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**VIDEO GAMES AS NEW TOOLS FOR POLITICAL PERSUASION:
WEB GAMES OF THE ESTONIAN CENTRE PARTY**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This thesis studies four web games that have been released in Estonia in 2004-2011 and have been sponsored by the Estonian Centre Party. Using video games in political campaigning is a recent and not very widely spread trend. Therefore, these web games provided an opportunity to examine the ways how political messages can be inserted into video games and how the qualities that are unique to video games can form political arguments and persuade the players.</p> <p>The main objective of this thesis was to identify the persuasive components of Centre Party's web games and to compare the persuasive arguments that were found from the games' representative layer to those that were formed on the games' procedural layer. In order to do that, the Centre Party's web games were placed in the wider context of political videogames and analyzed with semiotics, gameplay rhetoric and procedural rhetoric.</p> <p>Ultimately, the goal of the thesis is to emphasize the uniqueness of video game representative qualities which seem to be superseded by the studies of rhetorical potential of game rules and provide means for "reading" and understanding ideological content in video games.</p>	
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Tiivistelmä <p>Työssä tutkitaan neljää Viron keskustapuolueen tilaamaa nettipeliä, jotka on julkaistu Virossa vuosina 2004–2011. Videopelien käyttö poliittisessa kampanjoinnissa on uusi suuntaus, joka ei ole vielä levinnyt kovin laajalle. Keskustapuolueen nettipelit tarjosivat siis mahdollisuuden tarkastella tapoja, joilla videopeleihin voidaan lisätä poliittisia viestejä ja kuinka videopelien erityiset ominaisuudet voivat muodostaa poliittisia argumentteja ja vaikuttaa pelaajien poliittisiin käsityksiin.</p> <p>Päätavoitteena oli löytää Viron keskustapuolueen nettipelien retorisesti vaikuttavat osat ja verrata pelien esittävän tason retorisia argumentteja pelien toiminnallisella tasolla muodostettujen argumenttien kanssa. Tätä tarkoitusta varten keskustapuolueen nettipelit sijoitettiin laajempaan poliittisten videopelien kenttään ja niitä analysoitiin semiotiikan, pelattavuuden retoriikan ja proseduraalisen retoriikan keinoin.</p> <p>Lisäksi työn tavoitteena on tuoda esiin videopelien esittävän tason ominaisuuksien erityispiirteitä, jotka ovat aiemmassa tutkimuksessa jääneet pelisääntöjen retoristen mahdollisuuksien tarkastelun varjoon ja tarjota näin keinoja videopelien ideologisen sisällön "lukemiseen" ja ymmärtämiseen.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

Among the videogames that are designed mainly to entertain there are also games that are designed as a means to an end. They are often referred to as *serious games* and have many subgenres like an *election game* that despite of its entertaining appearance is a tool for political marketing, tailored to be a part of a political campaign.

Ian Bogost, the author of a book *Persuasive Games* that is one of the cornerstones of the current thesis, have proclaimed the year 2004 as the one that saw a great rise in the development of election games:

2004 was the year political videogames became legitimate. For the first time, candidates and party groups created officially endorsed games to bolster their campaign in the U.S. for U.S. president, U.S. Congress and U.S. State Legislature, and even in Uruguay for the president of Uruguay (*Persuasive Games* 103).

The first election game that was created in Estonia seems to be an appropriate addition to that list: in 2004, the web game was designed in order to support the candidacy of the young Estonian Center Party's (*Eesti Keskerakond*) politician, Mart Viisitamm, to the European Parliament. The web game can be found from the internet¹ even eight years after its release, but it is not located on the official site of the Center Party. The game that was introduced to the public in 2004 became known as the *Center Party's Ant Game* (*Keskerakonna sipelgamäng*).

The Estonian Center Party has been remarkably active in producing varied digital content for its marketing purposes in recent years. Their will and skill in exploiting the

¹ <http://www.aegmaha.ee/games/13567/keskerakonna-mang>

possibilities of digital media exceeds greatly the similar interest or attempts of any other Estonian political party. According to the public relation specialist Raimond Kaljulaid who was interviewed for the thesis, the party's chairman Edgar Savisaar was a first top politician in Estonia to open a blog (Appendix A-3). In addition to blogging, a trend that has now been picked up by many politicians, the party has sent out interactive greeting cards (e-cards with a pre-recorded greeting from Savisaar, for example), it has accounts in numerous social network sites and, at the time being, has produced altogether four web games.

The clear connection between their online "presence", advertising campaigns and popularity among the voters is not easy to prove, but it is safe to assume that some connection exists. Even if the intelligentsia of the country is rather cautious about the party that is often accused in the cult of the leader, populism and cheap manipulation tactics, the centrist, social liberal Estonian Center Party has many supporters among the nation. Notably, one of the few things Edgar Savisaar said in an interview² for the daily newspaper of Estonia, *Eesti Päevaleht*, after his re-election as the mayor of the capital city of Tallinn in October 2009 was, that the party intends to raise the proportion of internet advertising in their political campaigns of the future.

In my master's thesis, I would like to focus mainly on four web games that have been endorsed by the Center Party. After the initial experiment with *The Ant Game*, the party or rather, party's campaign managers, seem to have shifted their attention to other marketing strategies but last years have seen the birth of three Center Party's web games in rapid succession.

First, the web game *Juhi nagu Ansip!*³ was released in October 2008. The game was mainly targeted against the current Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip who has held the position since 2005 and is the leader of the center-right, liberal Estonian Reform Party (*Eesti*

² Anvelt, Kärt. "Savisaar: Keskerakond on valmis uut valitsust moodustama" *Eesti Päevaleht* 20 Oct. 2009. Web.

³ The original web site of the game has been recently closed down but the game can be found from numerous other websites like <http://playground.ee/>

Reformierakond). Wordplay is used in the game's title that can be translated *Drive like Ansip* or *Lead like Ansip*. In the game, the player sits behind the car wheel, assumes the role of the prime-minister Ansip and starts to dodge materialized burning political issues.

The next game from the Center Party, *Anna ministrile kinga!* (Kick out the Minister!)⁴, was released in March 2009. It lets the player to assume the role of a voter who, unsatisfied with the job results of the ministers in the previous Government of Estonia (2007-2011), is allowed to express his or her malcontent by throwing shoes at them. Once again, wordplay is incorporated into the game: a literal translation of the game's title would be *Give a Shoe to the Minister*. "To give a shoe" i.e. *kinga andma* is an idiomatic expression in Estonian that means "to fire (from the workplace)".

The latest game, *Ansip tõstab hindu!*⁵ (Ansip Raises Prices!), was released awkwardly just a few days before the parliamentary election in Estonia in March 2011. Despite its late release, the game was still intended to be a part of the election campaign; among other things it displays prominently the word *Aitab!* (Enough! / (He/She/It) Helps!) – the official campaign slogan of the party at that time – in a game. Like in *Drive like Ansip!*, the main character in the game is Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip. Unlike other Center Party's web games, *Ansip Raises Prices!* did not get any media attention at all. The only news article reporting the game's release was published in the Center Party's own newspaper *Kesknädal*.

The research questions of this master thesis are – how exactly videogames convey ideological messages, how do they persuade people and can they be considered an effective medium for these purposes? These research questions are partly influenced by the fact that issuing election games seems to be in decline. Ian Bogost describes in the video game developer's website *Gamasutra* the success of an election game genre in 2004 and how he, along with other professionals, predicted that "campaign games were here to stay" only to

⁴ <http://www.keskerakond.ee/annakinga/est/>

⁵ <http://www.keskerakond.ee/riigikogu2011/mang/>

admit thereafter that in 2008 U.S. President Elections "video games played a minor role". ("The Birth and Death") He offers couple of possible explanations, one of them being that as online video and social networks have become "big thing" since 2004, candidates were more interested in distributing their message through these mediums.

Secondly, he calls attention to the game design of an election games that are mostly derived from the old arcade games like *Space Invaders* and blames unsuccessful election games for not being able to "connect gameplay to political message". Bogost writes: "reskinning classic arcade games and placing billboards in virtual racetracks does not take advantage of the potential games have to offer to political speech" and suggests that the "election game" that presents simple ideas to the voters at the time of the elections should be abandoned entirely in favor of public policy games that would teach players about the consequences of political decisions on society, nature etc. ("The Birth and Death")

Election games may have not proved to be as popular as Bogost once predicted, but are the success of online video, outmoded arcade games' mechanics and failure to connect gameplay to the game's message the only things to blame? Or could it be that the election games have also failed visually and semantically? It is possible that election games have not persuaded the voter enough on the level of gameplay, but have they managed to use games' representative level for effective persuasion? Or is it really only gameplay that makes the difference, like Ian Bogost seems to suggest?

The long-term goals of this research are to explore the deeper relationships between politics and popular culture, starting with the strategies of political marketing that use the artifacts of popular culture as a platform. I hope that the case study of the four Center Party's web games provides new perspectives on thinking about the intertwined relations of politics and pop culture and enhances the ways of reading both deliberately and unintentionally inserted ideological messages from cultural products.

2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

According to Frans Mäyrä it is possible to distinct three main areas of game research that may overlap or be combined:

1. *Humanities methods* approach the game as a cultural artifact and attempt to "identify [their] constituent elements and [...] underlying structures" (157) through semiotics or textual analysis or by subjecting the research object to ideological critique (feminist, Marxist etc.)

2. *Social sciences methods* can study game players, playing practices and effects of playing by using laboratory research, surveys, statistical analysis, interviews etc.

3. *Design research methods* study games from a software engineering and game industry viewpoint.

The fourth method he suggests for game studies is *game playing* itself in a form of analytical playing that could result either in *thematic* or *social* game analysis or *structural* gameplay analysis (157-167).

2.1. Video Game Analysis

The most long-lived and complex video game methodology controversy that affects the whole field of game studies but most remarkably the researchers using the methods of humanities is a *narratology vs. ludology* debate. To put it in a nutshell, narratology – "a branch of game studies that approaches the subject through the prism of *narrative*" – sees games as novel forms of storytelling and ludology – "a branch of game studies that approaches the subject through a prism of *play*" – as rule systems (Kremers 6). Dominic Arsenault distinguishes two trends of narratology in current game studies: one of them

follows the ideas of Vladimir Propp and French structuralists, "can be called narrative semiotics, and seeks to understand the combinatorial mechanics and underlying structures of stories" and the other one studies narrative features that are specific to the video game medium (369). One of the landmarks of narrative approach is Janet Murray's book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (1997) where she argues that procedural, participatory, encyclopedic, and spatial properties of digital environments makes computer a "powerful vehicle for literary creation" (71).

Ludological approach was created as a response to narratology. The godfather of the *ludology* term is Gonzalo Frasca but Jesper Juul indicates that today, it has two different meanings:

1. *Ludology*. The study of games as such; the study of games as a separate field with its own theories that are sensitive to the specifics of the medium and the game-playing activity.
2. *Ludology*. The study of games as distinct from narratives. ("Ludology" 363)

Juul states that it was the second definition of ludology that caused the clash between ludologists and narratologists. Janet Murray has called that type of ludological approach both methodology and ideology and suggests the *ideology* to be called *game essentialism* "since it claims that games, unlike other cultural objects, should be interpreted only as members of their own class, and only in terms of their defining abstract formal qualities" ("The Last Word" 2) The main ludology hardliners have been Espen Aarseth and Markku Eskelinen. However, the tension between the fronts has been losing the edge lately with some participants (Gonzalo Frasca, Jesper Juul *et al.*) claiming that it was artificial in the first place. Even if numerous studies have tried to bridge the gap between the approaches and the

compromises "along the lines of "all games are formal abstract systems, and some games have stories"" (Costikyan) are not rare, the differences in the study of games still remain. The main contribution of early ludology to the field of game studies is, according to Juul, three simple perceptions: stories are predetermined sequences but games are not; there are games without stories; good games can have bad stories and bad games can have good stories (363).

Ludology and narratology debate is relevant in the context of this thesis because Ian Bogost's theory of proceduralism (see chapter 2.3.1) that is used here for analyzing video games has grown out of ludological approach. It represents a type of game formalism that acknowledges the *system* (e.g. game rules) as a most important part of the game where the primary meaning making takes place. The importance of game's representative level and the possibility of game playing as an act of independent, creative (e.g. player-centric) meaning-making that is not just contained by the rules, but may even include abandoning the rules, are considered of secondary importance or even completely swept aside.

For analyzing videogames, whether by existing humanities, social sciences or design methods, Frans Mäyrä has proposed a basic distinction of layers in the game: "(1) core, or game as gameplay, and (2) shell, or game as representation and sign system" (17) that are visually explained in Figure 1.

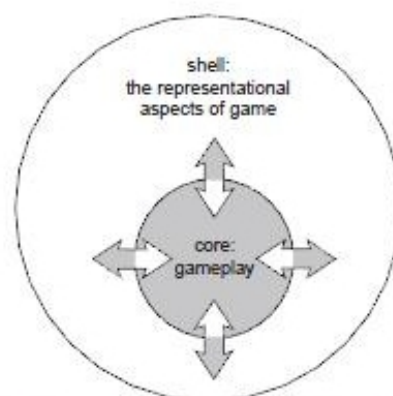


Figure 1: Core and shell i.e. gameplay and representation in video games according to Frans Mäyrä (18)

In Mäyrä's words, the core gameplay layer consists of the game rules and player's actions within the boundaries of these rules but the shell "includes all the semiotic richness modifying, containing and adding significance to that basic interaction." (17) He emphasizes that both of these dimensions are strongly interconnected and even if interactive gameplay is crucial condition "for games to be games there is always also interpretative activity involved: in the end, we cannot escape our human capacity to interpret meaning into sign systems and phenomena." (53) Even if Mäyrä is not straightforwardly saying it, it is possible to deduct from his writings that he recommends researching the game's core, the gameplay, using ludological approach while semiotics, narratology and other methods of humanities would be acceptable for studying representational game aspects, the shell.

Other game theorists who have had similar aims – to separate the game's representative layer from the layer of rules and gameplay – have been using slightly different terminology. In his PhD Dissertation *Play the Message*, Gonzalo Frasca, for example, is using a term *game-world* (following Espen Aarseth) or *play-world* in order to describe game's fictional content, objects, space and time and the term *mechanics* for "the group of regulations in play and games" (Frasca 116).

2.2. Roland Barthes' Myths and Semiotics

French theorist Roland Barthes (1915-1980) who brought Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) concept of signs, signifiers and signifieds into popular culture could be called the founding father of semiotics of everyday life (Thody 13, 59).

Saussure suggests that language is a sign system where signs are the arbitrary combination of signifieds (*signifié* = the conceptual component of the linguistic sign) and

signifiers (*signifiant* = the mental sound pattern associated with the *signifié* to form the linguistic sign) (Cobley 264-265). According to him, however, language is just one sign system among the many and the other systems in the society (architecture, fashion etc.) can be studied in the same way as the system of language.

In one of Roland Barthes' most widely read books, *Mythologies*, that was written in 1954-1956, and published as a single text in 1957, Barthes uses Saussure's concepts to explain how *myths* work in a society. In ancient Greece, myth (*mythos*) meant fiction but it "also tends to refer to stories that have an apparently timeless and universal appeal and truth" (Allen 34). In Barthes' use of the word, myth refers to contemporary dominant ideologies that present themselves as timeless and natural.

In order to show his readers the artificial and ideological nature of French culture, Barthes wrote of the myths he found from advertising, TV-shows, exhibitions and other popular imagery. He spoke of soap-powders and detergents, for example, that "have been in the last few years the object of such massive advertising that they now belong to a region of French daily life which the various types of psycho-analysis would do well to pay some attention to if they wish to keep up to date" (*Mythologies* 35).

For Barthes, advertising was one of the many tools of ideology that was "naturalizing" the symbolic order. In the essay *Rhetoric of the Image* (1964), Barthes says that he prefers to analyze advertisements, because:

In advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a

view to the optimum reading: the advertising image is *frank*, or at least emphatic.

(Image 33)

Roland Barthes argues, that in language, meaning is produced in a relation between the signifier and signified but "myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a *second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second" (Mythologies 113).

