Let's Play the Boston Tea Party - Exemplary Analysis of Historical Events in Digital Games

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Abstract

Digital games constitute a new form of presenting history: With unprecedented intensity, users are taking part in the game-world through active participation. This creates an individually staged, seemingly historical situation in which the plausibility-requirements can exceed the level of classical historical narration.[1] The crucial aspect is choosing which perspective is applied to a specific historical representation; the focus must be on the user's options for action, and their influence within the entire game-world. Other approaches are required when, for example, only a particular episode is to be investigated. This research shows how the analytical framework developed by Adam Chapman facilitates analyzing historical events represented in game-worlds (Chapman, Digital 59-172). The depiction of the Boston Tea Party in Assassin's Creed III provides an exemplary analysis, which compares relevant historiography. It will ultimately be concluded that the Sons of Liberty would not have been able to historicize the Boston Tea Party as a glorifying revolutionary act, if, as the game imagines it, dozens of British soldiers had been killed (Berg 14-15; Hochgeschwender 111; Humphrey 59-82).

Keywords: Digital Games, Historical Events, Historical Narratives, Boston Tea Party, Assassin's Creed III, British North America

1. Introduction

The current discussion about digital games and history is characterized by disparity, as well as by criticism of the accuracy of historical representations in video games. While critics argue that the inaccuracy of historical representations is attributed to 'history as a brand', the point with games is that they often do not intend to achieve accuracy.[2] Thus, the criticism is misleading. Digital games simply use a different understanding of history than historians would, because of their need for media-specific enactments that support their commercial requirements. When analyzing the historical representation in digital games, it is necessary to consider the interdependency between the media-specific ludic form, narrativity and iconicity (Hensel 146). We must ask how the game regulates what the player can do (gameplay) through an immanent system (game-structure), the same system that influences the historical representation and thus creates the game-world (Aarseth 2). Therefore, specific historical representations within the game-world have to be investigated by focusing on the user's options for action, and their influence within the entire game-world. Other approaches are required when, for example, only a particular episode is to be investigated. This research shows how the model for "playing games as actions" by Klimmt combined with the analytical framework developed by Adam Chapman allow analyzing historical events represented in game-worlds (Klimmt 69-73; Chapman, *Digital* 59-172). The depiction of the Boston Tea Party (henceforth referred to as BTP) in *Assassin's Creed III* provides an exemplary analysis, which compares relevant historiography. It will ultimately be concluded that the Sons of Liberty would not have been able to historicize the BTP as a glorifying revolutionary act, if, as the game imagines it, dozens of British soldiers had been killed (Berg 14-15; Hochgeschwender 111; Humphrey 59-82).

2. Analyzing historical events in digital games

A promising model for analyzing gameplay has been developed by Klimmt (Klimmt 69-73). In his model, he describes gameplay as a process that can be divided into several temporal procedural sections. The smallest part of this is the "Input-/Output-Loops" (I-/O-Loops), which describe the action of the player (e. g. clicking) and the resulting output of the digital game (Klimmt 70-71). Chains of I-/O-Loops are called episodes, which are concluded by the player through a specific action, motivated by the story of the game (Klimmt 71-72). An episode can be the same as a mission within the game and these episodes are always framed by the player's actions. Further differentiation of the actions taken while playing an episode or focusing I-/O-Loops narrows the complexity of research down to three possibilities. The first is a micro-perspective, which considers every activity of the player (see I-/O-Loops). The second is a meso-perspective, which focuses on specific coherent parts of the game content. The third is a macro-perspective that regards the communication process in its entirety (activity while gaming, Klimmt 70-75). However, I-/O-Loops tend to subside in immersive gameplay (Klimmt 102-115; Klimmt and Blake 76-78). Using a micro-perspective to investigate the depiction of historical representation does not seem to be expedient. While a macro-perspective enables us to reveal the mode of the historical representation, a meso-perspective permits us to focus on specific episodes, as for example, a historical event. Throughout the present article, the BTP in *Assassin's Creed III* is drawn upon as an example for performing such analysis. If this historical event and its representation within a game are to be investigated, we must consider them within the context of the entire game-world. Accordingly, if a meso-perspective is used analyzing the BTP, the underlying game-structure must still be analyzed through a macro-perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the game-world and its game-structure by analyzing gameplay (Aarseth 2-7). Chapman's analytical framework is particularly suitable for this purpose.

Chapman insists that content should not be analyzed separately from its form (Chapman, "Form" 44). This implies that the specificity of digital game-worlds should always be considered. A discourse on the accuracy of historical content in games, without an analysis of gameplay and the game-structure, is not sufficient because of the producers' (that is, developer historians') creating history with different goals in mind than gaining historical perspective according to books (Chapman, "Form" 42-43). "History is not a 'thing' that can be understood as separate from the forms in which it is produced, received, and argued" (Chapman, "Form" 44.). In his monograph, *Digital Games as History*, Chapman offers a model for analyzing historical representations in digital game-worlds (59-172). From a methodological point of view, Chapman focuses on the analysis of historical content based on his own gameplay-experience and proposes four analytical dimensions: epistemology and style of simulation, time, space, and narrative (see Table 1). A macro-perspective analysis aligned with these dimensions allows us to find out which "historical narrative" (Chapman, *Digital* 136-172) is present in the so-called (hi) story-play-space which is shaped by shared authorship of the player and the developer historian. This leads to an understanding of the ways in which history is designed through interaction within digital game-worlds (Digital 30-55, 131-132). The game series and games analyzed by Chapman show an extraordinary, but not necessarily complete, range of game-structures (*Digital* 61-69). However, a focus on emergent historical narratives created through gameplay allows us to compare these historical representations with current historiography from a meso-perspective.

