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Playing (Dutch) Game History. Designing Games with Historical Datasets (Abstract | 299 words)

Over the past two decades, games have increasingly been acknowledged as important technological (Camper 2012) and cultural historical artifacts (Pinchbeck et al. 2009). Consequently, various initiatives have been undertaken to preserve games as part of a country's¹, an industry's², or a community's³ heritage. Moreover, online archives like Mobygames⁴ or Boardgamegeek⁵ catalogue and categorize both current and past titles together with a wide range of other information such as the year of release, platform(s), or genre. All these initiatives are presenting a wide range of information about the complex genealogies of game history. However, due to the abundance of information and sorting criteria, these datasets do not easily reveal the historical insights and narratives they contain.

To address this issue, we propose a practice-based method, drawing on critical making (Ratto 2011) and experimental, self-reflexive game design (Waern and Back 2015; Gualeni 2016), to interpret (game-)historical datasets by developing, play-testing and remixing multiple game prototypes based on the same material. More specifically, we explore the recently created historical dataset of Dutch games⁶ to assess how the prototypes as historiographical 'lenses' (Therrien 2015) produce different, interrelated views on game history. We draw on the notions of narrative sensemaking (Cunliffe and Coupland 2012) and narrative inquiry (Kim 2015) to explore how designing and playing the prototypes produces numerous, partially overlapping emergent historiographical narratives (Atkins 2003). This approach allows for a critical discussion of the "complex course of descent" (Foucault 1977) which has formed the Dutch gaming present, laying bare the accidents, deviations and different emplotments (White 1984) that produce histories of companies, of genres, and of appropriating foreign motifs and themes. Finally, the method promises an exploration of the politics of canonization (Staiger 1985) of (Dutch) games, which still constitute an understudied aspect of contemporary game history (Lowood et al. 2007).

¹ Cf. the Beeld en Geluid game preservation initiative at <https://www.beeldengeluid.nl/kennis/projecten/game-on>.

² Cf. e.g. the Computerspielemuseum in Berlin at http://www.computerspielemuseum.de/1210_Home.htm.

³ Cf. initiatives by fan communities such as [Awesomospace](https://www.awesomospace.com/).

⁴ Cf. <http://www.mobygames.com/>.

⁵ Cf. <https://boardgamegeek.com/>.

⁶ Cf. <https://www.beeldengeluid.nl/kennis/projecten/game-on>.

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