

## Compassionate Play in the Ludic Century

James Dyer

Utrecht University

### Abstract

In 2013 game designer Eric Zimmerman wrote a provocative manifesto entitled 'Manifesto for a Ludic Century' (2013a), in which Zimmerman declares the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's dominant cultural form to be games. Consequently, Zimmerman proposes that the individual occupant of the century is therefore in a continuous state of game engagement. As such, this re-contextualisation of game space and play, indefinitely articulates the individual as a constant player and character, and thusly challenges the notions of selfhood. Importantly it should be noted, the state of a ludic century is explicitly assumed as a truth, however superficial it may appear. Accordingly, this paper is then afforded to be an extended hypothesis of the proposed ludic century, rather than a critical dissection and response to Zimmerman's manifesto. This enables a hermeneutic framing of the questions: 'What does it mean to live in a ludic century?' and 'in what capacity may the self exist in the ludic century?' These questions will attempt to distinguish play as an inherent cultural logic that extends beyond the limitations of explicit 'gamification' or instrumental play (Stenros *et al.* 2009; Zichermann 2010). Concluding, it is claimed that the ludic century elicits a sustained delusion of self, as the player is confined to the designed game structure, which inhibits authentic engagement and interaction with environment and self. It is proposed that this evokes a form of suffering, the compassionate play within the ludic century.

### Keywords

Ludic Century; selfhood; responsible agency; free will; pervasive games

Press Start 2014 | Volume 1 | Issue 1

ISSN: 2055-8198

URL: <http://press-start.gla.ac.uk>



Press Start is an open access student journal that publishes the best undergraduate and postgraduate research, essays and dissertations from across the multidisciplinary subject of game studies. Press Start is published by HATII at the University of Glasgow.

## Introduction

In 2013 game designer Eric Zimmerman wrote a provocative manifesto titled 'Manifesto for a Ludic Century' (2013a), in which he declares the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's dominant cultural form to be games. Zimmerman purports that the systemic nature of games is seeping into the societal and cultural orders, and as such will inform the individual occupants' direct experience and comprehension of environment. This is a proposed phenomenological shift, which is to say a shift in direct experiences. In the supposed ludic "world of systems" (ibid.) the individual engages with culture and media on a "systemic, modular, customizable, and participatory" level (ibid.). As such, the individual is in a continuous state of game engagement and play. This re-contextualisation of game space and play indefinitely articulates the individual occupant as a continuous player and character, and as such challenges the notions of selfhood, as being the individual's notion of self. This controversial manifesto will be the impetus for the following paper.

However, it should be noted that this paper is not concerned with a critical dissection or reactionary response to Zimmerman's manifesto, there are already more than enough academic publications and online debates that address this (Chaplin, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Stein, 2013). Conversely, this paper explicitly assumes a prophetic perspective of the manifesto. Therefore, as an extended hypothesis, this paper explores the possible parameters of an individual existing in the ludic century within the defined factions of Zimmerman's manifesto. That is to say, the premise of this entire paper relies on the suspension of a counter argument towards the manifesto, and readily assumes the hypothetical situation of a ludic century. Whilst this may seem in some way perversely disobedient within the context of balanced academia, it is noted that this paper is written as a contribution towards the discourse of the ludic century, as a supplementary and alternative perspective, and not as a holistic argument or (re)-presentation of Zimmerman's manifesto.

Firstly, this paper intends to explore, in an expressive manner, the possibilities of existing in a ludic century. This is approached hermeneutically by addressing Zimmerman's manifesto and defining the proposed coordinates of the ludic century. This is effectively outlining the conditions of the ludic environment, and how it differs from the traditional environment as well as how it transposes the generalised perspective of gameplay. Due to the proposition of a perpetual state of game engagement, play will be acknowledged as transcending its normative polemic distinctions (Huizinga, 1944; Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). Seemingly, play in the ludic century is presented within a serious mind-set and ordinary context (Stenros *et al.*, 2009), and as such this distinguishes play as an inherent cultural logic that extends beyond the

limitations of explicit "gamification" or instrumental play (Stenros *et al.*, 2009; Zichermann, 2010). Therefore, this developed reframing of play, as proposed by Zimmerman, may elicit a conflict within the paradigms of selfhood. That is to say, selfhood, as being the entirety of one's own essential being, that may individuate them from others, allow self-awareness and encourage responsible and autonomous behaviour, may in fact be challenged within the contributed notions of persistent play in the ludic century. This investigation is framed within the question; in what capacity may the self exist in the ludic century?