3. Chapman's analytical framework

The following analytical categories must be seen as ends of a spectrum, whereas analyzed (hi)story-play-spaces should always be understood as categorical hybrids within the said spectrum (see Table 1). History in digital game-worlds constitutes modes of representation based on two completely different styles of simulation, while audio-visual processing needs

to be considered as the major factor. Since the different styles of simulation involve different epistemologies, the simulation style should be the first part of the analysis (Chapman, *Digital* 59-61). The time dimension entails three categories: X = play time (needed by the player to play), Y = fictive time (narrated by the game-world) and Z = realist time (duration of historical events or actions). The relation between these categories determines time within the game-world. Following Chapman, space in digital games is mainly determined by the player's perspective and actions. He also distinguishes this through a dichotomy, in this case between narrative gardens and canvas story structures, which reveal an intended story within the game-world (Chapman, *Digital* 100-109). The game-based narrative contains two parts: the narrative intended by the developer historian (framed narrative) as well as the narrative framed by gameplay (ludonarrative). The framed narrative is a pre-established story with movable pieces of scenery that structures the events and cannot be changed by the gameplay. The ludonarrative is an ongoing process, located between the beginning and ending of the framed narratives and is only specified through gameplay. The framed narrative has to be seen as the global control over the gameplay by the developer historian who directs and contextualizes the historical narration. Cutscenes are one example of the unalterable forms of narrative. Within these framing controls, possible gameplay is predetermined by developer historians. In this manner, the framing controls determine the continuation of the framed narrative within

Table 1: Analytical dimensions: epistemology and style of simulation, time, space, and narrative (table created based on Chapman, *Digital* 61–129)

	|----------------------- Hybrid Forms within the Spectrum -----------------------|
Style of Simulation + Epistemology	**Realistic Simulation** (Chapman, Digital 61–69) Surroundings, objects, events and characters are portrayed audio-visually as authentically as possible, regarding their physical and historical conditions. Realistic simulations try to approximate reality.	**Conceptual Simulation** (Chapman, Digital 69–79) Conceptual simulations are audio-visually less complex. Usually abstract symbols hint at information within the game-world. Realistic scaling, standards and relations are sidelined.
	Tends to Reconstructionist Approach (Chapman, Digital 79–83) The reconstructionist developer historian thinks of the production process as being objective and unaffected by social or ideological constraints. Discursive, multi-perspective or theoretical constructions of history are avoided. They show history as it "really happened".	**Tends to Constructionist Approach** (Chapman, Digital 79–83) Constructionist approaches try to approximate structures. Constructionist approaches are more than just an audio-visual depiction that is being authenticated. History of that kind is often generalized or historicity is even established as a constituent game-structure.
Time	**Realist Time-structure, X=Y=Z** (Chapman, Digital 91–93) In this structure, play, fictive and realist time pass nearly equally and create a feeling of authentic time representation. Realistic time-structures are usually found in realistic simulations.	**Discrete Time-structure, X≠Y≠Z** (Chapman, Digital 93–97) Within discrete time-structures the play, fictive and realist times differ fundamentally. Sometimes multiple decades pass within a second. Discrete time-structures are usually found in conceptual simulations.
Space	**Narrative Gardens Structure** (Chapman, Digital 101–104) Narrative gardens are predefined, usually aesthetically designed, game-worlds depicting a space that is limited by the narrative or game-structures. The player is a listener of a story determined through the mostly unchangeable space.	**Canvas Structure** (Chapman, Digital 104–109) When using space as a canvas, it becomes a game-structure. Space is the fundamental aspect that determines gameplay. The user becomes the author of his own narrative through interaction with the space.
Narrative	**Deterministic Story Structure** (Chapman, Digital 128) Within a deterministic story structure the framing narrative is privileged. The decisions of the users barely have an influence on the narrative within the game-world. The user might decide whether to step into a house and search for something in it or not, however this will not affect the narrative of a deterministic story structure.	**Open-ontological Story Structure** (Chapman, Digital 129) The open-ontological story structure uses weak framing goals and focuses on the gameplay. Hence the framing narrative is rarely present. The user has various possibilities to reach goals within the game-world, which can lead to enormous changes in the narrative. Ludonarratives are preferred.

the ludonarrative. Thereby, according to the probability of a given gameplay, coherence is ensured through prearranged storylines (Chapman, *Digital* 119-127).[3]

Following the analysis of game-structures influencing the historical narrative as stated above, it is clearly relevant to explain the relation between the frame narrative, ludonarrative, and classical historiography (Chapman, *Digital* 136). A comparison between the historiography and historical narratives created by the game-world should only be established through an adjustment in textual form. Nevertheless, the textual description of the game-world always contains some processing of ludonarratives, even if framed narratives are more dominant. This is needed, or else the game would not be a game anymore. Historical narratives in digital games always contain framed narratives and ludonarratives intertwined with various intensity (Chapman, *Digital* 155-162), and can be explained with the help of the previous analysis based on the four dimensions. Because Chapman's analytical framework does not contain clear-cut dimensions, the historical narrative can be seen as a final stage of the complete analysis. Within the macro-perspective, Chapman's analytical framework can serve to uncover game-structures which influence the historical narrative of the game-world. The macro-perspective on the tendentious influence of game-structures though gameplay forms the basis of a meso-perspective analysis of the historical narrative, based on a chosen episode in the game-world — in this case the historical event of the BTP in *Assassin's Creed III*.

