released and refers to season one to seven.

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game. All phases of the turn, level after level, move after move, I'll keep them spun" (s06e16/43:00). Eugene is supposed to implement a plan step by step, but literally, he says that he'll play a game level after level. It does not get any more concrete at this point, but all in all the series—somehow metaphorically—shows traits of computer games. Alexander Galloway defines computer games as follows: "A game is an activity defined by rules in which players try to reach some sort of goal" (Gaming 1). Or as game designer Greg Costikyan states: "A game is a form of art in which participants, termed player, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal" (I have no words and I must design). Claus Pias emphasizes that gameplay is about deciding how to apply correctly the right items (Pias 110). A computer game is a world of choice among alternative courses of action, and according to Henry Jenkins the narration is subordinated to the process of decision-making ("Narrative Architecture" 121; Pias 158). As far as *The Walking Dead* is concerned one could put forward the proposition that what looks like an experiment is also a product of gamification.

As we are discussing the increasing complexity of contemporary (television) series in culture, media and film studies (e.g. Mittell, Rothenmund) and as this increase has often been described as a novelistic turn, i.e. an increase of narrative complexity (Matejovski 180) we have to focus on this aspect or rather on the lack of this aspect in *The Walking Dead* at first. At the beginning of the series, we enter the scenario with Rick just waking from coma once the catastrophe has already happened. Just like this character we are left clueless facing the fact of the living dead's existence with all its consequences. I shall return to this starting point more than once, but now the question arises what keeps the series running or what motivates the narrative once it has started this way. Apart from constant danger due to the undead, several major narrative arcs unfold. Action is required because of the threat by other groups of humans what regularly leads to climaxes of excessive violence, which then calm down again, i.e. warlike conflicts between our party trying to hold up civilised values and barbarians, sects, cannibals etc. arise. If strict criteria in terms of substantive plot motivation are applied, *The Walking Dead* is anything but consistent. Basically, the series shows a simplistic narrative scheme and its variation compared to traditional narrative criteria, e.g. Friedrich Blanckenburg's 18th century theory of the Bildungsroman, which shapes the expectations of novel readers to this date²; assuming that a novel should present the "human being, its inner state" ("Seyn des Menschen, sein innerer Zustand") (14) with "this text being a perfect poetic ensemble, a chain of cause and effect." ("diese Schrift ein vollkommen dichterisches Ganzes, eine Kette von Ursach und Wirkung ausmacht") (12). This comparison is not all that far-fetched if you take into account that Robert Kirkman, the author of the graphic novel, applies Aristotelian categories stating "at the end of the day, I want this entire long narrative to be a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end" (Robert Kirkman knows how *The Walking Dead* ends) These narrative structures cannot be identified anyway. But the series' principle is not described correctly either as "just a soap opera with a zombie occasionally" (George Romero *Walking Dead* Soap Opera), which is how George A. Romero distinguishes the series from his own satirical-critical use of zombies. All these considerations miss the mark because the series is a complex transmedia phenomenon dealing at least with the graphic novel and computer games. One of the concrete references on PC games occurs when Eugene Porter suggests playing the game *Warlords* after he had joined Negan's group. The fact that the figure plays a PC game is very conspicuous because the usage of any media or even the availability of electricity is rare in the scenario. Significantly, Eugene shows in this context that he is able to create a bomb out of household utensils (s07e11/20:51-22:40). In another sequence it is Eugene again, who hints at PC games when thinking through theories on the infection:

I'm well aware it sounds bananas, but looking at the fossil records knowing what I know about this infection, you cannot say for certain it isn't what killed off the dinosaurs. Do I believe that's what happened? No. But it's enjoyable as hell to think about an undead Ankylosaur going after a Diplodocus. That there is a video game worth a preorder. [dialogue partner finds a coin] Oh, hell, yeah. Score! A few more of those, a little aluminium foil and some bleach, got yourself some volts, sister. Homemade battery. . . . Speaking of video games, what kind of gamer were you? RPGs? Shmup? Sim racing? (s04e15/0:00:09)

² Although Blanckenburg's categories have been deconstructed during the novel of the 20th century, it is not farfetched to compare the series with novels. Robert J. Thompson has shown how much 'Quality Television' depends on literary structures (13-16).