This question will be presented as a symmetrical argumentation to the contemporary notions of free will and responsible agency (Daly and Žižek, 2004; Habermas, 2007). This is a somewhat recurring topic of interest in neuroscience and philosophy (Anderson, 2007; Libet, 1985) and seems to present a coalescing overlap with the proposed ludic century. Conclusively, it is stated that the ludic century elicits a sustained delusion of self, as the player is confined to the designed game structure, which inhibits authentic engagement and interaction. It is this that is claimed to evoke compassionate play within the ludic century. The word compassion is comprised of the prefix "com-" meaning "with" and the suffix "passio(n)" meaning "suffering", as such, it is claimed that play in the ludic century is with suffering.

### The Ludic Century

In game designer Eric Zimmerman's 2013 'Manifesto for a Ludic Century' he purports the current age to be an age orientated around information at play, which features games as the dominant cultural form. As surmised by Zimmerman, this is a shift from the last century's dominant cultural form as being moving image. This cultural shift, for Zimmerman, presents itself through a structure of a systemic society, claiming that

the ways that we work and communicate, research and learn, socialise and romance, conduct our finances and communicate with our governments, are all intimately intertwined with complex systems of information [...] [f]or such a systemic society, games make a natural fit (Zimmerman, 2013a).

Zimmerman proceeds to declare that an analytical interfacing within this systemic society does not provide sufficient engagement, but rather that an appropriate form of engagement must be enacted on a playful level. This is something that, for Zimmerman, inexorably leads to a non-passive model of inhabitancy, and as such "[w]e must learn to be designers, to recognize how and why systems are constructed, and to try to make them better" (ibid.). Therefore, Zimmerman is proposing a particular societal state which inculcates a cultural value in the player-designer; "[a]s more people play more deeply in the Ludic Century, the lines will become increasingly blurred between game players and game designers" (ibid.). Needless to say, the manifesto provoked a high

degree of controversy and attracted its fair share of criticism (Chaplin, 2013). These criticisms ranged from the entire absence of the basic need of a manifesto's call to action (Johnson, 2013), to claims of Zimmerman's manifesto being concerned primarily with a niche idealised mono-culture and addressing the ludic century through an inherent techno-centric relevance (Stein, 2013).

What should be noted, however, is that Zimmerman readily avows that the manifesto was "incredibly self-serving", stating on his website: "In the future, games will be the central force in culture, and everyone will be a game designer. Is it really hard to believe that this was written by... *a game designer?* (Original emphasis)" (Zimmerman, 2013b).

Zimmerman also wrote, as a response to a Tweet: "I was hoping for opposition to the wildly unsubstantiated and self-serving claims of the manifesto" (Zimmerman, 2013c). This effectively designates the manifesto to be written all in good humour and as an ironic sentiment to engage polemic within the gaming community. Nonetheless, Zimmerman adheres to his claims, positing "perhaps the ludic century won't end up being about 'games' as we know them at all" (ibid.). He makes an explicit separation from the reception of the ludic century as engendering any form of a "gamified" culture. 'Gamification' is something that he defines as a process in which the superficial aspects of games; levels, maps, points, characters and so on, are applied in a manner purely to engage an 'audience', this is the "instrumentalisation of games" (Zimmerman, 2013d).

It is unclear in the manifesto how, or specifically by whom, this shift will become initiated, yet Zimmerman's ambiguity in this instance instils optimism that this shift is not bound to a specific generation as being the most susceptible to the shift. Unlike the rather stilted claims proposed by author and game enthusiast Gabe Zichermann, a strong advocate of gamification, who presents a rather deflating and insipidly titled, "Generation G". A generation of gamers who have been "re-wired" by gaming dynamics, altering their culture, mechanics, skill sets and so on. For Zichermann, this generation have radically mutated abilities and contorted perspectives of the world (Zichermann, 2011). Needless to say, this is somewhat of a vapid lifeless claim, and it is an exercise that perpetually alienates and creates spectacles of generations, mythologizing and "massifying" groups of individuals.

The key fundamental difference between Zichermann and Zimmerman's approach to a play orientated society is the implicit distinctions between mind-set and context (Stenros *et al.* 2009, p. 271). "[W]e can make government fun, we can make getting fit fun, we can make *searching* fun... we can make anything fun or work depending on its design" (Zichermann, 2010). Zichermann is clearly proposing a serious mind-set in a playful context. A hypothetical example may be observed whilst paying taxes; a serious mind set is assumed for what is considered 'work' – that is to say a 'not play' activity. Yet, if the tax form has

somehow been “gamified”, in which there is a form of immediate challenge and reward designed into the task, the “ordinary context” has now transgressed to a “playful context”. Which, for Stenros, evokes a form of “instrumental play”, in which “the context of play is utilized for an external purpose” (Stenros *et al.* 2009, p. 271) i.e. efficiency in tax payments.