In order to describe the *first order system* that involves a signifier, a signified and their combination in a sign, Graham Allen uses an example of *roses*. The word or image of rose is combined with a cultural concept of roses that produces the rose as a sign of romance, passion and love (42).

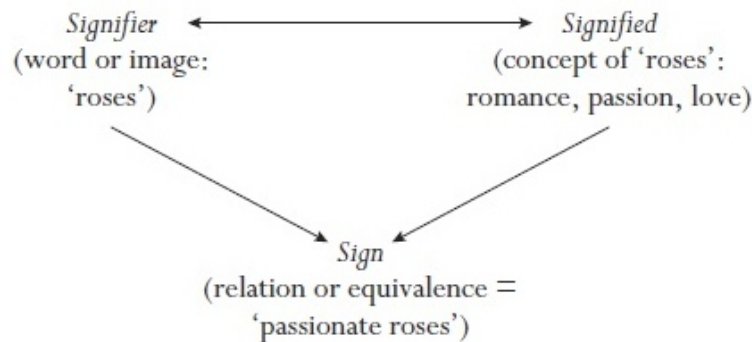


Figure 2: Graham Allen's model of relations between signifier, signified and sign in *Roland Barthes* (42).

The myth e.g. the *second order system* "generates meaning out of already existent meaning, already existent (first-order) signs" (Allen 44). Barthes described it on a following scheme:

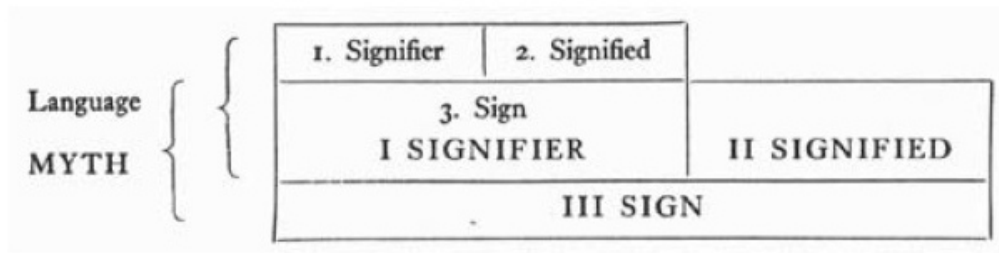


Figure 3: Roland Barthes' model of relations between the first-order and second-order signs (Mythologies 113)

The well-known example from Barthes that illustrates the creation of the myth is the cover photograph of *Paris-Match* that depicts a young saluting black man in a French uniform – that is the literal meaning of the image according to Barthes. However, he also finds a meaning from an image that glorifies the country of France and justifies the colonization of North-Africa: "I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier is giving the French salute*); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier" (Mythologies 115). If the purpose is to show the idea of France that calls people of all colors under her flag to serve as something "natural", the second-order meaning can be easily denied.

In order to differentiate the literal or *first-order signifying system* and *second order signifying system*, Barthes used the concepts of denotation and connotation. The literal, descriptive meaning of an image is denotative, while additional cultural meanings that can be found from texts or images and are particularly characteristic of ideology and myths are connotative (Huhtamo).

Video games are a particular way of using language and exploiting signs. The four web games of the Estonian Centre Party provide an interesting case study for a Barthesian

mythologist, because of the two different types of myths they are conveying. The signs of these games reflect the common mythologies of Estonian society, but in addition to that, they provide the examples of the mythology of one political group within the society – the Estonian Centre Party.

2.3. Video Game Rhetoric

In this master's thesis, I am using different strategies in order to study, how Center Party's four web games convey meaning and persuade the player. The *game-world* of the four web games under scrutiny – fictional content, topology/level design, textures etc. (Aarseth) – or Frans Mäyrä's *shell* layer of video games is analyzed here with the help of semiotics, the study of signs. As described above, my semiotic analysis is largely relying on the ideas and concepts of French philosopher Roland Barthes.

The meanings that are made on the level of game mechanics and rules are studied in the thesis with the help of rhetoric, more precisely – gameplay rhetoric and procedural rhetoric.

Rhetoric is an old discipline that started in ancient Greece as an art of persuasive speech and writing. It evolved through medieval times, renaissance and Enlightenment period and changed remarkably during the course of 20th century. One man, who revived rhetoric, although against his initial wishes, was Roland Barthes whose ideas about semiotics were described in the previous chapter.

In my rhetorical analysis of Estonian Center Party's web games I will rely mostly on the theories and insights of Ian Bogost, Gonzalo Frasca and Drew Davidson, therefore, it would be appropriate to begin with the recognition that the concept of *rhetoric* has quite different meaning for all above-named scholars.

Ian Bogost, the author of the theory of *procedural rhetoric*, is using the term *rhetoric* in its original, but also old-fashioned sense. For him, *rhetoric* is "the study of persuasive expression" (Persuasive Games viii) and his new theory, *procedural rhetoric*, is "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions" (Persuasive Games ix). He does mention the development of rhetoric in more recent time into discipline that is more concerned of "effective expression" than persuasion and quotes Kenneth Burke, for whom, rhetoric is a system of *identification* (Persuasive Games 19), but to Bogost, rhetoric still more or less equals with persuasion.

Roland Barthes was completely anti-rhetoric. He wrote an essay *The Old Rhetoric: an aide-mémoire* (1964-65), in order to demonstrate that the discipline of rhetoric is dead or at least dying and that is for the best. For Barthes, rhetoric was a language of a certain historical period that was perceived as universal; oppressive *system* which he tried to reduce to "merely historicized object" (Semiotic Challenge 93). According to his view, rhetoric is an ideology: "a *science* of literary language which has endowed the ruling elite with power, but which has also behaved like an imperial force, colonizing academic curricula and repressing the possibility of other kinds of linguistic study" (Richards 126-127).

Jennifer Richards writes that despite Barthes' predictions about the death of rhetoric the discipline survived, but now "it is called upon to remind us that there is no objective, truthful language that can lift us above the uncertain realm of persuasion" (9). In her conclusion of the book *Rhetoric*, she describes new rhetoric (that has been greatly influenced by Kenneth Burke) as "exploring the ways in which we act on others and how we are, in turn, acted upon"; "flexible process of argument, which insists on the reversibility of all positions ... [and] uses argument on different sides to unsettle positions that seem 'natural' and unquestionable" (176-177). Especially this last claim is the complete opposite of what Roland

Barthes thought of rhetoric – he used semiotics for revealing cultural constructs that were mediated to us as "natural" by rhetoric.

I do believe that would be possible to do a rhetorical analysis of the game-world – the representative level of the game – by borrowing ideas from new rhetoric. However, because of Roland Barthes' approach to rhetoric, I am keeping rhetorical analysis and semiotic analysis (that relies mainly on Barthes) apart in this master's thesis in order not to confuse "different rhetorics". As a result, I am analyzing the semantic level of the games only by the means of semiotics, and reserve rhetoric for the game rules and mechanics.

Gonzalo Frasca, whose PhD dissertation *Play the Message* has been a valuable source of information for the thesis, also acknowledges that "modern rhetoric broke with the concept of rhetoric as mainly a persuasive discipline" (79). Compared to Bogost, his definition of rhetoric is more contemporary but also more ambiguous – "modern rhetoric aims at covering the broadest semiotic spectrum of communication" (80). However, he presents a good overview of theoretical texts about game and play rhetoric in his dissertation.

Among others, he refers to Brian Sutton-Smith and his seven categories of play rhetoric that, rather than being understood as persuasive techniques are "part of the multiple broad symbolic systems –political, religious, social, and educational – through which we construct the meaning of the cultures in which we live." (qtd. in Frasca 81).

However, Sutton-Smith's categories explain how games and play are perceived but not how they convey meaning. As a consequence, Frasca proposes a different kind of meaning to *play rhetoric*, suggesting that it could even become a new discipline which would not be a collection of persuasive techniques but a "metalanguage" in Barthesian sense and would "identify how play can convey meaning or rather how players construct meaning through play" (87).

The differences in terms – why I said above that I will use *gameplay rhetoric* for analyzing the games while Frasca is talking of *play rhetoric* – comes from the different focus and emphasizes of our research. Gonzalo Frasca's PhD dissertation's aim is to move from the system-centric approach to videogames that is especially favored by Ian Bogost and his school of proceduralists towards more player-centric approach i.e. his objective is not so much to understand "how **games** convey meaning" but "how **players** construct meaning while playing games" [emphasis added] (20).

Unfortunately, the scope of this master's thesis does not allow me to study Estonian Center Party's web games together with their players. Therefore, I made a decision to focus solely on the games this time, hoping that, in the future, I will also have the opportunity to study the players of these games. Because of the choice of my research subject, I will focus mainly on how games convey meaning – semantically and rhetorically.

Drew Davidson who has studied gameplay rhetoric is mostly interested in how the rhetorical elements in game mechanics guide the player through the game. He does not give the readers his definition of rhetoric but seems to be sharing Wayne C. Booth's approach who has written about the rhetoric of fiction as "technique of non-didactic fiction, viewed as an art of communicating with readers – the rhetorical resources available to the writer ... as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader" (Booth xiii).

In my rhetorical analysis of game mechanics I will follow in Frasca's and Davidson's foot-steps in order to explain more general aspects of gameplay rhetoric and turn to Ian Bogost's theory of proceduralism to analyze deliberately designed and implemented persuasive elements of game mechanics.

2.3.1. Ian Bogost's Procedural Rhetoric and Its Critique

Ian Bogost states that persuasion in video games works through (computational) processes. Therefore, he introduces the term *procedural rhetoric*, where *procedurality* is referring to "a way of creating, explaining, or understanding processes" and *rhetoric* is referring to "effective and persuasive expression"; concluding that "*procedural rhetoric* is a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created" (Persuasive Games 2-3).

According to Bogost, computational processes, especially video games, are unique among other media as they are not executing rhetoric merely through visual images or text but are persuading the user through rule-based representations and interactions. The reason that video games are intricate rule-governed systems themselves makes them suitable for representing and simulating other complex systems: "only procedural systems like computer software actually represent process with process" (Persuasive Games 14).

Similar ideas have been expressed also by other game designers and researchers like Ted Friedman who indicated already in 1995 that it would be easier to imagine computer game than film based on Karl Marx's *Capital* ("Making Sense of Software"). Persuasion through simulation games has been prominently advocated also by Gonzalo Frasca who has designed some of the best known *persuasive games* like *Kabul Kaboom!* (2001), *September 12th* (2003), and *Madrid* (2004) and collaborated with Bogost on multiple occasions.

Game researcher Miguel Sicart places Ian Bogost's *proceduralism* in a framework of "formalist work laid out by the original ""ludologists"" that attempts to be "...both [-] an analytical theory and a design paradigm by validating its existence through its application on serious games" ("Against Procedurality"). Sicart finds that by claiming that the medium of computer games is *unique* for being procedural by nature, Bogost and his followers have

justified videogames culturally and opened up new possibilities for the serious games movement.

However, in his opinion, the theory of procedural rhetoric overemphasizes the importance of rules in a game – according to proceduralists, "game *is* the rules", he says – and downplays the role of creative play and players. The example of Bogost preferring the rules over the content of the games can be seen further on in this thesis at the attempt to define *political videogames* (see Chapter 3).

According to the proceduralist logic, it is the design of the game that gives it its meaning, not its players or the context of playing: the only meaning that players can create, or rather, extricate from the game while playing, is the one that is previously inserted there by the designer. Therefore, as "for proceduralists, games have meanings that are prior to the act of playing the game, and somewhat determine the meaning of the game", Miguel Sicart goes as far as to claim that "proceduralism is a determinist, perhaps even totalitarian approach to play; an approach that defines the action prior to its existence, and denies the importance of anything that was not determined before the act of play, in the system design of the game" (*Ibid.*).

Sicart refers to Eugen Fink who sees playing as creative and imaginative act and concludes that game rules structure and focus play, but remain, nevertheless a subject of play. Accordingly – "meaning of a game cannot be reduced to its rules, nor to the behaviors derived from the rules ... the meaning of games ... is played" (*Ibid.*).

Although Gonzalo Frasca has not opposed Ian Bogost's proceduralism publicly as far as I know, it is obvious from his writings that he does not agree with all Bogost's ideas. He agrees that "system-centric approaches can be useful for game design purposes" but elaborates that "approaching games from a system-centric perspective is not problem *per se*, as long as its limitations are recognized" and warns that "framing games mainly as objects can

lead to an essentialist approach" (Frasca 61-62). In *Play the Message*, Frasca brings examples of games that share identical game mechanics but convey completely different ideas (*La Reconquista de España*, 1939 and *Plan de los Aliados*, 1939) and claims that "even though I agree that rules are an essential aspect of game rhetoric, they cannot work independently from objects, ideas, texts, sounds and images" (87). Hopefully, my analysis of the Estonian Center Party web games will come to support and strengthen this viewpoint.

2.4. Research Strategy

In this thesis, I am turning to the methods of humanities combined with analytical playing and use a structuralist model of qualitative research that assumes that "cultural systems of meaning ... frame the perception and construction of subjective and social reality" (Flick 62). In this model, the surface of experience is thought to be accessible to everyone, but the deep structures that generate activities are not accessible to everyday individual reflections: those deep structures are contained in cultural models, interpretive patterns and latent structures of meaning (*Ibid.*).

The starting point of the research is theoretical knowledge gathered from the writings of Roland Barthes, Ian Bogost and Gonzalo Frasca. The first of these scholars uses *semiotics* for uncovering deep structures of different "texts", the other has created a theory of *procedural rhetoric* for explaining and enhancing the structure of video games and the third studies *play rhetoric* for similar purposes.

The hypotheses derived from the theoretical knowledge is that video games have unique abilities for mediating ideological and political messages that may or may not suffice to make them an effective and popular medium for the purpose. "Texts" e.g. exemplary empirical objects on what the hypothesis is tested are four web games described in the

introduction of the thesis. In order to fit my research in the limits of a master's thesis, I have decided to analyze a certain group of video games here and postponed studying their players for the future.

In order to analyze the strategies of meaning-making within political videogames, I will divide the games into two separate layers that could be called either game's *core* and *shell* or *mechanics* and *game-world*. The meaning-making in the representative shell layer of the games is studied by the means of semiotics, while the meaning-making in the game's *core* layer is studied by the means of gameplay rhetorics and procedural rhetorics.

The data for the analysis is gathered by analytical game-playing that could be seen as a form of close reading – "interpretation of the phenomenon through detailed analysis" ("Close Reading"). Additional data has been gathered from existing media-texts and self-produced semi-structured e-mail interviews (see Appendix A and B).

The weakness of the structuralist methodological model as well as the method of interpretative close reading is their relative subjectivity – it can be claimed, that texts "result from the interests of those who produced the text as well as of those who read it" (Flick 63), therefore, both "texts", the ones that are produced for the purposes of interpretation (in this case, four video games) and the new text that is formulated as a result of the interpretation (the research), correspond to the interests of their interpretators (*Ibid.*). However, the above-described research methods are widely accepted approaches for analyzing cultural artifacts and in my opinion, applicable for analyzing polysemiotic⁶, procedural political video games.

⁶ Polysemiotic – made up of numerous codes that interact to produce a single effect (Chiaro 142).

3. VIDEO GAME TYPOLOGY AND CLASSIFICATION

Game designer Ernest Adams has described the whole domain of video gaming as a *genre muddle* ("The Designer's Notebook"). Even if video game theorists and designers have been attempting to sort *the muddle* out every now and then, it is true that there is a lack of consistency in the use of video game genre terminology, both in theory and everyday practice. The most notable attempts on creating taxonomy of video game genres have been done by Chris Crawford in his classic book *The Art of the Computer Game Design* (1982) as well as by Mark P.J. Wolf (*The Medium of the Video Game*, 2001) and Espen Aarseth (*A Multi-Dimensional Typology of Games*, 2003). The genre debate has been also influenced by *narratology vs. ludology* controversy that was described in more detail in the previous chapter. In daily practice, majority of the genre divisions (but not all of them), still concentrate on the ludological dimensions of games instead of narrative qualities as traditional genre studies seem to have inadequate means of evaluating video games and their inherent qualities fully:

Video games may no longer be unproblematically analyzed as simply "texts" that produce "meanings," as this is only a part of their operation. Video games complicate ideas of genre that rely on narrative structure (like literary genres) or iconography (like visual genres), by hybridizing narrative and visual iconography, with concerns unique to the video game medium: virtual representation of spaces, movements, and actions, and well as non-representational elements, particularly modes of interaction. (Apperley 353-354)

Nevertheless, acknowledging the hybridity of the medium of the video game has not made the *genre muddle* disappear and genre disputes between the video game market representatives, designer, scholars *et al.* remain. Maybe strict distinction of video game genres and narrative genres as described by Lars Konzack in his publication *Computer Game Criticism: A Method for Computer Game Analysis* would bring some clarity into the *muddle* in the long perspective.