Eugene is again a MacGyver (1985-1992) whose principle of survival is non-intended use, but he is also the figure who reflects the gamification of the series on a metafictional level and both aspects are closely linked to each other. I will discuss one of the best known, ‘classical’ games for a comparison: In the *The Curse of Monkey Island* PC game Guybrush Threepwood can escape from quicksand by attaching a stone to a helium balloon, making a blowgun out of a reed and a thorn, blowing the balloon towards a liana and bursting it above the liana by shooting it with the blowgun, so that the stone falls onto the liana, making it sway into reach for him to pull out of the quicksand. The items required are either found in his trunk or in the setting. More precisely, we as players can do all that, because we are guiding the character through the scenario in this interactive point-and-click adventure. While Guybrush has to rescue his beloved Elaine in the framework of the diegesis, we find our way with the cursor on the screen or in the setting, clicking on items to identify, collect, assemble and use them as tools (Venus 108-09) in order to bring Guybrush close to his goal step by step. Point-and-click adventures have a final motivation. The narration shapes a corridor for our decision-making. Our decisions realise or complete what had been intended. During the whole process, a chain with numerous parentheses and loops unfolds. If we do anything wrong we are stuck. If the game goes on we obviously made the right decision. We get feedback by the narration evolving. There is no complex, psychologically motivated causal connection. Guybrush Threepwood is a flat character with few traits. Thus we, the players, can fulfil his mission, but we cannot empathise with his emotional state or his motivation. We can aim towards a/his goal but have no other reason to act except the fact that we want to play and accept a narrative goal set beforehand. And in that way, we simply do everything we can, because we can, because the game is programmed in such a way that we can. And it is programmed that way because on diegesis level, what we will have done will make some sense at a later point. Essentially, the game consists of collecting anything that is not screwed down, i.e. looting every setting, and the players never know why nor often for what purpose. One cannot stress explicitly enough that even narrative games have another motivation than literary or film narrations.³

Against this background, *The Walking Dead* TV series can be discussed in the context of transmedia storytelling, which has been coined by Henry Jenkins with a view to franchising projects such as the *Star Wars* universe.⁴ With regards to *The Walking Dead* mainly the relationship between the graphic novel and the series has been considered up to now (Jenkins “Adapting Comics,” Jenkins, *Transmedia Storytelling*; Thon), which cannot be grasped in terms of traditional concepts of adaption and intermediality anymore (Sulimma). I shall come back to the graphic novel later. But at first, I want to focus the relation between games and the series going beyond the *Walking Dead* franchise and considering the layout of the TV series alone which simulates computer games on a broader, structural level and is characterised by their ludic logic. This is an effect of a convergence culture where old and new media collide—to quote Jenkins again (*Convergence Culture* 1-24). If we take into account that transmedia phenomena restructure the relation between messages and cultural performances and if we ask how cultural messages are (trans)mediated, we also have to look at the aesthetical structure of the involved media that are (trans)mediated as well. We not only have a dynamic relation between media, messages and cultural performance. We have a dynamic relation between media, aesthetics, messages and cultural performances. At this point, we have to note that there are still important aspects that cannot be (trans)mediated.

If photographs are images, and films are moving images, then video games are actions. Let this be word one for video game theory. Without action, games remain only in the pages of an abstract rule book. Without the active participation of players and machines, video games exist only as static computer code. Video games come into being when the machine is powered up and the software is executed; they exist when enacted. Video games are actions. . . . With video games, the work itself is material action. One plays a game. And the software runs. The operator and the machine play the video game together, step by step, move by move. (Galloway 2)

³ Zimmerman 13-23. Meanwhile, not only the reference to the discussion among narratologists (Murray 130) and ludologists (Aarseth 8) in game studies seems obsolete, but the assertion that their positions have come closer is established and taken into account in research (e.g. Jenkins “Narrative Architecture”, 119-129; Jenkins “Transmedia Storytelling”; Rauscher; Frasca; Juul “Clash”).

⁴ We will not deal with the *Walking Dead* Computer Games, which are also studied with a view to the phenomenon of trans-media storytelling (Beil and Schmidt).

According to Galloway the aesthetics of ludic structures in a television series may be more like a “rule book” than a game, but they can be experienced in analogy to games, recognized as games, cause similar effects like games, and there are also analogies in the way the recipients are connected to the figures they read or play (Venus).