This is fundamentally on the contrary to Zimmerman’s radical proposition. It appears that Zimmerman is proposing, within the ludic century, “ordinary life” as produced through a “serious mind-set” within an “ordinary context”, will become entirely informed by play on a basal level. That is to say, play is a phenomenon that will inform life in its utter entirety. Play will be intertwined with ordinary life in such a way that it will become impossible, and incomprehensible, to uncouple it from ones direct experiences. In the ludic century play becomes a prevalent penetrating influence beyond mere “instrumentalisation”, as Zimmerman states “perhaps the ludic century won’t end up being about ‘games’ as we know them at all” (2013c).

Certainly, this clear difference challenges the core notions within the designation of play and non-play, which is to say that, for Zimmerman, even the space of non-play will still be occupied and informed, on some level, by play. This rather convoluted binarism of play and non-play is a continuously contested subject, notably throughout the multiple iterations, definitions and applications of the “magic circle” (Huizinga, 1980). It would seem to be a rite of passage, in a critical discourse of games, to diligently pick the concept and metaphor to pieces, to iconoclastically dethrone its rather grandiose status (Zimmerman, 2014).

Concordantly, there have been several instances of re-sculpting and grafting of new terminologies within the protocol of the magic circle (Castrova, 2005; Lammes, 2006, Juul, 2008). In some instances there are declarations for it to be discharged from studies all together (Crawford, 2009; Calleja, 2012; Zimmerman, 2014). Nonetheless, the semantic squabbles are enough to crystallise that there is a true pertinent value in the conceptual division between play and non-play. As the ubiquitous space of play is one of the key factions of Zimmerman’s manifesto, there is applicable value in expounding the argumentation and explicating the contextual relevance of the space(s) of play.

### **A Magic Space of Play**

The attempts at defining the spaces of play are of great importance, even if they do retain a futility within their self-referential locale of definition from within specific studies, as a working definition. The somewhat verbose definitions of spaces of play are in fact a hermeneutic process of articulation; an interpretation that implicitly regards what is meant when one claims to be in or out of play. The following instances outline a fraction of the surrounding discourse in concern with this

junction of interpretation. The focus will be held around the apparent orthodox approach within the contentious subject of the "magic circle". The magic circle is a conceptual metaphor as coined by Johan Huizinga in 'Homo Ludens' (1958), and expounded in 'Rules of Play' (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). It is a pseudo-dogmatic approach that is unremittingly flogged by academics. The apparent concrete structure denotes a separation and demarcation of the structures and spaces of play and non-play as being outside of reality and as reality itself. As such, this concept is engaged on a much deeper ontological level than it seems to acknowledge. Nevertheless, it is not clear whom, if anyone at all, judiciously upholds these principles of the magic circle. In Zimmerman's cathartic essay 'Jerked Around by the Magic Circle' (2014), he dispels the mist of confusion that surrounds this concept, and declares it to be a hyper-structuralist fiction exercised by no one, yet the effigy of the phantom jerk continues to be burned: "The magic circle jerk *doesn't exist*. Nobody really takes the hard line that everyone wants to criticise. I'm sick of the magic cycle jerk. Let's bury the bastard (original emphasis)" (ibid.).

Gordon Calleja concordantly adheres to Zimmerman's perspective; "It is high time that we abandon the concept of the magic circle altogether, (along with modifications thereof)" (2012). In adherence, this paper will not linger on the cataclysmic subject matter, as the proverbial dead horse that it is. Neither will there be an attempt to create a new catchment buzzword, or repackaged 'essence' so as to comply with the new factions of the ludic century. However, other variations on the magic circle will be noted so as to reveal the strata of discourse surrounding the subject. This will help to frame the radical propositions of spaces of play within the ludic century, and its divergence from traditional modes of engagement.

There have been multiple attempts to re-classify and remodel the notions of the magic circle, as if it were a respected ancient relic. One of these attempts was by economist and game specialist Edward Castranova. He attempts to transpose the metaphorical circle to a "porous" semi permeable membrane, which may be "considered a shield of sorts, protecting the fantasy world from the outside world" (Castranova, 2005, p. 147). Cosmetically, this has the appearance of manipulating the concept of the magic circle by re-establishing the function of the metaphor, swapping the "circle" for a "membrane" that may be passed between. Yet, Castranova preserves Huizinga's magic binarism of play and non-play by phrasing his boundaries as "earthly" and "synthetic" worlds. This ultimately sounds very similar to Salen and Zimmerman's definition of the original magic circle: "To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps *creating one as a game begins* (emphasis added)" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, p. 3). These are the non-inherent emergent rules of play as created by the players.