4. *Assassin's Creed III* in the macro-perspective analysis

The audio-visual realization of *Assassin's Creed III* is assigned to the realistic style of simulation, which can already be seen at the start of the game. The first scene portrays how the main character of the game relives the historical memories of Haytham Kenway in 1754, through the so-called Animus technology by reconstructing "historic" surroundings.[4] In this episode, the Royal Theatre in London is reconstructed with precision, allowing the player

to see the performance of a play.[5] Thereby, the game tries to approximate "historical reality": Buildings and their surroundings, people, objects, and cities are depicted as realistically as possible.[6] Even the representation of Mohawk settlements corresponds to historical evidence. Not only do the inhabitants speak indigenous languages, which are translated using subtitles, but settlements are depicted as closely to historically validated models as possible. This visual approximation is also used for the indigenous people of the north-east woodlands, accurately depicting the typical methods of acquiring food, their clothing, their art and craftsmanship, as well as their social structures (Arens and Braun 24-45).[7] The so-called longhouses, as can be seen in figures 1 and 2, are shown as precise examples.[8] All in all, the game-world tends towards a reconstructionist approach to history.

In *Assassin's Creed III* the relation between gaming, fictive, and passed time can be called equal, with very few exceptions. Initially, some leaps in time are needed within the narration of the main story, e.g. during the change of the protagonist from Haytham Kenway to his son Connor. These can take days, months, or even years.[9] However, this development can be traced back to the Animus technology used in the game-world, which enables the protagonist to go back in time and relive certain sequences of memories from his ancestors. Therefore, the leaps of time do not seem misplaced. Fast travelling on the game's internal map can be explained in the same way. The distortion of the time-structure in fighting scenes is only a peripheral phenomenon.[10] Time slows down if the protagonist demonstrates spectacular fighting moves. Thereby, fictive time and passed time are caught in a momentary lapse, a sort of sequential disparity.[11] The day-night cycle is shortened as well in the game-world. This, however, is barely noticed, because there are at least two hours of difference between them. The leaps of time occurring through the Animus are another factor making it difficult to know what time is currently being represented in the game. Although realistic time cannot be depicted, the game-world tends toward a realist time-structure.
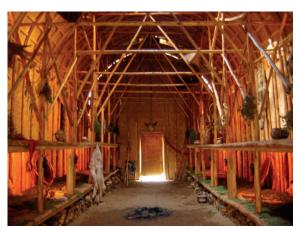
Within *Assassin's Creed III* some compromises

Figure 1: Picture of the inside of a reconstructed longhouse used by Mohawks.[12]

Figure 2: Selection of a Screenshot showing the inside of a longhouse used by Mohawks in *Assassin's Creed III.*

must be made regarding the representation of space. One example of this is the shortening of distance to historical buildings within the narrative gardens of *Assassin's Creed III*. Likewise, the exposable game-worlds of Boston, New York, and the western frontier are confined through visible borders, keeping the user from going any further.[13] In fact, since there is no new content in these border areas, they create very little incentive for the player to try to reach them.[14] Within these borders, however, the user can move freely. At the frontier, as in the cities, some houses are inaccessible (with the only exception being the possibility to walk through open houses as shortcuts).[15] However, since the realistic reconstruction of the house exteriors has been done so well, it is safe to assume that the players will imagine the interiors as having been equally well reconstructed. The perceived, but not reachable, space is augmented by specific kinds of representation. This can be seen if the user climbs upon an observation tower, where he can see the surrounding areas.[16] Even though the small island of Boston and Charlestown are out of the player's reach, they can still be seen. Through this, the game scene feels as if it were a part of a bigger game-world on the American East Coast. In order to force linearity within missions, the user does not always get to move around freely, as can be seen in the first scene in the Royal Theatre in London. Here, the user is forced to go directly to his seat, without being given a chance to explore the building.[17] Once more, the tendency toward narrative gardens within the main mission is shown clearly. Maps

provide information regarding the borders of the narrative gardens. This can be seen in missions or sequences that are not placed inside the open game-worlds of Boston, New York, or the western frontier. A small map is always visible in the bottom left corner of the head-up display (HUD), which shows the linear scope of action.[18] The spatial structure can barely be changed and does not present the user with options to take action. This leads to it being oriented as a space used for the embedding of information. A narrative gardens structure constrains the possible actions of the player —especially within the main episodes like replaying the BTP.

It becomes obvious that the influence of the player on the narrative of *Assassin's Creed III* is limited. The framed narrative dominates over the ludonarrative. It is not possible for the user to change the narration of the main episodes in any way. The only option is to reach a higher synchronization with the Animus technology through side quests, which grants some advantages for progressing through the game (for example, better weaponry or equipment). However, it does not change the underlying narrative. The user can only choose the main mission (including the framing goals) without the possibility of changing the order of approach. There is only a free choice when it comes to the side quests or optional mission goals. For example, during the BTP, the way in which dozens of British soldiers are killed is optional, but not the killing itself. The user cannot prevent the BTP from happening in the specified order that the game designates.[19] For example, even