3.1. Serious Games

So-called *serious games* and its numerous subcategories are also being haunted by terminology issues. Most commonly, serious games are understood as games that are designed for other purposes than entertainment. Ben Sawyer, co-director of *Serious Games Initiative*, game designer and author who, with certain reservations can be credited with coining the term⁷, has defined serious games as "solutions for problems – any meaningful use of computerized game/game industry resources whose chief mission is not entertainment" (12).

However, his emphasis on the problem solving qualities of serious games has made other game designers to exclude some well-known games that are usually classified as *serious* from the genre. Ernest Adams, for example, finds that notorious game *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* that simulates the 1999 Columbine High School shootings in Colorado, U.S does not fall into the category of serious games because it "is a satire; [...] it obviously wasn't intended to make money or solve a problem, and perhaps not even to entertain. Satire may be another purpose in its own right" ("The Designer's Notebook").

Sawyer, together with Peter Smith, has also written down alternative names for the serious games: educational games; simulation; virtual reality; alternative purpose games;

⁷ The concept of *serious games* was introduced to game studies before the rise of the videogames. Serious play was analyzed by Johan Huizinga in his classic study *Homo ludens* (1938), Clark C. Abt published a book *Serious Games* in 1970 that explored the possibilities of using analogue games in education, industry etc.

edutainment; digital game-based learning; immersive learning simulations; social impact games; persuasive games; games for change; games for good; synthetic learning environments; game-based “X” (9) – all of these titles are simultaneously accepted by video game industry and theory, but often used separately and in different circles.

Clark Aldrich, designer and the author of *The Complete Guide of Simulation and Serious Games*, is bringing out a number of pros and cons of using the term serious games as well:

Pros: Nicely ironic; students like it; press loves it – *loves it* (I mean *New York Times* and "serious games" should get a room); researchers use it as a way to get foundation grants; it's the most popular handle. Cons: Sponsors hate it, and instructors from academics, corporate, and military, hate it. It emphasizes the most controversial part of the experience – the fun part (that is, the game elements), and it often describes content that is too conceptual (you would never call a flight simulator a "serious game"). Most examples of serious games are neither very serious nor very good games. For better and worse, the term is successor to *edutainment* (33).

However, in his book *Persuasive Games*, videogame researcher and designer Ian Bogost has developed a critical approach not just towards the term but the whole concept of serious games in its current form. First, he points out that opposing *serious games* to entertaining games suggests that the latter are not able to communicate *serious* messages (Jansz 794); secondly, he highlights *Serious Games Summit's*⁸ list of institutions that the conference sees as their partners: education, government, health, military, corporate, first

⁸ *Serious Games Summit* is organized by *Serious Games Initiative* (founded at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C) and therefore represents mostly Ben Sawyer's perception of *serious games*. It is worth mentioning, though that even if Ian Bogost is taking a critical position towards *Serious Games Summit* he is, at the same time, the official advisor of the conference.

responders, science; and concludes that *Serious Games Initiative's* "focus on "government and other public or private organizations" [...] suggest that serious games are crafted in the service of officials, especially officials of governments or corporations" (Persuasive Games 56). Therefore, he writes:

Serious games are videogames created to support the existing and established interests of political, corporate, and social institutions. To apply this principle to the industry domains of the *Serious Games Summit* proves a simple task. Educational games translate existing pedagogical goals into videogame form; government games translate existing political goals in videogame form; health games provide doctors and medical institutions with videogame-based tools to accomplish their existing needs; military games help armies and soldiers address existing global conflicts with new, cheaper, and more scalable simulations; corporate games provide executives with videogame-based tools to accomplish their existing business goals; first responder games offer simulated views of already known methods of response to natural disaster or terrorist incident; and science games provide appealing videogame-based tools to clarify known principles and practices (Persuasive Games 57).

Despite some of its disadvantages, limitations and possible ideological baggage that may be attached to its current use, the name *serious games* is still most widely acknowledged term for speaking of games that have been done for other purposes than entertainment. The alternative names for serious games often limit themselves to referring only to some potential purpose of the game like educational (edutainment, educational games *et al.*) or social change (social impact games, games for change, games for good *et al.*) – the name *serious games*,

however, seems to be able to gather all its subcategories together under one roof if not without complications then at least slightly less problematically.

Ian Bogost's alternative vision for the name and concept to *serious games – persuasive games* – are video games, whether *serious* or entertaining, that are designed to influence players. However, in many instances, those types of games still operate in the fields of education, commerce, and politics and therefore do not drift very far from the Sawyer's idea of so-called *serious games*. Interestingly, in his latest book *How to do Things with Videogames* (2011) even Bogost uses the *serious games* concept freely for describing games that stand "outside entertainment" (5).

The most systematical and ambitious attempt to classify so-called serious games is, for the time being, Ben Sawyer's and Peter Smith's *Taxonomy of Serious Games* (see table 1). Different establishments that can make use of serious games industry are listed in the first column of the table. The content of the column resembles to *Serious Games Summit's* list of possible partner institutions: government and NGO, defense, healthcare, marketing and communication, education, corporate, and industry. Video games in the uppermost row of the table are sorted to groups according to their objective. In the intersections of game categories and institutions are, as Ben Sawyer would probably say it, problems that could be solved by serious games; or as Ian Bogost would say it – goals that could be translated in videogame form. It is important to note that when assembling the table, Sawyer and Smith found existing game equivalents for approximately 80 % of their taxonomy chart. Some game objectives for certain institutions are merely suggestive: using games as work and in production seems to be especially challenging.

Taxonomy of Serious Games

	Games for Health	Advergemes	Games for Training	Games for Education	Games for Science and Research	Production	Games as Work
Government & NGO	Public Health Education & Mass Casualty Response	Political Games	Employee Training	Inform public	Data Collection / Planning	Strategic & Policy Planning	Public Diplomacy, Opinion Research
Defense	Rehabilitation & Wellness	Recruitment & Propaganda	Soldier / Support Training	School House Education	War games / Planning	War Planning & Weapons Research	Command & Control
Healthcare	Cybertherapy / Exergaming	Public Health Policy & Social Awareness Campaigns	Training Games for Health Professionals	Games for Patient Education and Disease Management	Visualization & Epidemiology	Biotech Manufacturing & Design	Public Health Response Planning & Logistics
Marketing and Communications	Advertising Treatment	Advertising, marketing with games, product placement	Product Use	Product Information	Opinion Research	Machinima	Opinion Research
Education	Inform about diseases / risks	Social Issue Games	Train teachers / Train workforce skills	Learning	Computer Science & Recruitment	P2P Learning Constructivism Documentary?	Teaching Distance Learning
Corporate	Employee Health Information & Wellness	Customer Education & Awareness	Employee Training	Continuing Education & Certification	Advertising / Visualization	Strategic Planning	Command & Control
Industry	Occupational Safety	Sales & Recruitment	Employee Training	Workforce Education	Process Optimization Simulation	Nano / Bio-tech Design	Command & Control

Table 1: *Taxonomy of Serious Games* according to Ben Sawyer and Peter Smith (29)

3.1.1. Advergimes

In *Taxonomy of Serious Games*, Ben Sawyer and Peter Smith have gathered all of the game types that will be more thoroughly described and analyzed in the current master's thesis under a title *advergimes*. It is often claimed that the development of advergimes started as a response to low success rate of more conventional internet advertising like banners and pop-ups. Advergimes are considered to be a "reflection of the growing blurring between entertainment and persuasion" and it has been pointed out that the aim of advergimes "is to offer entertainment and to engage web or electronic game users in order to make an emotional connection between the game and the brand featured within it" (Dahl, Eagle, and Báez 3).

According to Ian Bogost, a formal definition of *advergame*⁹ can be traced to Jane Chen and Matthew Ringel, analysts at interactive agency <kpe>, and their 2001 whitepaper *Can Advergaming Be the Future of Interactive Advertising?* (Persuasive Games 152). Chen and Ringel defined advergimes as "the use of interactive gaming technology to deliver embedded advertising messages to consumers," pointing out that "it incorporates branding directly into the gaming environment" and "the advertising message is central to game play" (2). Matthew Ringel divided advergimes into three types:

Associative Advergaming can drive brand awareness by associating the product with the lifestyle or activity featured in the game.

Illustrative Advergaming can prominently feature the product itself in game play.

⁹ In the internet sources, the term *advergame* is attributed to Anthony Giallourakis who allegedly coined it in 2000, concurrently purchasing the domain names *Advergimes.com* and *Adverplay.com* – unfortunately the most quoted article in the web about the origin of the term *advergame* is in *Wikipedia* and therefore this information needs to be verified.

Demonstrative Advergaming can leverage the full arsenal of interactivity by allowing the consumer to experience the product within the virtual confines of the gaming space. (3-4)

In other words, *demonstrative advertising* provides direct information about the product; *illustrative advertising* emphasizes more the indirect information, placing the product in a social and cultural context; and *associative advertising* focuses on indirect information, especially on the product's niche market appeal and is also known as "lifestyle marketing" (Persuasive Games 154, 156). Mattias Svahn has indicated that Chen's and Ringel's method of systematization is useful, but the three categories are not mutually exclusive and be combined in a single game (188).

Research done on advergaming has so far focused mostly on the games that advertize some type of manufactured product (cars, sports equipment, food etc.) and / or enhances the brand of the manufacturer of the goods (BMW, Nike, M&M's). Frans Mäyrä, however, defines advergaming more broadly. In his words, advergaming are "games that also operate at some level as advertisement of company, product or political view" (148). Ian Bogost is explaining advergaming and persuasive games that use political imagery in the different chapters of his book *Persuasive Games* – mostly because of his distinct definition of *political games* – but mentions also politically themed games that use the technique of associative advertising. For Ben Sawyer and Peter Smith, video games that are addressing political issues belong undeniably among the advergaming (see table 2). In the upper row of their *Taxonomy of Advergaming* are the means of using video games as advertising tools; in the first column of the table are the objectives of the advergaming (introducing a product to a consumer, increasing recruitment for an army etc.). The rest of the table contains the names of the existing advergaming that fall into the corresponding categories.

Taxonomy of Advergaming

	Using Games				Game Association			
	Standalone Advergame	In Game Placement		Out of Game Placement		Games in Ads	Marketing with Games	
		Billboards	Integrated Gameplay	Outside Field of View	Interstitial		Event Marketing	Product Tie-In
Branding	Coke Studios	FIFA Soccer	Playboy the Mansion	Game Portals i.e. Kongregate	Xbox Live	Coca-Cola w/ Warcraft	EA Sports 500 at Talladega	Slusho Cloverfield Game
Product	Yaris Racing on Xbox Live	Massive In Game Product Placement	Axe Body Spray	Doritos Unlock the Xbox Design Contest	Old Spice on Xbox Live	Volvo w/ Rallisport	MTV Gamers Ball	Movie Licensed Games
Issue	Darfur is Dying		Second Life Relay for Life	Free Rice				
Political	Take Back Illinois		Candidate Second Life Islands			Ping Time Labor Party Ad		
PSA	Catch The Sperm	Massive in Game Stay in School Ads				Teenage Mom Ad	Penny Arcade ESRB	
Recruitment	America's Army	British Intelligence Agency in Quake Wars		Military Recruitment Ads on Game Portals		US Army Gamer Targeted TV Ad	Army Game Experience	PS2 America's Army

Table 2: Taxonomy of advergaming according to Ben Sawyer and Peter Smith (32)

3.2. Casual Games

As Jussi Kuittinen, Annakaisa Kultima et al. point out in the paper *Casual Games Discussion*, "the casual games sector ... has been growing rapidly... However, there is no clear view on what is *casual* in games cultures... *Casual* is often taken to refer to the player, the game or the playing style, but other factors such as business models and accessibility are also considered as characteristic of *casual* in games." As a result, *casual gamer* is taken to mean both *someone who plays casual games* and *someone who plays casually* (105).

The discussion over casual games has also not been untouched by the *genre muddle*. Sometimes certain genres, like puzzle, tend to be classified as casual games while "sometimes casual games are considered as a genre of their own with various sub-genres like puzzle... Some casual games fit into many genres, like *Zuma*, which could be considered to be an arcade, puzzle, action or even shoot'em up game" (Kuittinen et al. 106).

In his book *A Casual Revolution*, Jesper Juul shows that *casual games* are often being defined through what they are not – as an opposition to *hardcore games*. If hardcore games "focus on technological capabilities" and may often have "gory themes" (25) then casual games are perceived as "easy-to-learn family games" that "tend to use simple technology" (26). According to the description of gamers, hardcore gamers are seen as committed to a game while casual gamers are expected to "have little knowledge of video game conventions" and "spend little time playing games" (28). As different researches show, though, this last stereotype is quite possibly not true as casual games can also be played in hardcore way i.e. time-intensively (*A Casual Revolution* 30, Kuittinen et al. 106) which brings us back to the controversy of defining *casual gamer*.

However, so called *casual games* seem to share certain design elements, at least. Kuittinen, Kultima et al. write that "game has generally appealing content, simple controls,

easy-to-learn gameplay, fast rewards, or support for short play sessions" (107). Jesper Juul quotes Ben Shneiderman who thinks that casual games should have "continuous representation of the object of interest; physical actions (movement and selection by mouse, joystick, touch screen, etc.) or labeled button presses instead of complex syntax; rapid, incremental, reversible operations whose impact on the object of interest is immediately visible; layered or spiral approach to learning that permits usage with minimal knowledge" (A Casual Revolution 35).

According to these game properties, many serious games, including advergames, can be also classified as casual games. If we look at the *Standalone Advergame* category in Ben Sawyer's and Peter Smith's *Taxonomy of Advergaming* (Table 2) then Flash-based browser games *Darfur is Dying* and *Take Back Illinois* that have simple controls and allow player to immerse himself in game without a long learning-curve, can be labeled as casual games while the realistic tactical shooter *America's Army* that among other things requires players to complete complicated training missions before fully engaging with the game itself, cannot¹⁰.

IDGA's (International Game Developers Association) *2008-2009 Casual Games White Paper* explains this difference in a following way:

Games such as *America's Army* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* set the bar in terms of graphics and gameplay for many subsequent serious games in non-military fields. ... The deep pockets of early serious games adopters, organizations like the U.S. military, made it possible to pay for budgets to make triple-A styled titles but with a more serious bent. ... Serious games that focused on ... advocating social causes ... lacked the luxury of similar budgets. After all, if your goal is to make a game to showcase the

¹⁰ Tero Pasanen has described the possible effect of *America's Army* training missions on casual players as follows: "enthusiasm of casual users may fade as they are bombarded and overburdened with instructive, factual, and/or otherwise "educational" information, sometimes to the detriment of a player's enjoyment" ("The Army Game" 18).

environmentally unfriendly practices of McDonalds, such as *McDonalds Videogame* did, it is unlikely that McDonalds will fund the project (190).

Therefore, one more characteristics of casual game is usually its relatively low production cost compared to complex, technologically advanced *hardcore* games. Besides that, they are also said to be developed "at a faster pace with smaller teams" (Kuittinen et al. 108-109).

In its *2008-2209 Casual Games White Paper*, IGDA lists several reasons why serious games' developers should prefer casual games format: 1) cost structure – "million dollar budgets for serious games are becoming the exception" 2) player demographics – "using ideas from the casual games space, serious games can be effective with learners who are not video game literate – even to users who are afraid to try traditional video games" 3) play time and structure – "when time is a scarce commodity, casual games are better suited to offering compelling experiences in short play sessions" and 4) game distribution methods – "serious games that require installation from a disk may lose out to similar products that can be distributed over a network" (191-193).