There have been similar attempts to reconfigure and re-place the magic circle within other metaphorical forms, such as a puzzle piece (Juil, 2008) or a node (Lammes, 2006), but they each seem to maintain an ascription of play to a specificity of confining borders. Yet, these borders are inherently defined and transgressed by the players in each instance of play. As noted by game scholar T.L. Taylor, "[a]s players blend game and nongame space, they simultaneously complicate preconceptions about authentic or legitimate play" (p.113, 2007). These few examples of the convoluted argumentation that orbits the subject of the magic circle, and more generally the spaces of play and non-play, serve to illustrate the complexities within the systemic nature of a ludic century that Zimmerman proposes.

Explicitly demarcating concrete borders or suggesting permeable membranes is ill suited to such a systemic society, as it inherently warrants a generic binarism and implies normative behaviours. Meaning, there is no leniency for deviation in play-spaces, or acknowledgement of 'abnormal' behaviours in play. It is a rigid system that does not foster independent development and creation, which are integral factions within Zimmerman's manifesto. Rather, there may be more value in establishing the possibilities for a multiplicity of assembled play and non-play spaces, beyond a juxtaposed antagonism. That is to say, each instance of play may define its own form of play-space, which is not indebted to the persistent paradigm of binarisms. As such, there must be an allowance for an irregular oscillation of border, one that may flex with each shift and modulation that is initiated by the players. Therefore, the working definition of play-space becomes an empirical phenomenological definition. Which is to say, with each unique occurrence of play there may be no regularity or rigidity of border, or generic utilisation of play-spaces beyond the direct experience.

To clarify, each instance of play intrinsically solicits an isolated specific form of border definition, which may oscillate irregularly. That is to say, the border may shift and deform itself with each moment of play enacted by the players. Therefore, there may be no ascribed border, or ultimate definition of "border"; its only consistency is in its transitory characteristics. As such, this is why the definition and actuality of "border" and play-space remains within an empirical spectrum, it must be experienced to be verified and to be actuated. Yet, it may not remain 'actual' as a generic applicable definition beyond that specific moment of play experience. Sophomorically, this is somewhat similar to the infamous line "you had to be there", trying to setup the situation for a joke and then attempting to describe and re-enact that joke never quite delivers the expected response, even though all the words were said in the right order and all the right expressions were made. The joke had to be experienced for what it was in that moment, and may not later be ascribed to dislocated conditions, ergo "you had to be there", just like the rules of play and defined borders of play-space.

Additionally, this working definition also gels with Zimmerman's proposal within his manifesto that "[i]n the Ludic Century, everyone will be a game designer" (2013a). He claims that when the players envelope themselves deep within a game, they engage on a level similar to that of a designer. Therefore, the player experiences a perspective equal to that of a rule maker, constructor and architect whilst in play.

### To Live in the Ludic Century

It may be surmised at this juncture, that to live in the ludic century means to be both player and designer in a perpetual state of transgressing and contorting borders. These borders may be the definition of the player-designer role, the attribution of play-space(s) as well as the explicit rules of play. It would also appear that the self, that is to say the unique distinguishable individual, is elicited to behave in any way they themselves deem fit. This is because the self issues the defined borders and modes of engaged play and non-play, as previously stated. Certainly, this goes beyond the somewhat perfunctory binary attribution of defining what is "good" and "bad", but may transgress to modes in which the self may maintain responsibility for actions. For instance, in an extreme example, if the "rules" of Social Darwinism are initiated there may be an enabled affordance towards a sociological disavowal. The "rules" of Social Darwinism permit the conception of biological superiority, and causally also inoculates sociological attitude and cultural logic. As such, one may witness a human suffering who also seems to match the descriptions of an apparent weaker race, and as such, within the "rules of play", they are suffering justly and therefore it is beyond ones responsibility to help. Therefore, the player-designer articulates and enacts the coordinates of their own responsible behaviour.

At cursory glance, this sentiment of the ludic century fostering the possibilities for players defining their own rules and spaces of play has the appearance of being an effective proclamation of independence and freedom. It declares that the player within the ludic century is not subjected or marginalised by rules and constructed boundaries beyond their own construction, but is apparently an autonomous agent, whom may engage in the definition of their own game. However, paradoxically this will be explicated as a practice of self-deception and negation. Additionally, this engenders a symmetrical argumentation to the contemporary notions of free will and responsible agency.