if the user decides to eliminate some British units, this would not change anything regarding the presented narrative by cutscenes, which is divided into twelve main episodes including the epilogue. The central objective of the game is to complete the main missions, with multiple, dominantly placed hints inside the game-world motivating the player to advance.[20] All missions have one feature in common once they have been started: The level of progression and the next goal are shown in the top left corner of the HUD, with a division between primary and optional goals within the mission.[21] If all of the optional goals are accomplished, "full synchronization" is reached within the Animus and the user will be awarded with extra money or new equipment.[22] This sums up to a lot of possible game goals. However, completing the main mission(s) is the game's primary objective.[23] Especially important for a subsequent meso-perspective analysis of historical representation, regarding the game-structure, is the distinction between main and side missions, as well as the choice of areas within the game-world. Interaction with objects is limited to missions or opposing troops. All interactions of the player inside the ludonarrative are limited to the following framing controls: climbing (onto objects, buildings, trees, or cliffs), sneaking, hiding, riding horses, navigating ships and commanding the gunners, distracting and killing opponents, as well as specific interactions with several objects, which do not have any influence on the narrative —supported by the recurrent narrative gardens structure of the space. In the end, it is only possible to complete a mission or lose synchronization, for example, by the death of a character which leads to a mission restart. The player does not have a chance to change their decision or narration regarding the protagonists.

In this respect, while performing a meso-perspective analysis, special attention needs to be directed at identifying the framing controls. These might explore the historical narrative counterfactually by adding gameplay options that differ from the relevant historiography. Overall, a deterministic story structure arises underlying the narrative of the main missions. This is in opposition to the more open story structure in the areas of Boston, New York, and the frontier. An open-ontological story structure does not exist at any point in time. Especially when looking at the explicit procession of historical events in the main missions, it should be considered that the framing controls, preset by the developer historians, can distort the historical narration. For example, it is safe to assume that peaceful historical events are being transformed into acts of violence, since most of the player's actions are designed to violently eliminate enemies. In the end, the historical narrative in *Assassin's Creed III* is heavily influenced by the fictitious story of the assassin Connor and his mostly violent framing controls. In the case of the meso-perspective analysis of the BTP, we have to assume a realistic style of simulation, realist time structure, as well as a narrative gardens structure, coupled with a deterministic story structure, which first has to be described before a comparison with the actual historiography can take place.

5. Meso-perspective description of the Boston Tea Party in *Assassin's Creed III*

One of the most colorfully historicized events of the American Independence Movement is the BTP (Jennings 142). In the game-world of *Assassin's Creed III*, the motives leading to the BTP are only mentioned within the database of the Animus.[24] As is shown below, because of the influence of game-structures, the representation of this event is processed at the very least questionably, if not counterfactually. The role of the player is represented by the fictitious character Connor, who is portrayed as a thoughtful and decisive person during this event. This description is only meant to showcase what *could* happen if a historical narrative is worked out only on the basis of game-world representation without considering historiographic sources. Of course, this kind of approach must be evaluated critically and by no means meets empirical standards (Kühberger 75). Nevertheless, the following meso-perspective description enables a comparison between the "game-worldly" induced historical narrative and the current historiography that follows.

On the evening of 16th December, 1773, Samuel Adams takes part in a public debate

in the Old South Meeting. He argues that this meeting cannot do anything more to save the country and urges fighting the repressive British crown through the Tea Act or other "foreign" rules. Straight after uttering this sentence, he leaves the building to meet William Molineux, Stephane Chapheau, and Connor in front of the Old South Meeting House. The first two already know what the next steps will be. Connor on the other hand —being of British and Mohawk descent— questions the methods and motives of the Sons of Liberty, demanding to know every detail of the plan. Samuel Adams willingly explains the plan to destroy the tea cargo from the ships at Griffin's Wharf in order to gain support from colonists. However, Adams does not tell him any details; the exact route and the number of supporters are also unknown. Adams counters Connor's criticism by offering to lead the group. At the wharf, 15 British soldiers await the Sons of Liberty. The British soldiers, separated into formations of six and nine soldiers, cover both paths leading to the ships. The only possibility to send a message of rejection toward British dominance, in the minds of the Sons of Liberty, is to appropriate the crates of tea and kill the soldiers. Therefore, the two veteran fighters, Stephane Chapeau and Connor, are assigned to kill the British enemies in close combat. After having dealt with these, Connor tells Samuel Adams, William Molineux and Paul Revere to follow him. Meanwhile, a group of nearly 100 bystanders gathers in the wharf, watching the revolutionaries throwing the wooden tea barrels into the sea. The revolutionaries wear regular workers' clothes. Suddenly, British reinforcements appear, running towards the ships. Paul Revere warns of the advancing enemy, which leads to the revolutionaries leaving the ships to avoid the attack, except for William Molineux, Paul Revere, Stephane Chapheau, and Connor. The people defending the entrances of the ships are reinforced. However, the reinforcements are killed by the British troops rather quickly, before the assassins Connor and Stephane Chapheau eliminate the oncoming troops. More barrels of tea are thrown into the water in the meantime. After the last barrel has been disposed of, the British troops abruptly stop their attack and vanish for no reason.