Many serious games, including advergames and political advergames aka *election games* that are described later on in this chapter are indeed based on the casual game's model and seem to be targeted to slightly polemical but assumedly existing *casual player*.

3.3. Political Video Games

In *Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Roger Stahl claims that games "can become a political force [...] through a) moral panic, b) by way of military-entertainment complex, and c) as activism" (807). In a list of games that have caused moral panic, Stahl

names games like Exidy's *Deathrace* (1972), *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), and *Grand Theft Auto* (1999) that have been subjects of charged public and political discussions for their graphic depiction of violence – especially after the 1999 school shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado, U.S. (*Ibid.*)

Videogame-related moral panic is even capable of effecting governments and high ranking diplomats: Tero Pasanen describes a case in the article *Hyökkäys Moskovaan!* where the marketing and sale of Anti-Soviet game *Raid over Moscow* in Finland in 1985 (at the thaw of the Finlandization period) became an issue to be solved for the Finnish parliamentary member and caused a controversy between Soviet Union's and Finnish diplomats. Pasanen concludes that Finns who objected the game were presenting themselves as "moral guardians, responsible of protecting the youth" who, at the time, related more to American pop culture than to older generation's belief into socialism (8).

The interdependent relationship between "gametime and wartime" (Halter 5) can be traced back to several analogue war games starting with ancient Chinese game *Go*, 17th century *Koeningspiel* (The King's Game) or 19th century German war-simulation *Kriegsspiel* (The Wargame). Nevertheless, it is often agreed that military-entertainment complex as we now know it got its start from the "real-time television spectacle of *Operation Desert Storm* in 1991 [that] initiated the popularity of war games based on real conflicts" and was followed by further cooperation "between defense contractors and video game companies [...] throughout the 1990s" (Stahl 808).

Good example of U.S military supported videogame with battle scenarios "ripped from the headlines" (Huntemann 229) is *Kuma War* that tries to recreate real-world conflicts with maximum accuracy and urges the players to abandon the news channels in favor of playing the game. The tactical first and third-person shooter is free to download. It was launched in 2004 and is updated with new episodes every month. The game lets its players to

escort a military convoy in Iraq or even recreate capturing Osama bin Laden or finding the body of Muammar Gaddafi.

Digital game activism is based on a belief that games about social or political issues can reach to people who might not normally be receptive to political messages and that games are, by their very nature, especially suitable for representing and simulating complex systems like economic or social ones. This assumption owes much to Ian Bogost's "proceduralist" school of thought but Mary Flanagan also points out, that the concept of "critical play" has been used for creative expression, instrument of conceptual thinking and social tool in 20-century art movements like Dada, Fluxus etc. (Flanagan 187). Digital activists who have chosen games to be their platforms can create their own "games with agenda" (Gonzalo Frasca's term) or use existing game environments for distributing their message – tactics that uses the strategies of culture jamming and is known as in-game activism.

If we were to agree to the definition of political videogames offered in *Encyclopedia of Political Communication* we could say that videogames can be considered political if their content becomes a subject of political discussion; if they simulate politics; or become a part of political process itself. Ian Bogost has, once again, a different opinion – in his words "not all videogames about politics are political" (Persuasive Games 90). By his definition, political videogames are only these games that simulate political processes and where the political argument is communicated to a player through the means of procedural rhetoric so that "by playing these games and unpacking the claims their procedural rhetorics make about political situations, we can gain an unusually detached perspective on the ideologies that drive them" (Persuasive Games 75).

Bogost explains his view on political videogames further by separating *politicking* and *politics* from one another. *Politicking* is a political activity that is directed towards achieving power e.g. campaigning, whereas *politics* is executing that power. Bogost finds that "in an

ideal representative democracy, the one leads to the other, but in contemporary society the two are orthogonal" ("The Birth and Death"). In his opinion, games i.e. simulated worlds with their own rule systems would be natural on representing *politics* i.e. the rules by which we live in an actual world, but *politicking* – advertising, TV-shows etc. – is only meant to "get smiling faces and simple ideas in front of voters" (Ibid.).

As an example, he criticizes the UK mobile game developer Sorrent's game for 2004 U.S President Elections *Bush vs. Kerry Boxing* where the heads of a characters in a boxing game were replaced with the heads of presidential candidates, saying that the game only "reinforces the metaphor of politics as personalities rather than as infrastructures for facilitating everyday life." At the best, game's graphics may make some visual arguments about politics but not procedural ones as the game does not "proceduralize the political": "These games apply a political skin to existing procedural mechanics, without attempting to transfer those mechanics into rhetoric supporting a political argument." (Persuasive Games 94)

Therefore, according to Bogost, many politically themed games or even *election games* that are designed to be a part of *politicking* process do not really fall under the category of *political* video games as they do not use their procedurality for forming political arguments.

Bogost's definition of political videogames is clearly influenced by ludological approach. For him, the meaning making that happens at the game's representational *shell* level is irrelevant compared to the meanings that are made or not made on game's gameplay level. As I tend to support Gonzalo Frasca's views that also game's semantic dimension is worth attention and study, I would consider Bogost's definition noteworthy but too narrow.

Mike Treanor and Michael Mateas have highlighted politically and socially themed video games' connection to an earlier medium – political cartoon – a connection that in my

opinion would be worth of a closer study. Gonzalo Frasca has even described the content of the term *newsgames* he has coined as "simulation meets political cartoons" (Mateas and Treanor 1). Even if games have ludological aspects that political cartoons do not have, I would argue that in this case, it is the *message* the medium conveys that defines it as *political*, even if it is forwarded by semantic and narrative means in a game as it would be in political cartoons – therefore, in the thesis, I will be using Roger Stahl's definition of political video games while remembering Ian Bogost's viewpoint in the analysis' as well.

However, it is necessary to specify that Roger Stahl is actually missing a category of games that Ian Bogost places in the sphere of politicking from his account on political games. One possible reason behind it could be the ambiguous line between activism and politics, but if activists would be defined as persons who are "challengers to policies and practices, trying to achieve a social goal, not to obtain power themselves" (Martin 19) then there should be a separate category for political games that do not belong to the military-entertainment complex, are financed and distributed by the framework of conventional politics and designed as "a means to an end" (Stahl 808), like *election games*.

3.3.1. Video Games and Propaganda

Denis McQuail describes the study of propaganda as a starting point for modern study of political communications. As the subjects of early studies of propaganda were Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, who monopolized media in order to influence the audiences, the term acquired a negative connotation:

It was used to indicate a form of persuasive communication with the following features: the communication is for the purposes of the sender, rather than for the

receiver, or for mutual benefit; it involves a high degree of control and management by the source; the purpose and sometimes the identity of the source is often concealed. In general, propaganda is strongly 'manipulative', onedirectional and coercive (475).

However, according to McQuail, the term is also used in a less negative way to refer to "direct communications from political parties by way of mass media designed to persuade or mobilize support" (*Ibid.*). Thymian Bussemer adds some more characteristics to propaganda – in addition to being manipulative and unidirectional, it is communicated to large number of people by mass media and tries to "naturalize" certain self-interested viewpoints (658). Bussemer points out that there is no consensus about the relations of propaganda and advertising: before World War I, the terms were used synonymously while after the war, propaganda was perceived only as a political technique.

According to Thymian Bussemer, activities that could be described as a political propaganda in contemporary democratic societies (public relations, campaigning etc.) differ from the ones in the "propaganda regimes in Germany, Italy, Russia, and China" because the "parties openly admit that they try to persuade the electorate, and the media can comment freely on the various positions. Propaganda competes as one position among many on the market of opinions." (*Ibid.*)

Stanley B. Cunningham who has sought to reconstruct the philosophical concept of propaganda in a contemporary setting is calling this transition from World War I propaganda to public relations *new propaganda*. *New propaganda* is progressively dependent on technology, targets more selected groups than traditional propaganda, and what is most important – is ubiquitous i.e. not only confined to politics (21-25). Building on Cunningham's insights, Aaron Delwiche claims that "propaganda encompasses advertisements, public relations campaigns, political commercials, political leaflets, and persuasive messages

embedded in most forms of entertainment, including video games" (93). In Delwiche's opinion, vocabulary used by *serious games* movement, particularly terms like "behavior modification", "training", "learning", "simulation", and "altered perception" is a talk of propaganda with sugar-coated words that "soft-pedals the fundamental desire to shape gamers' opinions, attitudes and behaviors" (*Ibid.*). Therefore, it could be said that using video games as medium for propaganda is something that is coveted and feared at the same time by the video game industry. Renowned game designer Chris Crawford, for example, has said in an interview: "... relative opacity of the designer's assumptions and biases (compared with print) could make computer games a greater source of mischief than enlightenment. Goebbels was so frightening because he had a pretty good grip on how to use modern media for propaganda purposes. Right now, we're all too dumb to figure it out. Someday we'll have our interactive Goebbels" (Peabody).

In *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* compendium, Lars Konzack presents a somewhat surprising statement about propaganda video games:

In general, propaganda games are not that exciting. The player quickly gets a notion of what the game's dogmatic statement has to say about the demonstrative political subject. Players that agree to the political statements may use such games to feel secure in their convictions. Non-believers of the ideologies may find the games boring. The design philosophy behind these games is old-fashioned, because they are designed for a mass audience rather than for individual players ("Philosophical Game Design" 43).

The case of the most well-known and thoroughly studied propaganda game, *America's Army*, alone refutes this argument.

America's Army is financed by the U.S Government; the game's main purpose is to function as a public relations and recruitment tool. It was first released on July 4, 2002 and has since then been constantly developed and updated. In February 2009, the tactical first-person shooter game had more than 9.7 million registered users and it had been downloaded more than 42.6 million times (Mezoff). David B. Nieborg has described the game as follows: "the freely downloadable *America's Army* cleverly mixes educational, ludic, marketing, and propaganda elements that fits comfortably into the FPS genre, while also promoting a highly politicized recruiting and public relations agenda" (Nieborg 54).

In 2007, *America's Army* allegedly had players in over 60 countries (Dunham), so obviously, the game is not just being played by potential recruits of the U.S. Army and quite possibly even not by the avid supporters of U.S. military power. Global policy think-tank *RAND Corporation* speculates in the report *Stealing the Sword: Limiting Terrorist Use of Advanced Conventional Weapons* which they prepared for U.S. Department of Homeland Security that accurately modeled XM25 air-burst assault weapon in *America's Army* may "spark an interest in the weapon in the United States' enemies and allow them to practice using it" (Bonomo, Bergamo et al. 14).



Figure 4: On *America's Army* official webpage, this screenshot is accompanied with the following description: "U.S. Army ACU's [Army Combat Uniforms] modeled perfectly

right down to the Velcro attachments and equipment pouches" ("Screenshots"). In some analysts' opinion, ultimate realism of the game might pose a security risk.

On the grounds of above-described statistics and concerns, it could be concluded that a propaganda game can be very exciting for millions of people and perhaps even for "non-believers of the ideology".

There are also other noteworthy propaganda shooters besides *America's Army*, although none of them can compete with the success of the official U.S. Army game. Notable games that could be classified as propaganda include *Afkar Media's* (Damascus-based software developer) first-person shooter games *Under Ash* (2001) and *Under Siege* (2005) where the player is a Palestinian who is fighting against *Israel Defense Forces*. Helga Tawil-Souri writes, that both games "were met with immediate success in the region and in the Palestinian territories"(538).

By the year 2005, *Under Ash* had sold more than ten thousand units and it had been downloaded more than 500,000 times from company's web-site (Armstrong). Tawil-Souri emphasizes, however, that these numbers may not reflect the real popularity of the game "since the majority of video games – no matter their origin – are either purchased as pirated copies or played in public venues [in the region] where one copy suffices for tens, if not hundreds, of gamers" (538).

Israel Defense Forces are also the targets of the Hezbollah's¹¹ game *Special Force* (2003) that, once again, deals with Arab-Israeli conflict. Soon after game's release, a member of the design team, Bilal Zain, said that "about 10,000 copies of *Special Force* had been sold in Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Germany and Australia" (Wakin). "The game is often played at places like the *Champions Internet Cafe* ...in south

¹¹ Shi'ite Muslim militant group and political party.

Beirut, a predominantly Shi'ite area of rundown buildings where several computer stores said *Special Force* had sold out," reported *The New York Times* (*Ibid.*).

What is, then, the secret behind the success of these political persuasive games and not less importantly – is this "secret" to be found from the games' procedural *core* layer or representative *shell* layer?

Whether to ask from players or theorists, one of their first explanations to the success of *America's Army* is its "realism". Colonel Casey Wardynski, *America's Army* project originator, too, states: "we think our competitive advantage is realism" (Huntemann 184). When Nina B. Huntemann asked her informants, what usually draws them to play military-themed games, they named challenging gameplay, fast action etc. but also "realism" that meant:

Geographically accurate maps from real-world locations, modern weaponry known or assumed to be used by the military, threats and battle scenarios "ripped from the headlines", game mechanics in which the player's avatar could manipulate nearly every aspect of the environment, and a belief in the truthfulness of the representation of military strategy and operations (Huntemann 229-230).

It is important to notice that "realism" here refers to certain qualities of game mechanics as well as to game's representative (photo)realism. The weapons and other elements of a military-themed game are expected to *look* like the originals they are modeled after and to *function* as ones. *America's Army* that "fulfills the standards of realism set by other games of the FPS genre" (Army Game 110) is, in Tero Pasanen's opinion, "not necessarily the most authentic military game available", but is definitely "the most authentic U.S. Army experience available" that "in terms of realistic gameplay ... does not

significantly differ from other contemporary first-person shooters, but the **veracity in scrupulous graphical representation** [emphasis added] creates an atmosphere of authenticity that could not be achieved without the omnipresence of the U.S. Army" (Army Game 111).

In other words, even if the game has the specific "procedural rhetoric of chain of command"¹² (Persuasive Games 76) and other unique gameplay elements, one of the strongest features of the game, its "realism" that captivates and persuades the players, is not just created on game's procedural level but by combining the possibilities of meaning-making and persuading of both, *core* (rules) and *shell* (signs) layer, without underestimating the importance of one or the other.

Pro-Arab *Under Ash* and *Under Siege* video games have distinct procedural rhetoric, too, while *Special Force* "looks and feels like most other combat scenarios with minefields, enemy tanks, and the like" (Tawil-Souri 539). All three games are based on actual historical events to some extent. In *Under Ash*, for example, it clearly affects the gameplay:

Most of the stories and objectives feature young men who fight tanks with slingshots and stones ... Only the experienced fighters have machine guns, a status to be achieved as each level is passed. These are accurate representations of Palestinian resistance – where the majority of young boys rely on slingshots and stones as weapons, and the older more experienced ones have dilapidated ... guns (Tawil-Souri 538).

Another notable example of procedural rhetoric in *Under Ash* and *Under Siege* is that killing civilians (on either side), is a prohibited action that ends the game. However, even if

¹² "If a player violates the Uniform Code of Military Justice, rules of engagement, or laws of land warfare, reprisal is instant. He will find himself in a cell at Fort Leavenworth, accompanied by a mournful harmonica playing the blues. Continued violation of the rules may cause a player to be eliminated from the game. To rejoin, he must create a new ID and restart." (Mike Zyda et al. qtd. in Persuasive Games 76)

civilian casualties-avoiding rhetoric and the occasional procedural rhetoric of powerlessness may have been appealing to the players, there are reasons to believe that big part of games' success lies on their semantic level. Both, newspaper articles and scholarly papers about the video games, report that the main reason why the target groups have embraced the games is their pro-Arab narrative that in its own way aims "to redress the balance to a genre dominated by victorious U.S. soldiers defeating Arab enemies" (Armstrong). In *Special Force*, the pro-Arab theme is expressed almost entirely just on the game's representative level: "so while the action in *Special Force* is quite militaristic, it feels like a simple role reversal, a transplant of its American counterparts, with Israelis as the enemies rather than dark-skinned Arabs" (Galloway). Simple role reversal of this kind is definitely not enough to make *Special Force* a good video game, but it very likely helped the game to reach its target group and, in addition to that, to make it to the international news.