Against this background, we will have to come back to the starting point. At first in the series we are bound by the limited perspective of Rick Grimes who has to find his way in a world with strange rules. Instead of the civil order he knew and we know there are walkers threatening any living human and together with Rick we learn this new world’s rules. He is our avatar, at least at the beginning. Later we may decide to choose another avatar and thus another position within the game. We may see the world from resourceful Glenn’s or energetic Carol’s perspective, or through the eyes of pragmatic Daryl or fierce Michonne etc. For each of the characters there is a life or identity before and after the apocalypse, mirroring the forms of existence of us as players, e.g. Michonne is a lawyer with a family before the apocalypse and the type ‘woman with sword’ after. In real life, we have a biography, characteristics and a sociodemographic status, while in the game we become an avatar with a completely different skill set (Taylor, Kampe and Bell). Thus, via projections, in the series we are linked to one character or another with its basic talents such as sportiness, craftsmanship or a certain knowledge, with each of them having a specific function for the party as a whole. It is a recurrent element of the plot that the appropriate figure is in the scene with its ‘powers’ whenever it is necessary that everything turns out all right. Only seldom does a figure change its attitude. It works like chess: A figure has a certain value which cannot change and that figure has to be at or to be moved to the right place. In fact, that is what provides structure for the series. The characters hardly ever have good reasons, i.e. intelligible motivations for their acts in the way we expect them in traditional narrations, but they have or soon develop certain skills and thus are well or badly placed on the game board. For example, Morgan, who after some training in Far Eastern martial arts and philosophy is determined not to kill under any circumstances, not even enemies, meets a member of an enemy guerrilla group, a “wolf.” Morgan cannot/does not want to kill the enemy. The series shows his character as a (non) executioner bound or determined by this decision once made. Thus, the wolf survives, who can then rescue Denise, a doctor who in turn can save Rick’s son Carl by first aid measures (s06e15). Morgan himself calls this chain of actions the necessary circle of life. From a player’s perspective, all this may seem intelligible in hindsight. From a spectator’s perspective, however, the player with a certain property is simply put in a certain place so basically only one move is possible, starting the chain reaction described. Even *a posteriori*, the character’s action is not motivated with a view to the goal nor put in a consistent context. And it also does not always end well. The characters are grouped and moved in a way that at the end of every skirmish a large part of the group survives, but, just like in a game, we never know which character will have to be sacrificed and die. If the series followed a narrative logic, the characters would hardly ever die. Even in the episodic series *Star Trek Next Generation* there is an unknown character on some missions just in case somebody must die and Tasha Yar only dies after actor Denise Crosby wanted to leave the series. But just like in the slightly later series *Game of Thrones*—mind the title—in *The Walking Dead* characters that have been built up slowly may die. Characters can be sacrificed because the script follows a ludic arrangement. In most cases, those who die are pawns, but if the wager is worthwhile, so do pieces of higher value. The question which wager is worthwhile or the assumption that any wager is worthwhile if it contributes to the survival of the group gets considerable discursive attention within the series. Those who die do so for the group and for the game to continue. As new characters or pieces enter the game again and again throughout the series, they never fall below a critical mass.

We shall come back to the starting point once again to make clearer which rules of the game have to be learned in the series. The first lesson is that walkers can be killed by destroying their brains. We also learn—at the beginning—that you must not get bitten or scratched because it causes a deadly fever. Walkers are attracted by noises, light or the smell of living humans. At first, every walker is exciting, but soon we note that they live in a nearly brainless vegetative state and do not act too purposefully. They are quite slow, cannot climb nor hardly overcome any obstacles and are quite easy to kill individually. This is the information to be acted upon. If there is one thing we can expect from our first avatar, a US policeman, it is that he can shoot, i.e. Rick has no trouble taking down walkers by well-aimed headshots. Other players