Then, Samuel Adams appears and walks off the ship with the other revolutionaries while being celebrated by the bystanders who remain in high numbers. The Sons of Liberty do not miss the opportunity to discard one last barrel of tea in such a way that all the remaining people —such as William Johnson, a rich merchant and the chief negotiator with the Iroquois, and General Charles Lee, who later becomes famous within the game-world and tries to profit from smuggling tea— will see the victory of the Sons of Liberty. Shortly afterwards, the crowd leaves the wharf. Connor is the last to leave the area where the fighting has taken place. In the end, over 100 barrels of tea are destroyed and dozens of British soldiers have been killed by the Sons of Liberty during the BTP, with at least a dozen revolutionaries also killed. One of the bloodiest days of the Independence Movement ends like this and leaves —in contrast to the Boston Massacre— a high number of deaths on both sides. This kind of massacre is something the Sons of Liberty have to cope with in future.[25] This sums up the historical narrative of the BTP that is outlined by the gameplay in *Assassin's Creed III*— a narrative worthy of careful comparison with the current historiography.

6. The Boston Tea Party in *Assassin's Creed III* vs. historiography

The "climatic meeting of the Tea Act crisis at Old South Meeting House on December 16, 1773", as described in the historiography, plays a minor part within the game-world (Raphael 126). The three characters Connor, William Molineux and Stephane Chapheau only wait for Samuel Adams in front of the building. The attendance of people who are dressed up as Mohawks is not represented in the game at all. Connor's criticism is at the center of this cutscene. In his criticism, he reviews the actions of the Sons of Liberty as useless to save the territories of his tribe. Some Sons of Liberty were interested in new settlements and land speculation, a factor that always mattered to the Independence Movement. In contrast, the British crown insisted on preservation of the Proclamation Line from 1763 limiting the westward settlements (Hochgeschwender 102-103). The problem

arising from white colonists stealing land from indigenous people is an important aspect of the American Revolution that is "game-worldly" mixed up with a historical event, which comes up in history books for different reasons. Therefore, the central moment in the historical narrative of the game concerning the BTP and the act of destroying the barrels of tea at Griffin's Wharf, linked to the killing of dozens of British soldiers, ends up contradicting existing historiographic narratives (Berg 14-15; Hochgeschwender 22). According to historiography, the British military stayed in the garrison and did not intervene in the revolutionary actions of December 1773. Likewise, the fleet did not show up, and the commander-in-chief —General Hutchinson— barricaded himself away from the action. Thus the rebellious colonists, who were disguised as Mohawks, did not have to fear British resistance. Ultimately, the officers and sailors of the freighters were smart enough not to risk their lives for the property of the East-India-Company (Hochgeschwender 22).

It seems unrealistic that the Sons of Liberty would have been able to historicize the BTP as a glorified revolutionary Act, if it happened the way it is depicted in the game, that is, by killing dozens of British soldiers. Of course, there had been potential for escalation, since the governor at the time had consulted with the leading generals of the Royal Navy to summon warships to Boston Harbor (Hochgeschwender 111). Large numbers of British soldiers had already been stationed there because of the tense situation at the Proclamation Line (Hochgeschwender 111). However, the Royal Navy and the British soldiers did not intervene while the tea was being destroyed (Hochgeschwender 21-22, 120-135). Since the Sons of Liberty massively criticized the Boston Massacre within the flourishing publishing business, it would have been difficult to justify the killing of dozens of British Soldiers during the BTP (Berg 14; Humphrey 13, 70-73; Kratzke 179-195). If the BTP happened the way the game-world suggests, it could not have been historicized as such a significant act in the Independence Movement and used as a valuable strategy of political inclusion, as well as to motivate critical discussion about British interference (Rozbicki 105-106; Humphrey 76).

Presently, public history sites and guided tours continue to emphasize this patriotic call for "freedom" without reflecting on the individual motives and political involvement of the Sons of Liberty (Schocket 116-121).

The BTP happened in a disciplined and organized manner, without excessive violence. However, it was a provocation that was supposed to force the British crown into taking retaliatory action and which finally created solidarity among the colonists (Berg 14-15). In the game, the violence used by Connor is not criticized by any member of the Sons of Liberty. On the contrary, violence is presented as the only available option to deal with the situation.[26] Only two entries in the Animus database refer to the BTP, and even they do not address the counterfactual violence. In the late 18th century, the Sons of Liberty had reservations about the radical act of destroying tea that was worth around 10,000 pounds (Lerg 29). Contemporary moderate elites believed the right to own private property was such a crucial part of life that they finally ended up offering to compensate the East Indian Company for the lost tea (Hochgeschwender 22). Killing dozens of British soldiers, as depicted in the game, would have lowered the chances the Sons of Liberty had to mobilize the masses in the colonies. Destroying the tea was only deemed a viable action after multiple debates had been held — taking place as the first ship, the Dartmouth, arrived on the 27th of November— and was considered to be the last resort (Woods Labaree 147). We should keep in mind that radical Sons of Liberty under the leadership of Samuel Adams insisted on more drastic measures, for example, returning the British ships to their mother country as more moderate Sons of Liberty in Philadelphia had done (Hochgeschwender 19-21).

It has to be noted, however, that the oligarchy in the thirteen New England colonies had trouble preventing the aspiring lower classes from participating in politics since the 1760s. The colonies were in a social ferment, making it impossible to implement a bicameral system based on the British model. The radical nature of the measures taken by the Sons of Liberty are a reaction to social riots in the 1760s; Boston was worst affected, which threatened the political and socioeconomic hierarchy of local

elites (Hochgeschwender 34-36). Commercial success in the colonies encouraged the demand for freedom among the colonial elites. They did not want to submit to British interests any longer (Hochgeschwender 35-36). The Sons of Liberty developed into an expanding community of interest. Due to the multitude of resolutions under King Georg III regarding the North American colonies, mainly custom and tax resolutions, a group of people from all 13 colonies formed to defend their interests against "foreign" rule. This enabled the Sons of Liberty to take more radical measures, since they were sure to have comprehensive support from colonists.