In *Persuasive Games*, Ian Bogost writes that he believes into video games' capability to enable social change, but "this power is not equivalent to the *content* of videogames, as the serious games community claims. Rather, this power lies in the very way videogames mount claims through procedural rhetorics" (ix). I am not disagreeing with him completely. Anyhow, if we look at the examples of above-described propaganda games, we can see that they have been popular among the players, but the fact that many people have played these games does not necessarily mean that they were all successfully persuaded as well.

However, in order to persuade maximum number of people, the game needs to reach the maximum number of people in the first place – however clever video game's procedural rhetoric is, it cannot persuade the player who is unsure if the game deserves his attention after all. The advantage of game's representative layer, the *content* of the game, compared to the procedural layer is that it can start persuading the player even *before* he actually starts playing the game.

3.3.2. Election Games

Election games, also known as *campaign games*, are video games that are used for public relations and advertising purposes and are usually a part of a political campaign. In 2004, for example, "candidates and campaign organizations" used them "for publicity, fundraising, platform communication, and more" ("Birth and Death"). Occasionally, however, also video games that are not incorporated into real-life campaigning but are simulating an election process, are called election games. An early example of a game like this is *President Elect*, first released in 1981 by *Strategic Simulations, Inc.*

To make things more complicated, election games that are officially endorsed by the candidates or parties are frequently confused with activist games or so-called *newsgames* that feature politicians. My definition of an election game that I will use in this thesis was already outlined in the beginning of the chapter, but I will repeat it once more: election game is a political video game that is financed and distributed by the framework of conventional politics and designed for political party's or candidate's public relation purposes.

Probably one of the most well-known election games is *The Howard Dean for Iowa Game* (2003) – the fact that its designers Ian Bogost and Gonzalo Frasca are both acclaimed advocates of persuasive games who have written about the game and its design process on several occasions may have something to do with its celebrity. However, with the game, Howard Dean became "the first pre-candidate in a U.S. Presidential Campaign to launch an official videogame as part of his communication strategy" (Frasca 108). *The Howard Dean Game* was doing two things an *election game* could do – it was simulating an election process on the level of grassroots outreach and working as an advertisement for Howard Dean at the time of 2004 U.S. Presidential elections.

The game could be played for free on candidate's website and it reportedly gathered ca. 100,000 unique players during the first week of its release (Frasca 108). Game did not

focus on candidate's ideas but on elections and campaigning as such. Its gameplay (and procedural rhetoric) was quite elaborate:

Every player's results affected the games other supporters played later. The regions of the Iowa map start out near-white, and as each player generates more supporters in each region, that data is stored on the game server. Each time the game loads, it adjusts the blue tint in these regions to indicate how much support has been generated in the past 24 hour period. Increasing support in a region also makes it easier to generate more support ("The Howard Dean for Iowa").

The web game included three mini-games: the player could gather support for Howard Dean virtually by waving signs, distribute pamphlets or talk to people by going from door to door. Visual style of the game was considered important by the designers "because it would be the first – and maybe the only– impression that people [would] have about the game" (Frasca 109). Because the authors of the game did not want their game to look like a "traditional web game", they attempted to make it to look "as un-videogame-like as possible" by trying "to emulate the visual identity of the U.S. political cartoon tradition" (*Ibid.*). I must say that, at least to me, the game still looks pretty usual – it is definitely less "cute" and more toned down than majority of web games, but not radically visually different from an average two-dimensional casual game.



Figure 5: Screenshots of *The Howard Dean for Iowa Game*, 2003 (image on the left) and popular time management game *Diner Dash*, 2003 (two images on the right). While the visual style of *Howard Dean Game* is slightly more caricature-like, it is still quite casual game-like, as well ("The Howard Dean for Iowa", "Diner Dash").

All in all, it can be concluded that the *Howard Dean Game* was successful, as it was played by many people and received a lot of media attention – some celebrity was guaranteed to the game, however, just for the reason that it was the first of a kind. How effective it was on actually persuading the voters, is always more difficult to decide. The gameplay was well-designed, but considering its very short gameplay sessions, the scale of written instructions and other texts in the game seemed to be unproportionally large.

U.S., however, as the readers of this thesis already know, is not the only country that has introduced video games to election process. Interesting and controversial example of a "may be" election-game comes from Russia. In august 2011, just before Vladimir Putin announced that he will stand for Russian president in 2012 presidential elections, the Russian advertising company *Agency One* released a web game *Like Putin* that shows Vladimir Putin in a role of a superhero – image that Putin and his supporters have worked hard for. The game urges the player to step into the shoes of Putin in order to "destroy the terrorists, put out forest

fires, win all gold medals at the Olympics in Sochi and pump GDP¹³ to unprecedented heights".

The game is problematic, because some political scientist allegedly suspect that the game was ordered by Putin or his office while other think that Putin's image has become "something absolutely different from Putin himself" ("*Like Putin* Online Game") and that "Putin really do not like being a character of foreign advertising concepts" ("Владимир Путин"). The head of the agency that created the game, Alexander Kabakov, claims that the game's only purpose was to promote his company.

According to the information on *Agency One's* (sometimes written as *Агентства1*) website, *Like Putin* web game has been played by more than 800,000 players and mentioned in different (international) media more than 70 times ("*Agency One*").



Figure 6: *Like Putin* depicts Vladimir Putin as a Renaissance man and superhero – after performing *Blueberry Hill* with a jazz band, he jumps on a Harley Davidson motorbike and promises: "This is not an end, it is just the beginning!"

¹³ GDP – Gross domestic product

Player, in the role of Vladimir Putin, jumps around different websites and does all that was promised in the game's introduction and more: fights terrorist, drives yellow *Lada Kalina Sport*, plays football etc. The game ends with a YouTube video of Putin singing *Blueberry Hill* at charity gala event. Whatever were the real intentions of the game's designers, *Like Putin's* procedural rhetoric seems to go along the lines: being (like) Putin is cool; you can do anything you like (and as a by-product of doing cool things you also raise GDP by collecting yellow coins like Super Mario). Being Putin also means that you will never fail, because it is not possible to lose the game. Even if the player deliberately underachieves and tries to collect as little coins as possible, he has still "raised the GDP" around 50% and is named "superhero" in the end of the game.

Agency One did receive a lot of attention as the result of the game and, intentionally or not, the game functioned as an advergaming (or election game) for Vladimir Putin as well. Once again, game's procedural layer and representative layer seem to be sending out similar messages to the player, still it can be suspected that the reason why players went to the game's web site in the first place lies in the *image* of Putin that is so powerful that several Russian companies have used it in order to advertise themselves or their products.

It is somewhat complicated to make a list of officially endorsed election games, as in different articles and treatises they are often mixed up with unofficial ones. However, in addition to games already mentioned, the *Republican Party* in United States released the games *John Kerry: Tax Invaders* and *Take Back Illinois* in 2004 and John McCain's campaign sponsored the game *Pork Invaders* during the U.S. presidential elections in 2008. Besides that, Gonzalo Frasca designed a game *Cambiamos* for Uruguayan presidential elections in 2004.

All things considered, it looks like there is a wider selection of unofficial election games or activist games that address elections than there are officially endorsed games. Some games which could be named in this category are: *Polar Palin* (2008), *Hunting with Palin* (2008), *Debate Smash 2008*, *Truth Invaders* (2008), *Debate Night* (2008), and *Goodbye Mr. Bush* (2009).

Tracking down non-American election games is not an easy task, because the few scholars who write about political games (Ian Bogost and his students in Massachusetts Institute of Technology) seem to be mostly U.S.-orientated. Based on the examples of political games in Estonia, I am rather positive that there are election games to be found in other European countries (or all around the world), but as they are probably targeted to local voters, it can be assumed that they are also in local languages. Poor prospects of finding any information about these games in English slows down the process of discovering them; however, these games should still be searched for in order to balance the overall study of political games that is currently somewhat U.S.-centrist.

It is probably safe to assume that many election games have owed their success (celebrity) to media, but proved to be press-worthy because of their curiosity value, not because of their design or their message. Ian Bogost writes that in 2004, "it was easy to get public attention around such work" ("Birth and Death"). Even though election games are not the rarity they once were and part of their novelty has worn off, Bogost's statement still rings true – at least to some extent.

When Tero Pasanen compares *America's Army* game to some political web games (newsgames, election games etc.), he points out the technological disadvantages of the latter that have "limited scope and minimalistic representation" while in *America's Army*, "the full potential of digital games as vehicles of propagation has been harnessed for the benefit of the sponsor" (Army Game 106). Besides that, he finds that the strength of *America's Army* is "its

aspiration to reach towards people who are not necessarily part of the existing constituency" while majority of political games are developed to "preach to the choir" – "to uphold shared narrative of an interest group" (*Ibid.*). It is very likely, that persuasive games that enable multiple narratives are more successful in generating long-term interest in players, and are more persuasive as a result, than games that put all their faith in one (supposedly) shared narrative.

Despite their obvious political bias, pro-Arab games *Special Force* or *Under Ash* which were described in Chapter 3.3.1., could theoretically be played by a player who would actually want to fight Israeli soldiers; by a player who does not desire real-life military action but is tired of Arab stereotypes in American games; or possibly even by an apolitical player who is simply interested in military simulations. Games like *Bush vs. Kerry Boxing*, at the same time, give their players extremely limited choices – both technologically and ideologically – you either want to spend few minutes of your spare time to smack animated George Bush or John Kerry in the face or you do not: in latter case, there is nothing there in the game for you. Once again, we can conclude that gameplay, representation and content – in the act of persuading through video games, they all matter.

3.3.3. Political Web Games in Estonia

While Estonian Center Party's web games have indisputably received the most (media) attention compared to any other political videogame made in Estonia, attempts to form some kind of political arguments in a web game and presenting Estonian politicians in a game, is not an exceptional phenomenon *per se*. The difference is, that other political web games in Estonia have not been made to function as public relations tools but have been created as a part of a citizens' initiative – they do not have clearly formulated goals, neither do

they claim to express the views of a specific interest group, and most probably, no taxpayers money have spent on them.

The exception here is an election game of Estonian Reform Party's candidate Jaanus Rahumägi that went mostly unnoticed at the time of the Parliamentary Elections of 2011. The web game stated: Jaanus Rahumägi "has fought for security in Estonia for 20 years. This is not an easy job. Put yourself to the test in the game and see for yourself how difficult it is to catch the criminals!" ("2011. aasta Riigikogu valimised"). The player of the game had to click on "criminals" on Tallinn's street-map and drag them to the police station. Estonian non-profit organization *e-Governance Academy* found that Rahumägi's campaign violated election code because the ad offered a chance to win an iPad to the game players and the "campaign's message did not fall directly within the competence of Parliament" (*Ibid.*).

The earliest report of political web games in Estonia in my disposal is a newspaper article that was published in Estonian tabloid newspaper *SL Õhtuleht* (Evening Paper) on 17 November 2000 and is titled *Savisaar is the most popular online games hero*. The article describes the web game *Suur meeriks löömine* (Appointing the Mayor) where politicians Edgar Savisaar and Jüri Mõis fight for the mayoral appointment; the game *Kill Martix* that let the player to shoot the head of the drowning politician Mart Laar from a shot-gun and few interactive websites that let their visitors to play around with the virtual faces or bodies of known Estonian politicians on a "create yourself your own politician" principle (Naulainen).

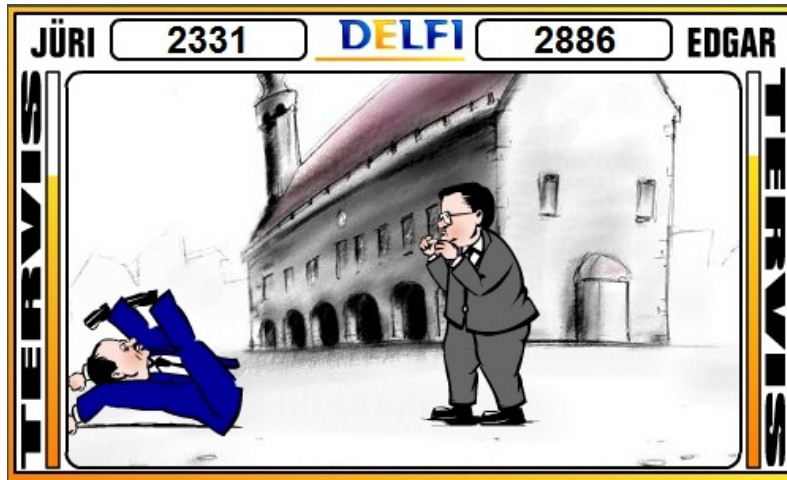


Figure 7: Screenshot of the game *Appointing the Mayor*. Edgar Savisaar (on the right) and Jüri Mõis (on the left) are fighting for the position of the mayor of Tallinn. The building on the background is Tallinn Town Hall.

Among other examples of political online games in Estonia, the web game *Maha Savisaar* (Down with Savisaar) could be named. The game was probably released on 2007, after the events of so called *Bronze Night* (see Chapter 4.2.1.). *Down with Savisaar* is a rather crude modification of the web game *Bush vs. Kerry Boxing* (2004)¹⁴ – the animated body of Edgar Savisaar's character is the body of John Kerry in the U.S. game, just a head is replaced with the head of the Estonian politician. The difference between two games is that in Estonian version, player cannot choose whom to fight with – the only available boxing opponent is Savisaar. Additionally, in *Maha Savisaar*, the background picture of the White House is replaced with the picture of Bronze Soldier memorial.

The most original and intensive element of the web game is its soundtrack that must have been recorded at the time of the mass protest against the dislocation of the Bronze Soldier monument (it may be a part of a news footage): the game starts with the monologue of an older, slightly hysterical Estonian woman who describes the crimes of Soviet soldiers she

¹⁴ *Bush vs. Kerry Boxing* is UK mobile games developer Sorrent's game that was, in turn, based on their earlier *Fox Sports Boxing* game (Persuasive Games 94)

has allegedly witnessed herself. After she finishes her story, game-playing is accompanied with the sound of hundreds of people chanting "Russia, Russia" (in Russian).



Figure 8: *Down with Savisaar* lets the player to fist fight with Edgar Savisaar in front of the infamous Bronze Soldier monument.

Web game *Ansip, loll kana* (*Ansip, Stupid Chicken*), is an interesting example as well. It is the only political web game that I know of that has been created by someone who apparently belongs to the Estonian Russian minority – the original title of the game is in Russian (*Трусливая курица*) and rest of the texts in the game are in Russian and in English. Player's task in *Ansip, Stupid Chicken* is to hack and slash chickens that have a face of Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip with an axe. The game is one of the most violent ones among its peers that I have encountered (even if majority of political web games in Estonia seem to be pretty violent) and has the highest level of gore compared to other games.

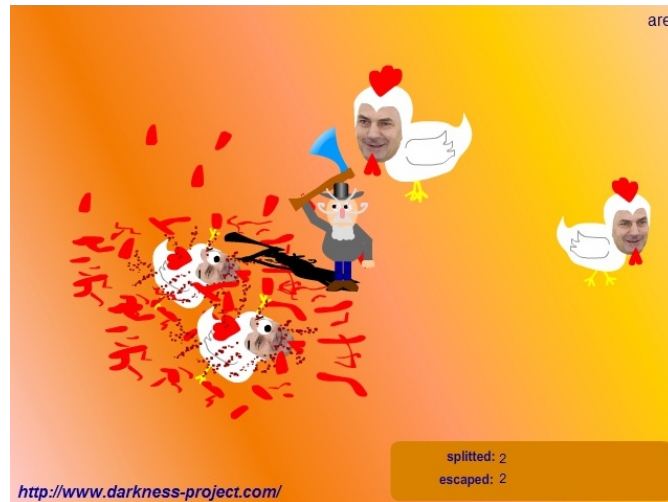


Figure 9: Player's avatar, who is wearing a top hat, mustache and an axe, runs around and whacks chickens that look like Andrus Ansip in *Ansip, Stupid Chicken*.