Therefore, within the capacity of being a player-designer, it is elicited that perhaps a new form of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) may become instated. Bad faith is effectively a deviance and falsehood initiated by the self to deceive the self. Which is to say, "the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person" (Sartre, 1984, p. 89). These lies inform ones actions and direct phenomenological engagement within their environment, ultimately producing a person



whom is victimised by their own life choices. This form of lying may be experienced in a variety of instances and in varying degrees of severity. For example, claiming to not be able to leave work until 6 p.m. is in fact a lie, there is a choice to stay at work because one wishes to keep ones job and get paid money for their time. There are no chains or locked doors keeping this person captive, and as such there is an inherent choice in their actions that is being negated. Therefore, in the ludic century, it is possible that the individual designs the terms and rules in which they engage with their environment, and then enacts these in the role of the played character.

Using Chess as an example, each piece has a defined restriction of movement, a Pawn may only move one square on each turn, but a Knight may 'jump over' pieces and moves in an 'L' shape. These are restrictions ingrained to the defined pieces within the state of play. Yet, of course, if these Chess pieces were given to a child, one would swiftly realise that all the pieces can also leave the board, be thrown across the room, chewed and hidden under the furniture. Yet, in the ludic century, these intrinsic rules of play are practiced continuously in an "ordinary context" and "serious mind-set", this is the bad faith of acting-as-if-unable when in fact able. Importantly, this actuated mode of action is entirely engendered by the "deceived", as they occupy the role of player-designer, the deceived and the deceiver is one and the same.

Consequently, within the ludic century the fabricated characteristics of the played character do not exist, in the sense that the characteristics, or essence, do not precede the acting individual self. They are transcendent, as an exterior not belonging to the individual. An action may be "the intention of the character of which he plays [...] but this character, precisely because he *does not exist*, is a transcendent (original emphasis)" (Sartre, 1984, p. 88). Just as with Live Action Roleplaying (LARP), the cloak of a wizard may be donned, but it makes the wearer no more magical than without the cloak. The cloak is not belonging to the self, but rather to the played character. Therefore, there is a seemingly present illusory self in the ludic century, appearing as an entirely fictitious set of actions in accordance to a set of arbitrary rules and laws. The self is in in-existence, in a state of non-being, due to its manifestation through nomological mechanisms and rules that are defined by the self, yet enacted by the played character. This is to say, the self, as the unique distinguishable individual, may never be actuated beyond the actions of defining rules. The played character is the dominant form, i.e. one is present more often as a wizard than as one's self.

Once the rules are defined the metaphorical cloak is worn and the played character is manifest as the dominant form of engagement, not the self. One behaves and (inter)-acts in everyday life as character, rather than self. Additionally, as previously defined, the outlined boundaries of play, within rules, roles and spaces, are subsequently

contorted and redefined by the player, as character, within each unique occurrence of play. That is to say, the LARP wizard may now, as a character, rearticulate the rules of game engagement without the need to remove his cloak and "re-enter" into the role of self.

Concordantly, it may be surmised that to live in the ludic century is to live as a dislocated self, and as an engendered character in play, which challenges the traditional concepts of autonomy and free will. As such, there is a value in briefly re-framing these dense concepts by noting the contemporary neuroscientific and philosophical engagements of free will and their inherent overlap with the framework of Zimmerman's manifesto. Notably, this will be issued via Jürgen Habermas and Slavoj Žižek's reactions to a recent scientific publication that claims "[w]e stand at the threshold of seeing our image of ourselves considerably shaken in the foreseeable future" (Elger *et al.* 2004, p. 37).

### **Free Will: A Non-Substantial Self**

Ultimately, the core of the free will argument is orientated around variations of questions engaged with autonomy and accountability for actions. As such, the overarching structure is concerned predominantly with the capacity of how an individual may maintain a sense of self. Some neuroscientific discoveries, such as Benjamin Libet's landmark experiments, have challenged the presumptive sense of agency within free voluntary actions by demonstrating that a voluntary act is in fact preceded by, what Libet calls, a "readiness potential" (Libet, 1985, p. 529). What this means is that there is a prior correlative brain activity that leads up to an endogenous voluntary act, an act that has an internal origin with no exterior influences. As such, this means that a seemingly conscious act of free will can actually be predicted, due to the subconscious brain activity that occurs up to half a second before the act. Therefore, this is immediately challenging the notions of an individual's agency and acts of free will. Of course, this discovery made by Libet has been challenged due to its interpretative nature (Trevena and Miller, 2002), and there have been many disputes and attempts to contradict his experiments (Brass and Haggard, 2007). Nonetheless, this illustrates that the notions of free will and responsible agency are in a contestable state, and as such may warrant license for extended hypothetical investigation.