After the British governor of Boston, Thomas Hutchinson, set a deadline for unloading the tea by the 16th of December 1773, two more ships arrived in Boston loaded with Indian tea, which threatened to escalate the situation. Governor Hutchinson believed that he needed to enforce British law, in this case the Tea Act. After the deadline expired, the tea would have been confiscated and sold by local authorities (Hochgeschwender 19-20). Hutchinson had ensured that the ships would not be able to return to England. The local Sons of Liberty and the Bostonians, estimated to be radical, prevented the tea from being unloaded and sold —creating a stalemate. Destroying the tea was the last resort of the Sons of Liberty to deal with the situation. In the end, Bostonian elites were afraid of losing control of the revolutionary process again (Hochgeschwender 120).

> Samuel Adams rose at that point to proclaim that he did not see what more the inhabitants could do to save their country. Perhaps this was the prearranged signal. From a gallery came a war-whoop, answered in kind by a small group at the doorway who were disguised as Indians (Woods Labaree 141).

The developer historians of *Assasin's Creed III* attach great importance to correct depictions of dates and purportedly historical facts. Interestingly, the fact that Samuel Adams himself was a former taxman is overlooked (Hochgeschwender 21).[27] In the game he is depicted as a patriot representing the greater

good of the Independence Movement, the only flaw being his attitude regarding slaves, which Connor criticizes. Within the in-game database of the Animus, the clean and patriotic spirit of Samuel Adams is evoked.[28] It does not become apparent that the Sons of Liberty were supported by rich local merchants and landowners, who would profit from a separation from the mother country in various ways, such as seizing and selling the lands of Native Americans (Hochgeschwender 11-12). In the game, only William Johnson enriches himself through selling the Mohawk territories. William Johnson, who was the superintendent for all Native American tribes in the north, is also depicted as a tea smuggler. This cannot be refuted or proven, but requires skepticism, since the smuggled goods came from lands of Bourbon rule (Hochgeschwender 26) and the ships docked during the BTP belonged to the East Indian Company, as is correctly depicted in the game-world. Smuggling tea was both unnecessary and nearly impossible. William Johnson would have profited from unloading the cargo, as he was a merchant and could have sold it in Boston. Through his business he had built up a lot of assets and could afford to buy a lot of land from the Mohawks. It was of no interest to him that this land had been offered by the Iroquois who had not been the rightful owners of the property to begin with (Hochgeschwender 45). In the end, William Johnson was definitely less interested in smuggling the suggested goods, as presented in the game-world. In fact, John Hancock – one of the most notorious tea smugglers of the time — was a supporter of the Sons of Liberty, probably because he had smuggled with the French during the Seven-Years' War (Hochgeschwender 110-111). Surprisingly, John Hancock is not a significant character with the game-world.

The Tea Act, which has to be seen as the trigger of the BTP, was not at all an increase in taxation; in fact it led to cheaper tea imports (which is mentioned in the Animus database). The Tea Act was intended to end the smuggling of tea to the North American colonies and simultaneously open a market for the crisis-ridden East Indian Company and their overproduction of tea (Hochgeschwender 119; Williams 64). Even though the background

and motives for the outbreak of the BTP are not sufficiently represented within the game-world, the criticism by the Sons of Liberty preceding the Tea Act is expressed. However, the "game-worldly" William Johnson smuggles the tea off the ships of the East Indian Company, which is contrary to the historiography.[29] Many of the smugglers of that time were part of the Sons of Liberty movement (Hochgeschwender 119). This aspect particularly explains why the Sons of Liberty tried to prevent the enforcement of the Tea Act. In *Assassin's Creed III* this is not disclosed. Within the game these interests and roles of historical individuals blur. One cannot be sure whether they acted for political or financial motives. The representation of the BTP within the game-world and the accompanying agitations regarding the Sons of Liberty let us make superficial conclusions, at best, about the diverse motives of the Sons of Liberty.

Contemporary observers noticed that the American colonists were the first revolutionaries in the history of the world that went on the warpath for a severe lowering of the price of trade goods (Hochgeschwender 122). Who were these revolutionaries dressed up as the Mohawks at the BTP (Jennings 143)? Approximately 50 to 100 laborers and merchants led by the Sons of Liberty destroyed 342 barrels, or 45 tons, of tea (Hochgeschwender 120; McDonnell 105-106; Humphrey 78-81). The revolutionaries in *Assassin's Creed III* are therefore correctly depicted as working men and small merchants. The number of people involved, at least on the wharfs, seem to be close to the numbers in the relevant historiography. Surprisingly, the Native American costumes of the revolutionaries, as iconographically depicted through paintings and lithography, are not represented within the game-world at all. Not even the protagonist Connor changes his outfit for the BTP. He rather remains in his assassin-outfit, even though he is of Mohawk descent. Actually, the Sons of Liberty chose this Native American outfit on purpose, trying to send a symbolic message to England. The most common interpretation of this behavior is, that the colonies thought of themselves as an independent culture in contrast to the British mother country (Hochgeschwender 122; Humphrey 59-82).