Ansipi seemnemääraja (Ansip's Seed Determinant) is a good example of a newsgame as it is "short, quickly produced ... widely distributed [and] about current events" (Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer 6). The game was released on 10 February 2012 as a reaction to Prime Minister's attempt to ridicule people who were protesting against Estonian government's plans to sign multinational ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) treaty. During the ACTA-themed briefing in Estonian Parliament on 8 February 2012, Ansip said: "You know, the one who claims something like this, has been eaten seeds and not the seeds we sow to our fields... If people have such doubts, it helps from time to time when foil is placed inside of a hat... People should look for help from somewhere!" ("Ansip: ACTA-vastased on seemneid söönud").

The web game *Ansip's Seed Determinant* is based on the gameplay of a classic *Snake* game, which is known to many from *Nokia* cell phones. It depicts Andrus Ansip in a tin foil hat and eating seeds. If Ansip eats an ACTA-seed by accident, the game ends.



Figure 10: *Ansip's Seed Determinant* depicts Andrus Ansip as a snake who gathers points by eating seeds. Eating himself or a seed which reads ACTA ends the game.

Riigiametniku jõulud (Christmas of the Civil Servant), *Langinaator* (Langinator) and *Magus krundike ehk võitlus EKA eest* (Delicious Building Lot aka Fight for EAA) are three games that were published in 2011-2012 on a website *Imepilt.com* which belongs to the Estonian Academy of Arts' student Magnus Vulp. *Christmas of the Civil Servant* was also published in online version of Estonian financial newspaper *Äripäev* (Business Day) where the game was introduced to the readers as "an interactive caricature" ("Interaktiivne karikatuur").

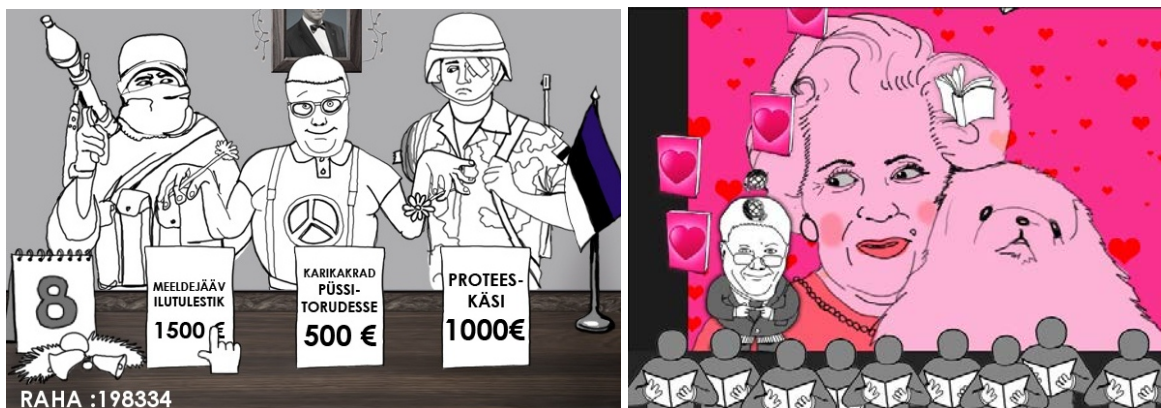


Figure 11: Screenshots of *Christmas of the Civil Servant* and *Langinator* (from left to right).

Christmas of the Civil Servant is an ironical comment on the practices of state organizations that fund their spending out of a fixed budget that expires at year's end and are hit by the spending spree at the end of the year, fearing that if they fail spending all the funds allocated for the year, it would result in budget cuts for the next year. The player is racing against the clock in the game: he needs to choose between rather absurd money-spending proposals and spend all the money in the budget before the year ends. The game seems to have a no-win condition.

Langinator is a reaction to the opinion of Rein Lang, Estonian Minister of Culture (2011-...) that Estonian libraries should not use state's and tax-payer's money for "distributing mass culture". His example of "mass culture" that should not be subsidized by Estonian state was the romantic novels of English author Barbara Cartland (Sikk). This and few other "bold statements" earned Lang a nickname *Langinator* (derived from the name of science fiction character Terminator) and sales of Cartland's books in Estonian book-stores jumped. Player's task in a game is to keep Barbara Cartland's pink books away from the library visitors by hitting them with grenades, not hitting the "quality literature" (white books), gives extra points.

Currently last game in a series, *Magus krundike ehk võitlus EKA eest* (Delicious Building Lot aka Fight for EAA), deals with problems around the new building of Estonian Academy of Arts (EAA). Construction of EAA's new building should have started in 2010 but is being delayed for several reasons. It is a public secret that numerous real-estate developers are attracted to EAA's historic building site in the heart of Tallinn, hoping to gain it and use it on commercial purposes.

Player's task in *Delicious Building Lot* is to dodge boxes that are falling from above; make his way to the "business-warlocks" and destroy them "before they manage to build a

shopping-mall on EAA's building lot". Player's avatar is EAA's rector (2005- ...) and former Estonian Minister of Culture (1999-2002) Signe Kivi.

These three political web games from *Imepilt* differ from all other similar games in Estonia in their artistic quality. The visual style of *Christmas of the Civil Servant*, *Langinator* and *Delicious Building Lot* resembles a style of famous Estonian Animation School and *Delicious Building Lot's* "business-warlocks" are an obvious homage to Estonian artist Jüri Arrak's cult animation *Suur Tõll* (Toell the Great, 1980).



Figure 12: Estonian Academy of Art's rector Signe Kivi avoids the boxes on EAA's construction site in order to destroy "business-warlocks" who fancy EAA's strategically located plot in a game *Delicious Building Lot aka Fight for EAA*.

4. PERSUASIVE PROPERTIES OF THE *CENTER PARTY'S* WEB GAMES

Estonian Center Party's four web games have probably had quite different effect on players, Estonian voters and Center Party itself. There is no readily available data (except the election results) for assessing, how effective the games have been on persuading the people, only their popularity among the players can be followed to certain extent. When Center Party's second game, *Drive like Ansip!*, was allegedly played by 100,000 people, their last game to date, *Ansip Raises Prices!*, was overlooked by players, media and even by online-advertising analysts. However, the reception and general "success" of these games has very likely depended on many out of game aspects like marketing or the timing of game's release. Following analysis describes the background and context of Center Party's games, but mainly aims to identify their in-game persuasive elements and conclude on this basis if the web games could be seen as successful vehicles for political persuasion, or not.

In the analysis, every Center Party's game is approached from two aspects: first, a semiotic analysis is conducted, that focuses on *signs* in the *gameworld* and tries to evaluate their role in games and the extent of their persuasiveness. Secondly, games' gameplay's persuasiveness is assessed by studying their gameplay rhetoric and procedural rhetoric. As this thesis has been partly inspired from Ian Bogost's claim that, in persuasion, video game's rules play a more crucial role than its content (Persuasive Games ix), the analysis also observes, how games' content and mechanics work together or against each other and what part they both play in video games in formulating messages and persuading the player.

4.1. The Ant Game

The Ant Game was created at the time when Estonian political parties (including Estonian Center Party) had not yet started seriously to take interest in the possibilities of internet in their marketing and overall communication strategies. According to Public Relations Specialist Raimond Kaljulaid who has been involved with Center Party's web games from the very beginning, *The Ant Game* was an "indie-project" that was done within the "couple of days" (Appendix A-5). The amateurish-looking web game was produced for the European Parliament elections of 2004 to support the young candidate Mart Viisitamm¹⁵ from Center Party and it spread in the internet under the title *Center Party's Ant Game* (Keskerakonna sipelgamäng). According to the article in *Eesti Ekspress*, the game was originally posted on Viisitamm's web page and the author of the idea to "launch a new product called Mart Viisitamm in this way" was controversial advertising and imagology expert, art historian and socialite Linnar Priimägi (Ideon).

In Kaljulaid's words, Viisitamm was never expected to make it to the European Parliament:

As he was, so to say, Center Party's Youth Council's candidate, people came up with youthful and sometimes funny ideas that would get more attention to him. That is exactly what this game achieved and nothing more was expected from it. Media attention was remarkable (Appendix A-3).

¹⁵ Mart Viisitamm who was 24 years old back in 2004 was an unknown politician at the time of the European Parliament elections. He came to politics as a member of the Center Party's Youth Council and was strongly supported and favored by the party's leader, Edgar Savisaar. His candidacy for the parliamentary elections was a failure – he gathered only 260 votes. On the following year he got a seat of a mayor of the resort town Pärnu. His actions as the mayor were largely criticized at the time and Viisitamm's time in power ended with charges of corruption in 2009.

When questioned about the web game for the purposes of this thesis, politician Mart Viisitamm, who was promoted in the game, declared that he was not involved with a design process and does not approve the game and its "violence" (Appendix A-2). These claims may be true now, eight years later, but must be met with some reservation. First, Viisitamm, who was in the very beginning of his career in politics at the time *The Ant Game* was produced, has been through thick and thin since then, both in politics and personal life, and may prefer to give "the right answers" to the media and other interviewers in order to avoid another scandal. Secondly, when the game was released in 2004, newspaper *Postimees* published a short text about the game in its reader's section, which was sent by Mart Viisitamm. In his letter, Viisitamm described the game as "witty" and "figurative" (Appendix B-2).

At the time of the writing of the thesis the game could be found from the website <http://mangukoobas.ee> under the title *Keskerakonna mäng*.

4.1.2. Semiotic Analysis

In the following analysis I will try to apply Roland Barthes' ideas about advertising, text and images to *The Ant Game*.

Essentially, it can be said that the *Ant Game* consists of three consequential images that could be also called frames as the game has a narrative structure and its three single images compose the complete opus: the first one mostly represents text, the second one is almost entirely an image and the third frame represents both text and image.

The first frame of the game displays written, somewhat enigmatic introduction: "What would you do, if you were to find out that small nasty bugs want to feast on your bread? What would you do, were you to find out that somewhere the scheme is being hatched to betray

your trust and your future? What would you do, if you discovered that counteraction lies in your power? You would not hesitate for a second, would you?"

The second frame shows us the gameworld and the mechanics of the game that are both very simple. In an empty run-down house, black ants make haste towards the bread that is lying on a floor. Clicking the mouse on an ant "kills" it and leaves a bloody spot¹⁶. The player's task is to defend the bread from the swarming ants. Surprisingly the ants in game have human heads. The heads are so small and facial features so hard to recognize that only after some research from outside sources it becomes clear that the human heads represent a politician Urmas Reinsalu who was the number one candidate of Res Publica party for the European Parliament elections¹⁷.



Figure 13: On the left: the second frame of *The Ant Game* where all the playing activity happens. The player's task is to hit the "ants" with the mouse cursor and prevent them from reaching to the right side of the screen. On the right: red substance on the floor that in my opinion obviously signifies blood but according to Mart Viisitamm is "indeterminate".

¹⁶ According to the letter that Mart Viisitamm sent to *Postimees* – red spots in a game are not blood, because insects do not have a blood-circulation and this "substance that remains of the insects is as indeterminate as Res Publicans understanding of Estonian nation's future" (Viisitamm; Appendix B-2). In my opinion, the substance *is* blood and Viisitamm just tried to find an excuse to the game's violence.

¹⁷ Urmas Reinsalu also failed to be elected for the European Parliament but gathered more votes than Viisitamm: 4719. His failure as the first representative of the Res Publica party for the elections resulted the vanishing of the whole party, once a major force and main opponent for the Center Party in Estonian politics – its remains joined up with the Pro Patria party.

The third frame appears after *game over*. It reads, "Even if they do all that they can to secretly lose the bread from your table, there is someone who will keep them from running aground and getting the power. Vote for Mart Viisitamm at European Parliament elections! Mart Viisitamm says: "Eat hearty, Estonia! Also tomorrow, in Europe!"" In a lower right corner, there is a photograph of the boyish candidate and next to it an arrow-like sign that urges the player to "try again". In an upper right corner, the player can see the sum of the points he has gathered during the play.



Figure 14: The final screen of *The Ant Game* that reveals its true nature as an advertisement.

I will use the Roland Barthes' concepts of anchorage and relay when analyzing the text-image relationship in the *Ant Game*. Barthes has explained his idea of anchorage in *Rhetoric of the Image* and *Elements of Semiology* (first published in 1964). In brief, the anchorage "describes the fixing or limiting of a particular set of meanings to a text. Typically associated with printed images, /.../ anchorage acts usually through the use of a caption or other written text. However, the use of a commentary or voice-over can also have the same

purpose for audio and moving image texts. Anchorage acts as a guide for readers and viewers and aims to direct the audience towards the preferred reading" (Pearson and Simpson 21).

The introductory text definitely serves as anchorage in the game. The player finds out from the text that there are some bugs somewhere out there that are "nasty" and he is expected to act against them. Without the anchorage to guide the interpretation, the player could be altogether confused by the image he is presented within the next frame, because the "nasty bugs" he needs to kill in order to save his bread, appear to him in the form of ants.

It is true that people generally do not wish to see ants in their houses, but even so, the overall connotations of an ant (to use another Barthes' basic concept) are mostly positive in Estonian cultural context. Ants are considered intelligent, organized, clean ("cleans the forest from debris", formic acid that ants are producing has been used to clean wounds) and industrious bugs and industriousness has historically been the virtue that has been valued above all others in rural Estonia.

If we stop on the visual elements of the central image of the game a while longer, we will be able to find some other messages from a game that have been implemented to it, some in a more successful way, some not so skillfully.

The bread that the player needs to protect from the attacking ants is a very strong symbol in general; bread symbolizes home, warmth, due reward for hard work, fullness and many other things related to overall well-being and safety. Nevertheless, the bread on the floor is not just any bread but rye bread – a type of bread that is a typical meal only among a small number of nations in the world. In Estonia, black bread is considered the first and foremost thing every "real" Estonian starts to crave for when living in a foreign country. If Barthes talks about the "Italianicity" of the word Panzani in his *Rhetoric of the Image* then for Estonians, black rye bread is one of the strongest symbols of "Estonianness" there is. Paradoxically, the concept of "Estonianness" is supported also by the belief into the alleged

industriousness of Estonians. Subsequently, we may suggest that the creator of the game has probably not been a semiotician – he has used signifiers in a game that create both kinds of signs: some of them have connotative meanings that correspond with the aims of the election game, but some counterminimize or at least confuse its task.

The first time player of the *Ant Game* does not know yet, that the game is in fact an advertisement for the European Parliament elections. With this knowledge (playing the game for a second time, for example) it becomes clear that the creator of the game has, either by choice or by lucky accident, pushed the button of the familiar fears that "Estonianness" will be lost in multicultural, borderless but normative European Union. Again, we meet a paradox: based on a Gallup that was conducted in 2002 (Kirch and Tuisk), the fears of Estonia losing its identity after joining with the EU were more common among the older age groups (40 and above). These age groups are but not the groups of people who were eager to play video games back in 2004 – so even if there was an adequate message of "Estonianness being threatened by the EU" incorporated within the game with the use of the images of rye bread; it probably did not reach its intended targets.

Last observation about the image of the bread in the *Ant Game*: the cultural knowledge of an Estonian game player says that bread definitely should not be lying on a floor. The Estonian grandparents of my generation remember the practice among old farming families that demanded kissing the piece of bread that had been accidentally dropped on a floor. The improper treatment of bread and weary appearance of the room where the whole scene has been staged signals (or signifies) that the imaginable house where the game events are happening is missing its master. Patriarchal "master of the house" and "the man who has all the answers" is the image the Center Party's leader Edgar Savisaar has created and preserved over many years. The image of Savisaar's personality is so strong that it has produced the situation where the image of the party's leader equals the image of the whole

Center Party¹⁸. As the charisma of Savisaar (or repulsion against him) transfers to the other members of the party, it is possible that favorably inclined voter who stares at the face of the unknown candidate in the end of the game will believe that he is representing the same patriarchal values as his mentor and will "set the house in order".

The last frame of the game illustrates the Barthes' idea of relay that he introduces, once again, in the essay *Rhetoric of the Image*:

The function of relay is less common /.../; it can be seen particularly in cartoons and comic strips. Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level /.../. While rare in the fixed image, this relay-text becomes very important in film, where dialogue functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself (Image 41).