do not have this skill. So Andrea, the civil rights lawyer, has to practice shooting first (s02e06) in order to become a battle-ready member of the party. Rick, on the other hand, finds a horse by chance in the beginning and sits in the saddle rather clumsily. On a gaming console, we also usually have to practice shooting first, because the avatar does not do it for us within the game. There are combinations of keys for special moves we must be proficient in for the avatar to master them, i.e. perhaps the character will not be able to ride a horse on its own either (Venus 105-06). In shooter games, sports games and action adventures such as *Assassin's Creed*, all these motor skills—both of our hands and of the avatar's body—are needed, and all these different skills are required, in demand and used in *The Walking Dead*. In an interlude at the Woodbury sect community's arena, close combat abilities like in a beat 'em up game such as *Mortal Combat* or *Tekken* are required (s03e05). And you learn even more: If you have the weapons required and know how to aim it is possible to run through a horde of walkers like in a jump-and-run game—think of *Super Mario Bros.*, to mention another classic—i.e. an obstacle race where you have to dodge the walkers and/or shoot them and where both agility and speed count. That is how Rick runs through the scenario right at the start (s01e02). Then, just like in a point-and-click adventure, it is about collecting items that might be useful later. For instance, Carol finds the hand grenade Rick had found in a tank and taken with him in Rick's backpack and in a situation when a massive door has to be blown to pieces so the party can exit a building she hands it back to Rick for that purpose (s01e06). Throughout the whole series, the utensils required are mostly available just in time. Although some time passes and even though all humans roam around looting, still there is enough non-perishable food and medication, new weapons or fuel found again and again. There is always some character who has an idea where to get something at the right time, e.g. Hershel, the veterinarian, remarks that drugs for animals may as well be administered to humans and that they could perhaps be found at an animal shelter because others may have overlooked this opportunity. Daryl, the scout, mainly has the task of exploring, searching and taking whatever the party needs. Without knowing what will be most urgently needed next, he is asked to procure “stuff” and gets lists for it. He or another authority has to choose and prioritize, because Daryl cannot carry everything in his backpack. Computer games are programmed in a way that you can find and/or assemble everything you need. You just have the task to collect and then apply correctly the right items (Pias 110). It soon becomes clear that the series is about recognizing rules and developing and implementing ideas based on this set of rules (s01e02). The characters presume that they may get through a group of walkers unnoticed if they rub themselves with a killed walker's blood and thus start to smell like them. The mechanism of infection is not completely known yet, and thus Rick warns the others from skin or eye contact with the walker's blood. However, what comes next is quite imprudent: The players wear protective suits and gloves, but the blood splatters around, and they also rub their collars etc. The coarseness of these actions is nearly inconceivable in the framework of a psychologically realistic interpretation of film diegesis. Who would spray around blood if he or she has to fear to become a zombie the next moment? However, the characters act so carelessly because they only have to comply with the scheme, only the idea and the fact that all items required are available count. Usually, that is not how movies work, but computer games do (Juul, *Half-Real* 575). However, this proposition should be qualified. The trick described, i.e. rubbing oneself with walker blood and slinging on their guts has a considerable visual effect on TV. A series about zombies, although they are never called that, cannot forgo horror. In a game, a trick that has proven to work once would be used more often afterwards. In the series, however, this is not the case. And it does not always work. If it is used and works, that means that the game goes on without any loss or that the action goes on in the ludic sense. If, for whatever reason, nobody comes up with the idea to use the trick, or the application fails (s06e09), this happens for the narrative's sake, for suspense or dramatic escalation. It is a TV series after all. In this case, different requirements overlap--game logic on the one hand and dramatic effect on the other.

In *The Walking Dead*, there is one basic rule which is typical of games and is only found in simple narratives in this unequivocalty: You have to make decisions. In the first season, Rick speaks about it very explicitly (s01e06) and later it is mainly Carol who reminds the others of this maxim. However, the options for decision-making are shown as surprisingly limited if you take into account that it is a TV series that would have a lot of time to build up complex decision-making situations and more differentiated alternatives. In *The Walking Dead*, however, it is imperative that you can only do or refrain from doing one certain thing and you

have to decide very quickly. This makes sense if you consider that it is the equivalent of a game to a certain degree, because in a game you cannot program an infinite number of small variations. At the same time, in PC games it is precisely about showing that this is a world of choice among these limited alternatives. As I said before the narration is subordinated to the decision-making situation in game design according to Henry Jenkins (“Narrative Architecture” 121; Pias 158). Additionally, the figures are determined to always decide in the same way. Morgan at first always decides that he will not kill; Carol at first always decides that she will. Anyway, in case of doubt it comes to the decision of killing or getting killed, but actually that is not an option. And if there is no choice, motivation for actions ultimately becomes irrelevant. Actions simply have to be carried out if they seem feasible somehow, hoping that they will have been the right thing to do—the past perfect tense gets a special meaning in instructions with a ludic-final structure.