Specifically, this will take shape within a critical response to pragmatist philosopher Jürgen Habermas' 2007 paper in concern with free will, from a perspective of self-perception and responsible agency (Habermas, 2007). Habermas declares outright that there is an "indisputable" progression emerging in neuroscience, which is something that poses a "genuine threat to the language game of responsible agency" (*ibid.*, p. 13). Habermas cites the journal *Brain and Mind (Gehirn und Geist)*, in which eleven neuroscientists declare free will to be an illusion, claiming that in the near future the prediction of psychological processes such as

sensations, emotions, decisions and so on, will be possible. Consequently, "[w]e stand at the threshold of seeing our image of ourselves considerably shaken in the foreseeable future" (Elger *et al.*, 2004, p. 37). For Habermas, this means that if motivations, actions and deliberations may be reduced to a "nomologically determined interaction" - an interaction bound to reasonless absurd law, "then we would have to view free will as a fiction" (Habermas, 2007, p. 20). Which is to say, if all actions and thoughts may be predicted then they must in some way pertain to a causal or calculable reason and this, as such, negates the key sentiments of free will and autonomous agency.

Ultimately, in the adversary confrontation of a diminished notion of self, Habermas steers towards an idealist preservation of the 'traditional' notions of self; claiming that the knowledge gained from the neuroscientific investigations should be effectively ignored. It appears that Habermas wants to prohibit the advancement of knowledge to sustain an illusory sense of self. Almost as if not wanting to open one's eyes after waking from a great dream, so as not to acknowledge the world outside. This is a sentiment that appears to hold a direct symmetry within the structure of the ludic century. In which, the "play" of self within the engendered character, as with the aforementioned cloak wearing wizard in LARP, takes precedence over the possible radical confrontation and enlightenment of engagement with the actual authentic self, the non-substantial self. Which is to say, persistent engagement with the character is a direct avoidance of engagement with the actual self. This perspective is also present in cultural critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek's writing on a conference at which Habermas spoke.

Žižek states that Habermas' solution is "death", and as such the paradox is that "Habermas, the great Enlightener, adopts basically the Old Catholic strategy of 'better not to know': in order to save human dignity, let's not probe too much" (Daly and Žižek, 2004, p. 93). Conversely, Žižek is exploring the capacity and possibility of a human life endowed with the knowledge of the self in non-existence. This is a theory that Žižek is framing within the Buddhist sentiment of *anatman*. Anatman is the self's inexistence, an emptiness, a non-substantial self. Žižek claims that the moment in which the scientific results that abolish free will are readily accepted, there would be an event of enlightenment. This would become an "attainment of Nirvana, which liberates us" (Žižek, 2014, p. 69). Sophomorically, this "liberation" through knowledge and acceptance may be compared with Christmas celebrations. Acknowledging that Father Christmas does not exist permits an enlightened understanding towards the holiday, and rather than ruining the holiday, the enlightened perspective details new avenues of experience.

What is important to note, is the liberation that Žižek refers to is in no sense transcendence. It is not a spiritual disconnect or uncoupling from the immediate environment, but rather emancipation from illusion so as

to live directly within the environment - a kind of harmony in discord. That is to say, Žižek is not proposing that some form of 'higher realm' may be accessed through the attained knowledge of a non-substantial self. Rather, he proposes that enlightenment may be attained within the already present direct experiences that are currently obfuscated due to the false illusion of self. Yet, this is contrary to what is occurring in the ludic century. The players are manipulating, reinvigorating and synthesizing the delusional sense of self. This is engaged through the player association, a connection to what may be called the character in play or "projected identity" (Stenros *et al.*, 2009, p. 260). Therefore, in the ludic century, enactments and engagements within the direct environment are synthesised.

Cosmetically, this is evident within the play of a game such as Parkour. In which, typically urban environments are re-contextualised as obstacles to be efficiently traversed by the player, the *traceur*, by "running, climbing, jumping, vaulting and quadrupedal movement" (Puddle and Maulder, 2013, p. 122). Therefore, the space is not being directly encountered for what it is in its original capacity, but instead repurposed to cohere with the active game. As such, in this sense I disagree with Stenros' deductions of "found" play space, he claims that "[t]he traceur uses urban landscape as a found playground (Stenros *et al.*, 2009, p. 262)". The playground is not "found" it is coerced into existence through the designed game. The space is engaged with as if it was something else, and this is elicited through the individually constructed boundaries, contextualisation and omnipresence of play. This is the true compassionate play. The word compassion is comprised of the prefix "com-" meaning "with" and the suffix "passio(n)" meaning "suffering". As such, the compassionate play in the ludic century is evoked within the active obfuscation and mutation of environment, an environment never being encountered, and the self that traverses the space is an illusory phantom.