The real purpose of the game – introducing and promoting a political candidate for the elections – is not to be found from the central image of the game (where the player spends most of his / her time). Only by getting defeated by "nasty bugs", the player finds out the true message of the advergaming and "gets the whole picture". Even the "Estonian identity is under

¹⁸ It seems that during the process of writing of this thesis things have started to change *for* the Center Party as well as *inside* of the party. In recent years, the party has been involved in numerous scandals and more people than before have been voicing opinions that the leader of the party, Edgar Savisaar, should take responsibility and resign. On April 9th 2012, eight longtime members of the party, including two party's representatives in European Parliament and five members of the Parliament of Estonia, seceded from the Center Party. They reported in their public appeal that the leaders of the party are preventing Center Party's cooperation with any other Estonian party that leads to political isolation and explained their secession by writing: "values, ethics and governance have become problems within the party. As our party's current policies tell us to remain silent, then continuing in the party means marginalization – as a man and politician"(Teder).

attack by EU" connotation of rye bread will not be revealed before the *Ant Game's* "gag line" manifests itself.

The Ant Game is the first attempt to create a political advergame i.e. election game in Estonia. The web game's level of execution is not particularly professional but the stakes in a political game it supported were high and as an object for cultural analysis, it is partly even more interesting for its contradictions. We can conclude that ideological messages can be transmitted to people in the form of the game that is often considered a trivial form of medium – a preconception that possibly makes it, therefore even more effective. The texts and images used in the game relied strongly on a player's pre-acquired cultural knowledge in order to deliver its message.

4.1.2. Gameplay Rhetoric and Procedural Rhetoric

All four Center Party's web games are simple flash games and their rules and mechanics have clear predecessors among digital and non-digital games. *The Ant Game* could be described as a *Whack-A-Mole* type of game. *Whack-A-Mole* is an arcade game that requires the players to hit moles that randomly pop up from the holes with a mallet. The game started as a carnival game but has been a basis for several digital games for now. The difference between *Whack-A-Mole* and *The Ant Game* is that while playing the latter, the player does not need to stand guard and wait until the object to be whacked appears; instead, he must keep whacking (or smashing) ants that constantly appear from the left edge of the screen almost without an interruption until he is inevitably overwhelmed.

The representation of the physics in the game is mostly mimicking the real-world physics. The bread is lying on a "floor", ants are running towards the bread and when player smashes them by clicking on them with a mouse cursor, ants "die", leaving a bloody spot.

Nevertheless, there is also an inconsistency with the real world physics in the game: the blood spots on the floor disappear in a blink of an eye. In real world, the floor would be covered with bodies of smashed ants and blood after a while. The disappearance of the dead ants resembles to a phenomenon called *Hollywood healing* in *Tvtropes.org* web-page which means that a cartoon action hero never receives permanent injuries or scars (the hero gets miraculously plastered with "instant bandages" after a fight that will vanish before the next shot, leaving the character in a pre-fight condition). *The Ant Game*, too, has decided not to imitate/simulate permanent infliction of damage: maybe the designer thought that too much naturalism can threaten the "fun" factor of the game.

According to Drew Davidson, "the represented physics of a game-world can subtly help establish the limits of actions within the world" ("The Rhetoric of GamePlay"). In *The Ant Game* and other Center Party games there is nothing subtle about establishing the limits of actions – the only objects that can be manipulated within the game-world are ants and the only way the player can manipulate them is by smashing them.

Additionally, the background image of *The Ant Game* is static and the whole action in the game is confined on a single screen. This means that *The Ant Game* like three other Center Party's games, are setting very clear and limited spatial boundaries to the player as well. During the play time, the player cannot leave "the one room" where the play is taking place.

However, gameplay mechanics have been trusted with the important rhetorical task in *The Ant Game* and the game's limits are probably the main reason why they succeed – *The Ant Game* does not have any instructions. There is nothing verbal or visual to guide the player to play the game: not in-game, not in a manual (there is no manual). The first screen of the game with the introduction about "small nasty bugs" is too ambiguous to pass for game instructions, so it seems that the designer has been relying on the rhetoric of gameplay and expecting the game controls to be "intuitive", which they are.

Despite its primitive game-world and mechanics, according to Ian Bogost's values, *The Ant Game* is still a good example of political video game. *The Ant Game* adopts processes of object targeting from *Whack-A-Mole* type of games but it mounts its own procedural rhetoric atop it, namely the *rhetoric of failure*. *The Ant Game*'s procedural rhetoric is similar to the game *New York Defender* or Gonzalo Frasca's *Kabul Kaboom* because it "borrows a technique common to arcade games: the game continues until the player can no longer keep up with the onslaught. The actions necessary to play the games do not themselves produce failure. Rather, the inevitable breakdown of player attention or reflexes causes it" (Persuasive Games 85).

The in-game logic of the *Ant Game* that is built into the mechanics of the game predestines the player to lose: he needs to lose the game at some point in order to receive the message of the game and truly, there is no way of beating the game. Consequently, we see that there is an important message in the game that is not expressed through neither textual nor visual signs but through the game functionality i.e. procedural rhetoric – "as long you have not elected Mart Viisitamm, you will always eventually get defeated by "bugs"". However, without the visual and textual signs that informed the player of his task and game's purpose before, during and after the game, its procedural rhetoric could not have revealed itself.

4.2. Drive like Ansip!

Web game *Juhi nagu Ansip!* (Drive like Ansip!) was released in October 2008 and received considerable media attention. Besides Estonian Centre Party's own weekly newspaper *Kesknädal* (Midweek), short articles about the game appeared both in printed and online national media: in daily papers *Eesti Päevaleht* (29.10.2008) and *Õhtuleht* (8.11.2008) as well as in popular online news portals like *Delfi* (28.10.2008) and *Elu24* (28.10.2008).

Even if by large, the game's general format is similar to *The Ant Game* – it is a simple online flash game that is easy to pick up and play – the execution of the game seems far more professional, especially from the visual aspect. That corresponds to the information received from PR specialist Raimond Kaljulaid who was coordinating Center Party's campaigns at the time according to whom *The Ant Game* was an "indie-project" whereas *Drive like Ansip!* was more "elaborate" and done by the professional advertising agency *Nitro FX* (Appendix A-5). Interestingly, *Drive like Ansip!* cannot be straightforwardly classified as an election game because it was released in-between the elections and, unlike *The Ant Game*, does not persuade the player to vote for a particular candidate.

There is a wordplay used in the game's title that is to become a returning theme in Centre Party's following games and campaigns. Estonian verb *juhtima* translates to English both as *to lead* and *to drive*. Both interpretations of the title, *Drive like Ansip!* or *Lead like Ansip!*, are valid too – the game is a driving game by genre but attempts to describe Prime Minister Andrus Ansip's style of governance on a metaphorical level (from the viewpoint of the Center Party). The game was originally found from the website <http://juhinaguansip.eu>. The domain name was registered on the name of Tanel Kiik, the member of the board of the Youth Council of the Center Party. The site is closed by now, despite of the original promise of the Center Party's Secretary General Priit Toobal who said that "the game will be available in the Internet as long as Andrus Ansip ... leads the state" (Sillaots), but the game can be found from other websites like <http://playground.ee>. The instructions of the game are in Estonian and Russian as are the instructions of *Kick out the Minister!* and *Ansip raises prices!*.

Andrus Ansip, leader of the Estonian Reform Party, who figures as a character in all Center Party's web games except in the first one, has been the Prime Minister of Estonia since 13 April 2005. First government formed by Andrus Ansip which resigned in 2007 was

assembled of the members of Estonian Reform Party, Estonian Centre Party and The People's Union of Estonia (disbanded in 2012) with the leader of the Centre Party, Edgar Savisaar, as the Minister of Economic Affairs and Communications.

In a so-called "Ansip's second government" (2007-2011), there was no place for the Center Party anymore – the government was formed by Estonian Reform Party, Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica, and Estonia's Social Democratic Party. That was the time when the opposition between the Reform Party, Center Party and their leaders Andrus Ansip and Edgar Savisaar started to become graphic. In autumn 2009, social scientist Juhan Kivirähk described the transformations in electioneering in Estonia as follows: "Estonian election campaigns are receding from their real objectives step by step by becoming banal duels between Savisaar and Ansip" ("Kivirähk").

Although Estonian Center Party has been the opposition party in the Parliament of Estonia (*Riigikogu*) since 2007, they have been successful at the local elections, especially in Tallinn – the capital and biggest city of Estonia. Party's leader Edgar Savisaar was the Mayor of Tallinn from 2001 to 2004 but was forced to resign after a vote of no confidence. Local elections of 2005 won the Centre Party 32 seats out of 63 in Tallinn City Council and in local elections of 2009 the party gained an absolute majority in the council. Savisaar was re-elected as a Mayor of Tallinn in April 2007 and is still holding the position at the time of the writing of this thesis. Andrus Ansip formed his "third government" in April 2011 that consists of the members of Estonian Reform Party and Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica.

4.2.1. Semiotic Analysis

In *Drive like Ansip!*, the player, who is in the role of the Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, is controlling a constantly moving car with the arrow keys on the keyboard. On his

journey, player's avatar Ansip needs to retain popularity among the nation by collecting different objects and avoiding crashing with coalition partners. Preventing the collision with Mart Laar (the leader of the right wing party Pro Patria and Res Publica Union 2007-2012) or Ivari Padar (the leader of Estonia's Social Democratic Party 2002-2009) is the player's most important task as the above mentioned two parties formed the Estonian Government coalition together with Estonian Reform Party in 2007 and the collisions with the partners would result in governmental crisis (*i.e.* the end of the game).



Figure 15: The first screen of the web game *Drive like Ansip!* Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip is depicted standing next to the car.

The game also has a *popularity meter*. If the popularity meter falls to zero, the Prime Minister needs to resign and the game ends. In order to keep the popularity meter full, the Prime Minister on the road needs to collect the images of Estonian Kroon (Estonian national currency during 1992 -2011) that symbolizes raising taxes in the game, Euros (inflation), bowls of porridge (leaving the children without school meals), feeding bottles (leaving the parents without the child support), bus stations (closing down the provincial bus lines), postboxes (closing down post-offices), War of Independence Victory Columns (controversial

project where lot of state's money was spent) and Bronze Soldiers (Ansip's government decided to remove a World War II memorial from the center of Tallinn in April 2007 and place it to the nearby cemetery. Displacing of the statue, so called Bronze Soldier, caused riots on the streets of Tallinn, initiated by the Estonian ethnic Russian minority to whom the statue symbolized Soviet Union's victory in the World War II. For many ethnic Estonians, however, the statue symbolized Soviet occupation that lasted almost half the century).

After three collisions with coalition partners or popularity dropping on zero the Prime Minister in the game resigns, the game ends, and a statistics of his time in power – the number of collected objects – is shown to the player.

The Ant Game used *relay* in order to reveal its true message and purpose but *Drive like Ansip!* does not make similar use of this technique. Still, it needs to use *anchorage* in the form of the game instructions to guide the player towards expected behavior. Similarly to *The Ant Game*, without the anchorage, the player could get confused. If in *The Ant Game* the player was expected to kill ants that have mixed connotations in Estonian culture then in *Drive like Ansip!*, player is supposed to *collect* the items that signify negative and unwanted things in the game (tax increase, cuts in social welfare etc.). Without reading the instructions before starting the game *i.e.* without anchorage, player could choose to *dodge* all the objects on the road that would result in fast failure.

As the game's description probably showed, the web game *Drive like Ansip!* is very rich in signs and some of these signs are "mythological" in Barthesian sense. One of the most complicated signs in the game is the image of the Bronze Soldier.



Figure 16: The image of the Bronze Soldier in the game *Drive like Ansip!* and the photograph of the original statue ("Pronkssõdur").

The literal, first order meaning of this image is that it depicts a World War II memorial that was originally named *Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn* (Tallinna vabastajate monument) but is also known by its two nicknames: Aljoša and Bronze Soldier. The authors of the monument were Enn Roos and Arnold Alas and it was erected in the center of Tallinn in 1947.

However, already before the civil disorders in Tallinn in April 2007 that were caused by the government's plan to dislocate the statue, and certainly after the riots, hardly no-one in Estonia is able to look at the statue or its images with the "virgin eyes", perceiving the statue only in its literal sense.

For people who know about the events of spring 2007 or were experiencing them by themselves, the image of the statue in any context that connotes something political, forms a sign or even a "symbol" of ethnical tensions in Estonian society. Placing Andrus Ansip in the middle of various political problems (inflation etc.) in *Drive like Ansip!* which, paradoxically, *raise* his popularity in a game, creates an illusion that he alone is responsible of everything, including the one and only civil unrest in the history of independent Estonia. In Estonian

Center Party's mythology, Andrus Ansip is a true antihero¹⁹ – putting him on the same screen with the notorious monument connotes that he is, among other things, "the splitter of Estonian society" and "the bane of Estonian ethnic Russian minority".

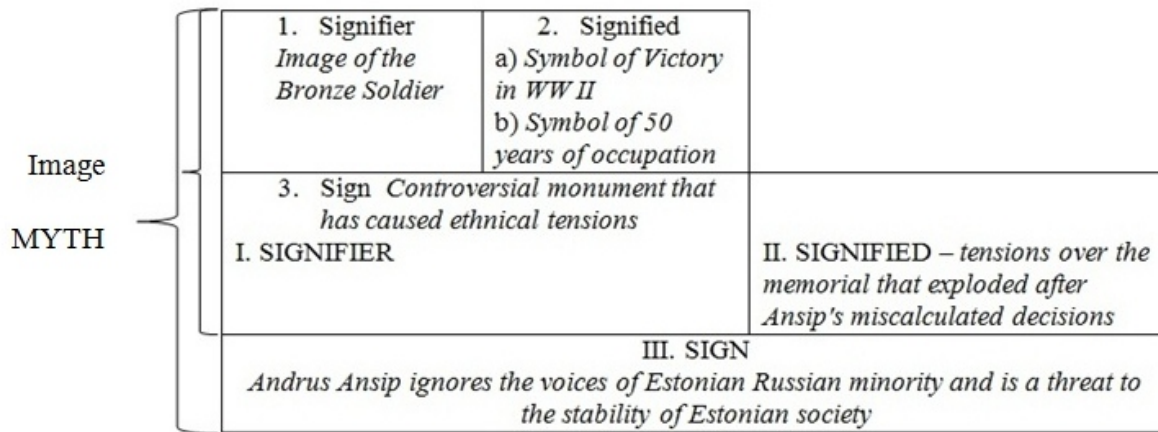


Figure 17: The myth of Bronze Soldier and Andrus Ansip in *Drive like Ansip!* based on the Roland Barthes' pattern from *Mythologies*.

The use of the image of Bronze Soldier can, therefore, be seen as a case of myth acting on existent signs – "hijacking meaning and turning it into a second order meaning" (Allen 44). It can also be seen as good example of propaganda that "needs to be at least partially true to have a lasting impact" (Bussemer 661) – both Andrus Ansip and Edgar Savisaar dragged the Bronze Soldier to the vote battle during the parliamentary elections of 2007 with Ansip promising to remove the statue and Savisaar assuring that the monument will be left in its place. Both politicians gathered a remarkable number of votes and even made their personal records: Ansip with 22 556 and Savisaar with 18 013 votes (Pau). However, to attribute the decision to remove the monument from its previous location only to Ansip is over-simplification – the process that started already in 2006 and involved the creation of *War Graves Protection Act* because of the 12 bodies that were buried in the vicinity of the

¹⁹ "The chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that of the traditional protagonist, or *hero*, of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, clownish, or dishonest." (Abrams and Harpham 14-15)

monument was initiated by all coalition parties, also the President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, and the Parliament (*Riigikogu*) were involved in the whole procedure.

Drive like Ansip! as well as the next Center Party's game *Kick Out the Minister!* are curious cases of negative advertising. That "candidates, parties, and groups promote themselves and their viewpoints by attacking the opposition" and "provide information on why potential voters should *not* vote for the opposing candidate" is typical to negative advertising (Lariscy 484). These two games, however, are not even openly defined as advertisements by their designers and distributors. Unlike *The Ant Game* and *Ansip Raises Prices!*, *Drive like Ansip!* and *Kick Out the Minister!* are not part of any specific election campaign and the games themselves do not provide any information about their sponsors and clear purpose²⁰. My suggestion is that these games could be perceived as products of a trend known in political science as "permanent campaigning": constant polling and fighting for the media attention between the election campaigns and in a long perspective, mixing up governing and campaigning (Welch *et. al.* 276-277).