The often-mentioned party is worth closer inspection from the perspective of provisions of computer games. Once Rick has left his instructor Morgan, i.e. once the intro to the game is over, he is addressed by Glenn via a radio unit because he saw Rick from a roof being surrounded by walkers. There is already an association, i.e. a group of characters who have found out that they are better at coping with tasks together in order to survive. And one member of the group, Glenn, who has a privileged overview of the scenario or playing field from a roof, turns to Rick, the stranger, and helps him by telling him how to run before the already mentioned jump-and-run scene. Glenn’s stated reason for this act is that Rick may help him at some other point. So, Rick joins a party or the party joins Rick. That is how MMORPGs, i.e. Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games such as *World of Warcraft* or *Star Wars. The Old Republic* work. In these games, you have to band together in order to perform tasks; you need other players whose avatars have special skills, with the real player deciding about their qualitative and quantitative extent. Thus, the series includes strong and quick, reflecting and energetic characters, i.e. apart from the social experiment following the narrative logic, in whose framework values are a matter of negotiation, the party groups by physical, motor and basic psychological traits, just as you would imagine the basic constitution of avatars. E.g. the fact that Glenn is lightweight makes him the ideal player to be abseiled into a well in order to “fish” a walker. By trial and error, this has been found to be necessary because the walker would not ‘bite’ dead bait. In the course of the series, however, the walkers are pushed more into the background—already in the original comic, they account for less space than the matters of the living (Bünthe 150). They only constitute the backdrop of permanent threat that maintains a state of archaic anarchy. This backdrop is subject to a logic of escalation, because in the beginning there are individual walkers causing fear who have to be overcome in frightening moments, while later a huge mass of them has to be led around Alexandria in a concerted effort with sophisticated tactics and all characters acting at specific positions. But actually, quite different challenges have to be met: The human adversaries increase from the Governor during the third season to Negan in the sixth and seventh. Each season corresponds to a game level and each level becomes harder to survive.

But why would you want to survive in the first place? And what is worth dying for? (Tenga 1283) These topics are discussed so explicitly in the series that you cannot help noticing the existentialist trait of the series in view of end times (Kleiner). Once hopes of freeing the world from walkers are shattered, there is no other goal but to find a place where they all can survive. Survival at an adequate place seems possible, while the matter of a good life remains utopian, so at a certain point, survival becomes an end in itself. What should the characters survive for? They should survive in order to survive, they should survive in order to survive in order to facilitate survival for others who, in turn, eliminate adversaries in order to survive . . . The game becomes an end in itself and must go on level by level for its own sake. Maybe that is life, but, above all, that is the essence of online games that can constantly be programmed and played further and that have neither technical nor structural limits such as CD-ROMs or floppy disks. Either our character dies or we, the players, have to decide to quit playing at a random point. At least one character of *The Walking Dead* wants to quit the game. Carol leaves the group because she sees no sense in the everlasting circle of killing or getting killed and ultimately wants to die (s06e15). In connected computer games, quitting is not only difficult in itself but has consequences for other players who require certain skills. Thus, in the series, Morgan prevents Carol’s death. The infinite simulation, however, goes on without the individual player, because there are always enough players left in the game...

If goals matter, so do paths and so does space. We only have rough knowledge of the fact that the party is moving from somewhere in Georgia via Atlanta to Washington D.C., but neither the characters nor we have a complete overview. This corresponds to the structure of many construction or business simulation games and even more so of strategy games. In one of the classics of the genre, *The Settlers II*, for instance, a large part of the screen is always black. Only if we send our avatars to an area, a new part becomes visible and we may know what is there. From time to time we send out scouts. In *The Walking Dead*, Daryl is mostly filling this role. Space is only created by crossing it. This is also the case in games where we do not look at the game board from above, because the fictional space of the game also only becomes real when we enter in with a character, e.g. in action adventures such as *Tomb Raider* or first-person shooters such as *Doom* or *Counter-Strike* we never know what the next room will look like and what is lurking around the next corner. *The Walking Dead* becomes rather 'idyllic' in the third season when the party finds a well-fortified jailhouse. Now the group has a space that promises more than mere survival, viz. life. Apart from the fact that, once again, social values have to be negotiated at the narrative level, it is about building this habitat as such. There is a building secured by a fence, jail cells, weapons, a small plot of land, even forest in the immediate surroundings. The characters gather wood for heating and cooking, cultivate the soul and even raise pigs, wherever they may have come from. This is equivalent to a business simulation game such as *The Settlers II* where there are items such as lumberjacks, farmers, pig breeders etc. readily available and they only have to be installed as soon as there is enough space.