This form of play has an inherent tone of desperation, as spaces are "psychogeographically" explored and erected in lieu of authentic confrontation and engagement. This is in some way similar to a child that never learns that a tree branch may be more than a sword or a gun. Therefore, the capacity in which the self may exist within the ludic century appears to be evident firstly as an actuator of boundaries, then as a player and finally as a designer within the character of gameplay. This model of engagement presented within the ludic century, intrinsically inhibits the capacity of the exploration of the non-substantial self, and fosters the potentialities of suffering through play, the compassionate play.

Whilst speaking at the Games for Change Conference in 2013 Eric Zimmerman stated that: "In my mind every game implies its player, it builds an implicit model of what it means to be human, by virtue of the way the game is structured and propagates that idea into the world"

(2013d). This brief statement distils the majority of the elements that were previously stated in this paper. Yet, in the ludic century games do not only *imply* its players through its structure, games are designed in such a way so as to actually *manifest* the implied model-player through play and imitation. Finally, I claim that the ludic century endorses the delusion of self through a faux-engagement, directly by not confronting the non-substantial self, or even the environment in which the delusion is enacted. This cultivates an individual whom maintains a detachment, anonymity and distance to the environment they exist in (Turner, 2003, p. 29). In the ludic century the individual is dethatched and ordered via subservience to nomological reasoning.

## Conclusion

The actuality of a ludic century in contemporary society is a heavily debatable subject, yet it was not the motive for this paper to engage such arguments. It was noted in the introductory stages of this paper that any dissection or critical reactionary response to Zimmerman's manifesto was not of concern, as there is already more than enough academic publications and online debates that address this (Chaplin, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Stein, 2013). Conversely, this paper explicitly assumed the position of an extended hypothesis that explored the possible parameters of an individual existing in the ludic century, structured within the defined factions of Zimmerman's manifesto. Whilst it may have seemed in some way perversely disobedient within the context of balanced academia, it was noted that this paper is written as a contribution towards the discourse of the ludic century, as a supplementary and alternative perspective, and not as a holistic argument or (re)-presentation of Zimmerman's manifesto.

The two salient points of enquiry were firstly, the framing of what it means to live in a ludic century, which was investigated via the polemic of play-space using the magic circle as contextual groundings for game and play orientated debate. It was concluded that the only consistency in the ideal of bordered spaces of play belonged to their transitory characteristics. This was surmised due to the fact that each instance of play intrinsically solicits an isolated specific form of border definition, which may oscillate irregularly. A border may shift and deform itself with each moment of play enacted by the players. This is proposed so as to progress beyond the re-articulation of traditional 'relic' binary definitions, and embrace a dynamic rather than concrete definition of play space. As such, the apparent empowerment of the player-designer within the ludic century challenged the fundamental notions of selfhood. Concordantly, this was framed within the symmetrical argumentation of the contemporary notions of free will and responsible agency.

This argumentation was framed around the theorists Jürgen Habermas and Slavoj Žižek. Habermas proposed a prohibition of the advancement of knowledge and a sustained delusion of self. Whereas Žižek

instantiated his perspective as akin to the Buddhist sentiment of *anatman*, as existing with the knowledge of the self's inexistence. The ludic century was then reasoned to be enacting the Habermasian reservation and sustained delusion of self which is actuated through the model of player-designer, and is placed in parallel with the Sartrean theory of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) as the deceived and the deceiver is one and the same. Finally it is claimed that the ludic century may in fact be fostering the disassociation and detachment from the direct environment, as well as inhibiting the possible authentic confrontation of the in-existence of self. It is this that is claimed to elicit suffering; the compassionate play within the ludic century.

It is hoped that this brief expressive investigation into the hypothetical situation of a true ludic century, may be acknowledged as a critical participation towards the discourse of games in culture, rather than a parochial reaction provoked by a broad manifesto. Perhaps, further research may regard the possible present similarities between an algorithmic logic and the systemic construction of the ludic century; both as rule-based systems that maintain radical influence on an individual's direct experience of environment. It has been made clear throughout this paper that the conclusive decision of declaring absolute truths of whether or not the ludic century is present, imminent or redundant hold little to no value. Yet, from a theoretical perspective there may be value in interpreting and defining what it means to be in such a condition, and this intern may encourage further debate and research.

## References

Anderson, J. (2007). *Introduction: Free will, neuroscience, and the participant perspective*. Featured in *Philosophical Explorations: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action*. Routledge.