The player is placed at the front of the crowd by Samuel Adams, which creates strong identification and involvement with the character, as well as a feeling of self-effectiveness. That only the four protagonists, namely William Molineux, Stephane Chapheau, Samuel Adams, and Connor are already at the "game-worldly" harbor, is explained by picking up further supporters at Nathaniel Bradley's house. During this scene the Sons of Liberty are fighting British soldiers and are supported by militia and regular soldiers, which probably never happened. Hochgeschwender argues that the activities of the Sons of Liberty were planned, since it would have been hard to find and use costumes spontaneously (Hochgeschwender 121). In the game, this scene does not appear to be well planned, since there are British soldiers at the harbor and the Non-Player-Character (NPC) Samuel Adams comments on this: "Damn, more soldiers."[30] Of course, there are no indications in the historiography that Samuel Adams said anything like that. There is also no indication in the historiography that the fictitious character, the assassin Connor, actually led the revolutionaries to Griffin's Wharf. Although it still is not completely resolved who took part at the BTP (Woods Labaree 142; Raphael 27-30), Samuel Adams was instrumental in planning the BTP (Dippel 23). In *Assassin's Creed III,* the representation is based on the fictitious story of Connor with a deterministic story structure. That Paul Revere and William Molineux actively engage in the fighting and need to be protected by Connor has to been seen as historical nonsense. However, this is definitely caused by game mechanics which are needed for the selected kind of representation within the game through narrative gardens. Because of the counterfactual representation of the BTP within the game, the storyline must be seen in high contrast to the inherent reconstructionist history approach of realist simulation and realist time structure. Great emphasis has been put on the visual depiction of the harbor —the exact and empirically proven reconstruction of the harbor remain uncertain— and the historical personas. This is enhanced by the visual representations of characters in the game that are clearly based on their historical origins, whereby Charles Lee is

depicted more aggressively and unappealingly than the allegedly "good guy" Samuel Adams (see figure 3).

armed ships nearby (Raphael 27). In the game, the BTP is transformed into an action scene

Figure 3: Portrait of Samuel Adams from 1772 and a depiction from 1773 in *Assassin's Creed III* as well as a portrait of Charles Lee compared to the depiction in the game.[31]

While 100 barrels of tea have to be destroyed by the end of the in-game scene, it has been surmised in the historiography that 342 boxes were destroyed (Mc Donnel 105-106). Since the ship Beavor was docked at a different harbor (Lerg 29; Woods Labaree 144), which is not a site of action in the game-world, the number of barrels destroyed during the mission is reasonable. However, the depiction of how the tea was destroyed is not at all ideal. Throwing the intact barrels —which are depicted as being smaller than they should be— into the water does not always lead to the tea's destruction (Raphael 27-28). It has to be assumed that some bystanders tried to fish the tea out of the water in order to save a little for their own personal use, which the Sons of Liberty tried to prevent by using some violence. However, the ships were not damaged according to the historiography (Williams 65). While the BTP takes place during a time period of 10 minutes in the game, the real action probably took around three hours and was not supported by a roaring group of people at the harbor (Lerg 29; Raphael 27). Even though a lot of upset Bostonians went to the harbor, the action was relatively silent (Woods Labaree 144). They quietly retired to their residences "without having any conversation" because of the fear of British

through the background music and the crowd at the wharf.

The peak of the organized protest of the Sons of Liberty was the BTP, at which the disguised colonists dressed up as Mohawks not only tried to avoid physical violence, but also showed their respect regarding private property through replacing an actual padlock which was broken during the action (Breunig 53). Instead of breaking a padlock to gain access to the ships, the user needs to eliminate 15 British soldiers in *Assassin's Creed III*. The real BTP happened in a less spectacular way, since, as Breunig argues, the violence was directed at destroying the tea, not against humans and certainly not against British soldiers. In reality, it was Samuel Adams who reframed the Boston Massacre from a mass brawl with casualties into an act of deliberate cruelty by the British military (Hochgeschwender 114). He was not the flawless hero fighting for freedom and liberty as depicted in the game. The BTP is shown as an act of violence in the game, a false representation. The use of violence by Connor can be seen as an indication that the Sons of Liberty saw violence as a legitimate method. However, the use of violence is placed incorrectly. Apart from this, the bystanders — most of them surely radical Bostonians— would have prevented the British soldiers from entering

the ships and it can be assumed they would not have played such a passive role as represented in the game-world, if you bear in mind the radical protests in the city of Boston since the 1760s (Dippel 18-21).[32]

If the BTP had happened the way the game-world represents it, it would not have been possible to historicize it as a significant act of independence. In the end, the depiction of the BTP in the game glorifies the agitations of the Sons of Liberty to the user, and demonstrates the use of violence as a legitimate method against a conspiracy within the colonies, not against the British crown. The question remains why John Hancock is not mentioned in the game-world. Including his character would have made the personal interests of the individuals behind the BTP more obvious. An implementation of the BTP, without the elimination of dozens of British soldiers, would have been possible with different game-structures. For example, the parkour-like climbing by the protagonist Connor could have been used to gain access to the ships in a peaceful way. Nevertheless, the analysis shows the "game-worldly" representation of native land appropriation by the colonists, but in a harbor basin full of confusing interests based on fictional protagonists, the Sons of Liberty, radical Bostonians, as well as British soldiers and officials. The confusing representation of the BTP within the game is not resolved and can be seen as a consequence of the selected deterministic story structure with unalterable framing controls of the main character Connor, finally remaining in high contrast to the realistic style of simulation, and leads to a questionable historical narrative.[33]