The visual design of space shapes, of course, one of the most relevant impressions of the graphic novel. In graphic novels a very important part of the narrative is drawn and so are the figures whose bodies matter beyond the question if they are round or flat (Baetens and Frey 162-167, 175). "Moreover, in the graphic novel the importance of characterization and spatialization is also increased by the difficulty of finding efficient and supple ways of visualizing temporal relationships . . ." (Baetens and Frey 167). So it is obvious that many of the aforesaid aspects of the television series can be explained by the fact that we are dealing with a transmedia phenomenon between comic and television. In some respect, the TV series is an adaption, viz. very close at its comic template: The camera setting of *The Walking Dead* TV series is similar to the point of view of the comic pictures, for example in many of them weapons are shown and we often do not only see Rick with a gun, but we look into his weapon's muzzle. All in all, the narratives of graphic novels come up in interdependence of text and picture which of course shapes the aesthetics of the television series as well. But as the graphic novel, in general, is neither tied to a certain content nor to a certain plot or motivational structure (Baetens and Frey 179) the final motivation of *The Walking Dead* TV series and comic cannot be described as a structure that is due to medium of comic. Even if the temporal dimension of *The Walking Dead* graphic novels is shaped by the graphic novels's tendency towards spatiality that does not necessarily include a final motivation. *The Walking Dead* graphic novel rather includes a gamified plot or motivation by itself. So both, the graphic novel and the TV series have a motivational and/or time structure that is not bound to their specific medial requirements but that are owed to adventure PC games.

And so on it goes, level by level with the graphic novel and the TV series. What could put an end to the series? Kirkman's will or plummeting audience ratings. But there are no compelling structural reasons for the series to end. And just like with a soap opera, viewers may join at any point. The rules of this world are quickly learnt. As characters die at regular intervals anyway, new ones have to be built up rather quickly, so every novice viewer always finds a new identification figure soon. The series really works like a MMORPG. Game logic, however, does not only affect the series at production and structural level, but gameplay may have moulded viewers in such a way that there is no end in sight in terms of reception either. Watching series requires a certain amount of patience. If a series is not convincing right from the start you wait a bit whether and until you 'get in' or until a rather lacking season is over. In 1688, Christian Tomasius has one of the characters in a dialogue play remark that novels are a problem even if you do not categorically deny that they have their qualities and uses, simply because they are long and you only find out after a time-consuming reading experience whether the investment was worthwhile (84). Discussions about impact such as those taking place when the novel was a novelty come up with every new medium, format or genre. In this context, the excited discussions about TV and computer games are already a thing of the past. However, it is interesting to contemplate the impact of computer games on the sense of time in view

of the current mega-series. The convergence of games and series shown in this context includes recipients and their expectations and skills. Not only since there are MMORPGs, but rather since the LAN parties of the 1990s, when computers were gathered and connected to a network in a large room in order to play for a whole weekend, the game players' horizons of expectation have changed. The duration of medial offers, as well as the reception practice, have become longer. We have leisure again. This may be seen as a positive effect of computer games while others view gameplay as practice for social selection or neoliberal attitudes, i.e. for struggling with the economic treadmill. Thus, for many viewers of *The Walking Dead* the question about the end probably does not arise, while on the other hand there is a virulent discourse about the endlessness of the series.⁵ What is familiar for some may be strange for others, but anyway the idea that the narrative logic of *The Walking Dead* is replaced by a ludic logic intrudes itself, which is due to a changed context of media reception. The series and its success can be explained not consistently, but at some points, by seeing it as a gamified construct. After all, *The Walking Dead* does not include an increase of complexity of the narrative, but a turn towards ludic, but not less complex structures (Mittell).