Brass, M., & Haggard, P. (2007). *To Do or Not to Do: The Neural Signature of Self-Control*. Featured in *The Journal of Neuroscience*

Calleja, G. (2012). *Erasing the Magic Circle*. Featured in *Philosophy of Engineering and Technology*, pp. 77-95. Springer

Castrova, E. (2005). *The Almost-Magic Circle*. In *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*, pp. 147-162. University of Chicago Press.

Crawford, G. (2009). *Forgetting The Magic Circle (or Towards a Sociology of Video Games)*. University of Salford.

Daly, G., & Žižek, S. (2004). *Conversations With Žižek*. Polity Press.

Elger, C. E., A. D. Friederici, C. Koch, H. Luhmann, C. Von Der Malsburg, R. Menzel, H. Monyer, F. Roßler, G. Roth, H. Scheich, and W. Singer. (2004). *Das Manifest: Elf fu hrende Neurowissenschaftler*

*uber Gegenwart und Zukunft der Hirnforschung'*. Featured in *Gehirn und Geist* 6, pp. 30–37.

Habermas, J. (2007). *The Language Game of Responsible Agency and the Problem of Free Will: How can epistemic dualism be reconciled with ontological monism?* Featured in *'Philosophical Explorations: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action*. Routledge.

Huizinga, J. (1980). *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Redwood Burn Ltd. First published in 1944.

Juul, J. (2008). *The Magic Circle and the Puzzle Piece*. Retrieved from [http://opus.kobv.de/ubp/volltexte/2008/2455/pdf/digarec01\\_03.pdf](http://opus.kobv.de/ubp/volltexte/2008/2455/pdf/digarec01_03.pdf)

Lammes, S. (2006). *Spatial Regimes of the Digital Playground: Cultural Functions of Spatial Identification in Post-Colonial Computergames*. In: *Gaming Realities. A Challenge for Digital Culture*, pp. 236-243. Retrieved from <http://digiplay.info/node/3208>

Libet, B. (1985). *Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action*. In: *The Behavioural and Brain Sciences*.

Puddle, L. D., & Maulder P. S. (2013). *Ground Reaction Forces and Loading Rates Associated with Parkour and Traditional Drop Landing Techniques*. in *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, pp. 122-129. Retrieved from <http://www.jssm.org/vol12/n1/17/v12n1-17pdf.pdf>

Salen, K & Zimmerman, E. (2004). *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Sartre, J. P. (1984). *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Washington Square Press.

Stenros, J., Montola, M., Mäyrä, F. (2009). *Pervasive Games in Media Culture*. Featured in Montola, M., Stenros, J., & Waern, A. (eds.). In *Pervasive Games: Theory and Design*, pp. 257-276. Burlington: Morgan Kaufman.

Taylor, T.L. (2007). *Pushing the Borders: Player Participation and Game Culture*. In *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*, J. Karaganis (ed.), *Network\_Netplay*. New York: Social Science Research Council.

Trevena, J., & Miller, J. (2002). *Cortical Movement Preparation before and after a Conscious Decision to Move*. In *Consciousness and Cognition* Volume 11, Issue 2.

Turner, B. S. (1999). *The Possibility of Primitiveness: Towards a Sociology of Body Marks in Cool Societies*. In *Body & Society* 2003.

Zichermann, A. (2011). How Games Make Kids Smarter. TedXYouth. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2N-5maKZ9Q>

Zicherman, A. (2010). *Fun is the Future: Mastering Gamification*. Speaking at *GoogleTechTalk*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6O1gNVeaE4g>

Zimmerman, E. (2013a). *Manifesto for a Ludic Century*. Retrieved from <http://kotaku.com/manifesto-the-21st-century-will-be-defined-by-games-1275355204>

Zimmerman, E. (2013b). *What's wrong with the Ludic Century?* Retrieved from <http://ericzimmerman.wordpress.com/2013/09/12/whats-wrong-with-the-ludic-century/>

Zimmerman, E. (2013c). Twitter post. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/zimmermaneric/status/378728580702031872>

Zimmerman, E. (2013d). *G4C13 Keynote: Eric Zimmerman*. At the *Games For Change Conference*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRVa2Q5bq5o>

Zimmerman, E. (2014). *Jerked Around by the Magic Circle - Clearing the Air Ten Years Later*. Retrieved from [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/135063/jerked\\_around\\_by\\_the\\_magic\\_circle\\_.php?print=1](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/135063/jerked_around_by_the_magic_circle_.php?print=1)

Žižek, S. (2014). *Event: Philosophy in Transit*. Penguin Books.