7. Conclusion

The analytical framework by Chapman works well at a macro-perspective, focusing on the entire game-world and possible actions of the player, to reveal the form of representation of history in digital game-worlds by using the dimensions of simulation style, time, space, and narrative. Furthermore, this enables the use of a meso-perspective, focusing on a selected episode, for example historical events, by using a historical narrative dimension. It

is especially important to analyze the game-structures with a macro-perspective to enable a meso-perspective to reveal the "game-worldly" induced historical narrative. A description of the selected historical event in text form is helpful for the subsequent comparison with the relevant historiography. This creates the possibility to suggest alternative narratives based on the game-structures which might better represent historical events in *Assassin's Creed III*; avoiding the killing of dozens of British soldiers through a focus on climbing and traversing the ships by the main character Connor. The exemplary analysis of the BTP in *Assassin's Creed III* shows the strikingly high influence of the game-structures regarding the historical narrative. This leads to a peaceful event in history being converted into an excess of violence. The Sons of Liberty would not have been able to construe the BTP as a glorifying revolutionary act, if, as in the game, dozens of British soldiers had been killed. Furthermore, an opportunity was missed to implement a hearing and justification for the actions of the Sons of Liberty due to their personal interests. Nevertheless, the game — besides all of the counterfactual representations —shows the radicalism of the Bostonians and provides a starting point to reflect upon the appropriation of land beyond the Proclamation Line by colonists after they had won the War of Independence. The representation of the BTP in *Assassin's Creed III* is therefore a brilliant way to access problem-oriented teaching, reflecting the influence of game-structures based on a semi-fictional historical narrative.

Notes

1. See *Gespielt*, "Manifest für geschichtswissenschaftliches Arbeiten mit Digitalen Spielen."

2. History is of course not only a marketing tool for digital games, since there are different ways of using it. For more information on this, see Siller's master thesis (Siller 46-52).

3. For the concept as a whole, aimed at explaining the gameplay including the quality of historical representation within the game-world, Chapman uses the ecological approach from Gibson (Chapman, *Digital* 173-175). Accordingly, affordance means that information is already enclosed in the entities which surround us. They only have a requesting or offering feature. Chapman argues that the input devices are automatically connected with this concept ("Great Game" 171-180). Constructions of meaning are

therefore externalized and influenced by the surroundings (Mausfeld 103-105). Since there is little knowledge about the current level of development of the user's individual acquisition-processes as well as their understanding of history, it is impossible to derive anything from how the user receives game information. Thus, the analytical framework of the historical representation will be used without the concept of affordances.

4. The following scenes from the gameplay of the author are cited as recommended by the Arbeitskreis Geschichtswissenschaft und Digitale Spiele, see *Gespielt*, "Manifest." For the relevant part of the video capture of the gameplay, see Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung1", s. 13:33 – 13:37.

5. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung1," s. 13:22 – 14:58.

6. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung2," s. 01:21 – 02:15.

7. See also, gaming session within a Mohawk-Settlement: Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung5," s. 03:20 – 07:18.

8. See for example, Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung5," s. 02:32 – 03:18.

9. See, for example, Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung1," s. 51:58 – 52:21; "AC3: Spielsitzung5," s. 19:51 – 19:57.

10. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung9," s. 05:22 – 05:30.

11. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung4," s. 28:38 – 29:13 and s. 1:19:35 – 1:19:44.

12. See picture by Anne E.

13. As can be seen at the frontier: Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung7," s. 02:13 – 05:06. See also, what happens leaving the Game-world: Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung10," s. 1:28:47 – 1:29:00.

14. See for example: Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung6," s. 13:20 – 14:55.

15. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung8," s. 53:15 – 53:30.

16. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung2," s. 05:05 – 06:04.

17. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung1," s. 14:41 – 15:30.

18. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung7," s. 35:49 – 39:42.

19. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung9," s. 04:46 – 04:53.

20. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung11," s. 00:20 – 00:33; 02:58 – 09:05 and 1:22:15 – 1:22:37.

21. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung12," s. 1:44:26 – 1:45:33. See, also Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung8," s. 55:34 – 55:45.

22. The synchronization with the Animus constitutes an internal reward system, which does not have any effect on the historical narrative represented within the game-world.

23. This statement is supported by contributions in the official community-page of *Assassin's Creed III*, see for example: handballer, "100% Sync (Assassins Creed 3)."

24. The database of the Animus is an encyclopedia with additional information about historical places, persons, events and objects. The entries originate from the fictive protagonist Shaun Gilbert Hastings, who serves as a lexical narrator within the current setting in the year 2012. This is an attempt to create real historical coherency through sometimes amusingly written texts.

25. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung9," s. 00:00 – 14:20.

26. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung6," s. 34:11 – 1:28:44.

27. Most of the contemporary taxmen or custom officers were rightfully afraid. Isolated acts of violence, happening even in the calmer years between 1770 – 1773, almost always affected them. Similar to the taxmen during the Stamp Act riots, the people having a trading commission for goods with the East Indian Company became victims of several attacks which led to most of them abandoning their privileges (Lerg 28).

28. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung8," s. 25:25 – 1:22:23.

29. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung8," s. 1:03:52 – 1:05:24.

30. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung9," s. 01:25 – 01:30.

31. See portrait of Samuel Adams by John Singleton Copley and the portrait of Charles Lee by G. R. Hall.

32. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung9," s. 05:07 – 13:10.

33. See Daniel Giere, "AC3: Spielsitzung14," s. 1:28:25 – 1:31:05; and "AC3: Spielsitzung15," s. 00:00 – 23:11.

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