Now these ludic elements within fiction may be discussed from a general game theory perspective⁶—psychologically or sociologically—or be interpreted in terms of existential philosophy (Kleiner); and/or the specific aesthetical-structural dimension of ludic moments may be identified with a view to games and the transmedial configuration of the series. The latter approach does justice to the idea that transmedia phenomena combine formal and discursive aspects, viz. that epistemological frameworks get in motion or are newly created when the aesthetical requirements of certain media are mingled together. We cannot only notice an interaction between different media but also an interactive dynamics between form and content, meaning etc. A last look on motivational structures of the series shows a paradoxical design. We have a final motivation without a final goal or solution. In literary history we have either a causal—psychological—motivation, e.g. the enlightened *Bildungsroman*, or if we have a final motivation, that leads to a consistent and meaningful end, e.g. ancient and medieval novels or epics. In contrast, *The Walking Dead* seems to have a realistic existentialist design at first glance, because in real life our acting is always contingent and open to thousands of possibilities and only one thing is clear: We will all die. The artificial construct of the TV series *The Walking Dead* seems to reflect this, but perhaps this is rather due to the transmedial design with regards to PC games, because the series has imported this structure from them. At least we have to take this into consideration. If a literary work has a final motivation this points to a certain epistemological framework, because alternatives are possible with regards to technical requirements. If a PC game has a final motivation, this need not to be due to a certain discursive disposition, but it is a result of technical possibilities. So beyond other aspects a media determinism is at work. Only by accident a PC game revives ancient and medieval narrative structures. Thus, its final motivation is a new phenomenon only with homologies to certain established narrative structures. We are not confronted with a consistent or limited worldview but with a limitation of storage capacity. If then artworks with less limited technical capacities and possibilities come into play, MMORPGs or a TV series, we have to think about what could be implied or effected when the final motivation remains. In that case the final motivation leads to the void or, which may be the same, to endlessness. In contrast to Guybrush Theepwood, who was able to embrace Elaine at the end, we will never reach a goal. And perhaps the fact that this structure is at work in a TV series where it is not necessary out of technical reasons shows that we do not need to. The design of the series indicates a new kind of sense of time and contingency. Perhaps due to our gameplay experiences we can appreciate or even enjoy this and refrain not only from a religious closed worldview but also from an enlightened as well as a Marxist belief in a meaningful progress. Media determinism and transmedia processes might even

⁵ Cf. the conference by Johannes Pause on *The Walking Dead* with the title „Nicht tot zu kriegen. *The Walking Dead* und die Hölle der Serialität.“ at Dresden Technical University.

⁶ Werber, Niels. „Überleben im Ausnahmezustand. Politische Experimente in *The Walking Dead*.“ *Medialisierungen der Macht*. Ed. Irina Gradinari, Nikolas Immer and Johannes Pause. Print in Progress. I kindly thank Niels Werber for providing the manuscript. The *The Walking Dead* computer games, which obviously by layout are essentially games in contrast to the series, may then also be of didactical use (Staaby, Tobias. „Zombie-based Critical Learning. Teaching Moral Philosophy with *The Walking Dead*.“ *Well played* 4:2 (2015), 76-91). In a very convincing way Angela Tenga and Jonathan Bassett chose Terror Management Theory and Moral Foundation Theory (Tenga, Bassett. “You kill or you die and you kill”).

cause a new concept of crises. According to the Ancient Greek word *crises* means that we have to deal with a peaking, a situation in which we are on top of the edge what simultaneously means that we have reached a turning point. By far not always but sometimes it is possible to solve this situation with a last conscious, but not less contingent decision after the whole process has been accompanied by more or less contingent decisions. In contrast, online PC games are all in all training grounds for crises where you can learn: after the crises is before the crises. That means that there are no crises at all. Due to the transmediation of this structure into a TV series a new sense for crises gains currency and is getting normalized, because television has higher recipient ratings than PC games. *The Walking Dead's* scenario of zombies which have always been projections screens for crises and the series' ludic logic which is one of crises and which turns crises into an endless process fit very well to each other. And the apocalyptic background reflects current cultural debates. In real life media stages a future apocalypse because of global warming and regularly—especially before the World Climate Conferences—it is said that time is really running out. I am not going to deny that, but the repetition shows that even kairological rhetorics are endlessly repeatable (Werber and Lickhardt, “KlimaChoc,” Lickhardt and Werber, “Pest”). Endless time and endless decisions like in online PC games and in *The Walking Dead* TV series lead to a new capacity of dealing with contingency—and sometimes even a lust for contingency.

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