However, in all three Center Party's web games that feature Andrus Ansip, something can be seen that is the aim of propaganda techniques and essential to Roland Barthes' myths – naturalization. Center Party's games, starting with *Drive like Ansip!*, make it to appear "natural" that the Prime Minister is to blame for all the country's ills, even for things not under his jurisdiction or only partially under his control (price increase). Nevertheless, it cannot be forgotten that Estonian Reform Party is at least as efficient and possibly even more successful myth creator than Estonian Center Party. Their myth of Estonia as small but successful, high-tech country that manages to keep its economy going and under control even in hard times (all

²⁰ From the interview with Raimond Kaljulaid emerges that the two games were still designed with elections in mind, namely the European Parliament elections on 4-7 June 2009 and local/municipal elections on 10 October 2009 (see Appendix A-4). However, *Drive like Ansip!* was released in October 2008 – roughly a year before the elections in 2009. *Kick Out the Minister!* fits better on the timeline of electioneering as it was released in March 2009 but its content (as well as the content of *Drive like Ansip!*) has no direct relation to elections in 2009. As a consequence, no-one in Estonia, including the Center Party itself, did not tie the games with any elections or campaigns at the time of their release.

thanks to the Reform Party, "naturally") is probably best illustrated by the Andrus Ansip's overconfident and later much ridiculed election promise before 2007 parliamentary elections. According to the slogan, Reform Party was to take Estonia among the five wealthiest European countries in 15 years. In that light, Center Party's attempt to portray Ansip as an ultimate antihero may look slightly less out of place.

Amusing detail about *Drive like Ansip!* is, that the whole game is built on an ancient propaganda trick – scapegoating. It is Andrus Ansip who is raising taxes and inflation, shutting down provincial bus lines and post offices. Yet, his misdoings do not end there: according to the game, it is no-one else but Andrus Ansip who is scapegoating.



Figure 18: After the player collides with the coalition partner, text *Governmental crisis!* appears on a screen, together with three "escape routes" ("This is not what it seems", "Blame Edgar", and "Ask help from heaven") that allow the player to continue the game.

Like many games, *Drive like Ansip!* allows its players to fail a few times before the ultimate fail – the end of the game. This particular driving game offers the player "three escape routes" from the "governmental crisis" that happens after the player has collided with

coalition partners. Those three escape routes are: denying – "This is not what it seems", degrading – "Ask help from heaven"²¹, and scapegoating – "Blame Edgar".

In case player chooses to claim that "this is not what it seems", the question mark that issues from the head of the coalition partner transforms into exclamation mark. When help is being asked from above, U.F.O. appears (in the form of beeping noise and ray of light) and the coalition partner is being sucked into the light beam. The option "Blame Edgar" where the head of Edgar Savisaar emerges in the speech bubble can be seen as exceptional because this is the only occasion so far when the Center Party's leader himself appears in the game.



Figure 19: Visual representations of "three escape routes" in *Drive like Ansip!*: "This is not what it seems", "Blame Edgar", and "Ask help from heaven" (from left to right).

Both *Drive like Ansip!* and *Kick Out the Minister!* are occasionally adopting a visual code of comic books: most obviously comic book-like elements in both games are speech and thought balloons that appear after the player has chosen an "escape route". Speech balloons in comics are usually seen as a form of anchorage (Chandler 204) where linguistic elements

²¹ "Heaven help us!" ("*No tule taevas appi!*") is a sentence Prime Minister Andrus Ansip actually said at the Estonian Government's press conference. The sentence was picked up by a popular satirical Estonian TV-show *Ärapanija* (Kanal 2) which more or less immortalized it. Since then, the sentence has become a part of a political folklore in Estonia and is used and quoted frequently by media and people. Unfortunately, I have not managed to track down the exact date of the press conference or the original context of the infamous sentence but it is known that the tone of the sentence was derogatory, meaning "stop that nonsense". The expression "*tule taevas appi!*" is somewhat gender and age specific in Estonia – older women, rather than middle-age men are expected to use it that partly explains the continuous popularity of Prime Minister's utterance.

"fix the floating chain of signifieds" in an image ("Image" 39). In the game, however, speech balloons are robbed of this function. The real anchorage that explains what is taking place in a visual game environment is text that appears immediately after the collision with the coalition partner (see fig.18). Therefore, a phenomenon what Lars Konzack calls *referentiality*, "signs, ornaments or structures in a game that have been used before in other media or games" ("Computer Game Criticism"), appears here. The game refers to comic books and their visual code but does not function like one: it contains certain elements that have a clear purpose and function in comics (speech bubbles) but reduces them to mere decoration in games.

Two weeks after releasing the game *Drive like Ansip!*, Estonian Center Party issued a press release, claiming that the game has become "more popular than [the rock-band] *Metallica*" (Sillaots). Allegedly more than 85 000 people – one out of ten internet users in Estonia – had played the game by that time. The arbitrary comparison made by the Center Party was based on a number of visitors at the *Metallica* concert on Tallinn's Song Festival Grounds in 2006 that brought together 78 000 people. It is not clear, which method was used to count the players, but the number is still quite remarkable even if it only reflects the number of times the game was played and not its unique users (counted by the different Internet Protocol addresses, for example).

4.2.2. Gameplay Rhetoric and Procedural Rhetoric

In many aspects, *Drive like Ansip's* gameplay resembles the popular *Nintendo EAD's* go-kart racing video game *Super Mario Kart* (1992), but it is a very basic and stripped-down version of it; among other things, there is no actual racing in the Center Party's game – the player has the entire road for himself. Nevertheless, similarly to *Super Mario Kart*, player's

avatar drives a go-kart in the web game and he is urged to collect certain objects on the road and avoid the others.

Like *The Ant Game* and *Ansip Raises Prices!*, *Drive like Ansip!* is designed to express a rhetoric of failure. In order to keep playing the game, the player needs to keep the *popularity meter* in the right edge of the screen filled up. Different power-ups that player collects in the game raise his avatar's (Andrus Ansip's) popularity and fill up the *popularity meter*, but "not for long", as the game's instructions state. The web game is designed in such a way that the *popularity* in the game's *popularity meter* drops faster than the player can boost *popularity* by collecting the items. Initially, the player may get the impression that he is able to win the game somehow, but after racing for a while it becomes obvious that like in the first Center Party's game, the player is again predestined to lose and will never cross the finish line.

As I already wrote in game's semiotic analysis, the power-ups that player needs to collect in order to fill the barometer signify mostly negative things (inflation, tax increase etc.). Because the player / Ansip is *actively* collecting objects of negative "symbolical" value, one of the game's messages seems to be that the deeds that real Andrus Ansip does in order to gain popularity and keep himself in power are actually harmful to Estonian people. It is worth noticing how the message is created: the game's representative layer reveals us the *meaning* of power-ups and obstacles and the game's procedural layer of item collection and avoidance metaphorically "symbolizes" Ansip's *actions*.

The main message of the game is, however, that by doing what he is being doing, Andrus Ansip can enjoy the support of the people and stay in power for a while, but his politics and strategies are not sustainable and he, like the game player, is predetermined to lose sooner or later. This message is expressed through the rhetoric of failure that I described above. However, even if it may appear that it is just the game's gameplay that spells out the game's main statement, it is again not so. Similarly to the first argument of the game, the

game mechanics show (or simulate), what are the *results* of Ansip's bad decisions – temporary success that is followed by inevitable failure – but the *nature* of these decisions, the fact that the decisions are, indeed, "bad", are shown to the player by representative means (the sign of the Bronze Soldier etc.). Therefore, the procedural rhetoric in *Drive like Ansip!* sends out some unique messages that are not to be found from the game's representative level but it does it with the help of game's representative level.

It is interesting, how *Drive like Ansip!* is playing around with the in-game moral system which Gonzalo Frasca has described as follows:

From a systemic point of view, a game is a challenge that "must" be solved. A direct consequence of this is that games define an in-game moral system stating what is good and bad in terms of goals. In *Super Mario Bros.* (1985) any action that goes against rescuing Princess Peach is bad; rescuing Princess Peach is considered to be good. This logic is so pervasive in games that it can easily become invisible to players... The actions leading towards achieving the main goal are generally seen as acceptable (Frasca 129).

In *Drive like Ansip!*, a player who has not realized yet that the game is impossible to finish/win, may consider collecting items on the road *good* in terms of in-game goals, even if game's representative layers signals him, that what he is doing is actually *bad* in a wider, outside of the game-world perspective. After he has understood, that collecting power-ups is actually useless, he ceases to see object collecting as *good* also in terms of the gameplay.

The designers of *Drive like Ansip!* and *Ansip Raises Prices!*, the two Center Party games where player has an avatar (the graphical representation of the user) have made an interesting choice by putting the player in the position of a character who, in Center Party's

mythology would better suit to fill the place of the "boss monster" – superior video game enemy.

Designers' decision to force the player to identify himself with Andrus Ansip could possibly be explained through the strategies of negative advertising. In comparison to positive advertising, negative ads provide more conflict and therefore cause voters "to think, to make comparisons, to assess the believability of the claims... The negative ad requires more processing, more thinking, more lingering in the brain, whether a person wants it to or not" (Lariscy 486). When the player faces the items in the game that have negative connotations, and finds himself temporarily confused, the *anchorage* – instructions of the game that I wrote of in the game's semiotic analysis – guides the player through the game by explaining what needs to be done. Nevertheless, placing the player in a role of an antihero and obligating him to do *bad things* ("collect as many points as possible before you are forced to resign from the post of the Prime Minister") provides a significant amount of conflict and confusion that may also lead to processing, contemplation and "lingering in the brain". In the next Center Party's web game *Kick Out the Minister!*, however, the role of the player is different and Andrus Ansip appears there in the form that could be expected – as the "boss enemy".

4.3. Kick Out the Minister!

The game *Kick out the Minister!* was released in March 2009. The subheading of the game describes it as a "fun and satirical political game about the governmental circus". Game's original Estonian title *Anna ministrile kinga!* makes use of the idiom *kinga andma* – "to give a shoe" – that means "to fire" or "to kick out" someone, so the title literally translates as *Give a Shoe to the Minister!*

After *Kick Out the Minister!* had been made available in the Internet, the Centre Party sent out a press release and distributed the game by email marketing. Both texts, the original press release and e-mail that accompanied the game, can be found from the Appendix B together with translations.

On one hand, *Kick out the Minister!* did not get such large scale media attention as *Drive like Ansip!*: only weekly newspaper *Eesti Ekspress* published a short article about the game in a "curiosity" section (16.03.2009). On the other hand, daily newspaper *Postimees* seemed to be provoked enough by it to publish a more in-depth article about the games titled *The Centre Party spent tens of thousands of kroons on web games* (21.04.2009).

Center Party's Secretary General Priit Toobal did not reveal the costs of *Drive like Ansip!* and *Kick out the Minister!* to the newspaper. Web designers from different companies who were interviewed for the article speculated that the party could have spent up to 100,000 kroons (ca. 6400 Euros) on the games. *Frukt Kuubis* web design company's sales manager Erkki Markus calculated the possible costs of a web game as follows:

According to Markus it would take 2-3 working days to do the designs, about 2 days to create animations, 4-8 days to create a game engine with scoring and ranking system and 2-3 days would be spent on project management and documentation.

"In total, a project of this kind would last for 10-16 days and the cost would range from 40,000 to 64,000 kroons [ca. 2500-4100 Euros], plus VAT," explained Markus (Kass).

Like *Drive like Ansip!*, *Kick out the Minister!* is not an election game in its most straightforward sense – it was released between the campaigns. Center Party's press release about the game said that *Kick out the Minister!* is a "follow-up" of the "virtual protest" on the

web page <http://www.protest2009.eu> (Appendix B-5). According to the Center Party's Secretary General Priit Toobal's blog, *protest2009* was a website that "offered people a peaceful and non-violent way to express their views about the government" (Toobal). I tried to enter the web page just a week after the "virtual protest site" was allegedly opened, but the site was inaccessible – apparently it was already closed down.

In spring 2012, the original website of the game *Kick out the Minister!*, <http://www.keskerakond.ee/annakinga/est/>, was still up and running.

Apparently, there is a risk of over-interpretation here – it is possible to read too much out of the changes that could have been caused from mundane, practical issues, but some differences can be seen in the ways these four web games have been introduced to the public and in the level of party's involvement with the games. The first game that was sponsored by the Center Party, *The Ant Game*, was evidently defined by the party not so much as Center Party's but Estonian Centre Party's Youth Council's (*Eesti Keskerakonna Noortekogu*) project. The game promoted the youth council's candidate and people who were involved with making the game were from the youth council, including Raimond Kaljulaid who, at the time, was Centre Party's Youth Council's Press Secretary.

Four years passed until the next Center Party's game *Drive like Ansip!* arrived and once again, the game was introduced as youth council's brain-child. Daily newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht* wrote about the game under the title *The Centre Party's Youth's prank: Drive like Ansip!* (29 Oct. 2008) and it was pointed out that the domain juhinaguansip.eu was registered by the youth council's board member. News portal Delfi.ee even contacted the Estonian Reform Party Youth Council's (*Eesti Reformierakonna Noortekogu*) Member of the Board Allan Allmere to ask if they have "something similarly ingenious" to offer (28 Oct. 2008).

Since the game *Kick out the Minister!*, however, all referrals to the youth council stopped abruptly. The article about the game in *Eesti Ekspress* on 16 March 2009 was titled

The Center Party lets people to throw shoes at ministers [emphasis added]. Unlike *Drive like Ansip!* that had an .eu domain name, Center Party's two last games to date were published on Center Party's official home page www.keskerakond.ee.

It is a matter of choice whether to go as far as to interpret these changes as a sort of "legitimization" process of web games from "children's medium" and "youth's pranks" to fully acceptable means of political communication in the eyes of party as well as Estonian media, but the change in the context around the games still noticeable enough to be at least recorded.

4.3.1. Semiotic Analysis

Similarly to other Estonian Center Party web games, *Kick out the Minister!* communicates through multiple semiotic modes like visual, textual, and aural. The game has six levels and one bonus level. It starts with a player selecting a shoe (sneaker, boot, high-heeled shoe etc.). When the choice has been made, animated characters of the ministers from the former Government of Estonia (2007-2011) start appearing in front of the player on a stage one by one. Player's task is to hit the characters with a shoe and, if successful, advance to the next game level. Before each minister appears on a screen, a short written explanation is provided to a player on who will be presented next and why he needs to be fired from his job, for example: "Kick out the Minister of Education who was incapable of protecting teachers' salaries!"

In *Drive like Ansip!* subchapter, I noted that the game is occasionally using the visual code of the comic-books. In the book *Image-Music-Text*, Roland Barthes writes that photographic image is a "message without a code" while other reproductions of reality develop a supplementary message that is called a "style of the reproduction" – "second meaning, whose signifier is a certain 'treatment' of the image (result of the action of the

creator) and whose signified, whether aesthetic or ideological, refers to a certain 'culture' of the society receiving the message" (17). If we look at the screenshots of the Center Party's web games, we will see that all of them are essentially coded images. In *Kick out the Minister!*, central image is set in a frame that only partly imitates the real world (the hand of the shoe thrower).



Figure 20: Screenshot of the first level of the web game *Kick out the minister!*, presenting the former Estonian Minister of Education (Tõnis Lukas).

The number in a lower right corner that shows how many throwing attempts are available is a code, as well as the row under the upper frame that displays the game level, time left until the end of the level, successful hits, gathered points and number of performed throws.

In video games, components that I just described as a *code* (in contemporary culture, this "code" on an image can help the viewer to establish that he is dealing with the screenshot of a video game, for example) are rather known as elements of a game interface. Game interface is "any on-screen information that provides the player with information concerning the life, health, location or status of the character(s), as well as battle or action menus, nested menus that control options such as advancement grids or weapon selections, or additional

screens that give the player more control over manipulating elements of gameplay" (Consalvo and Dutton).

The game's visual style is another kind of code. Already the style of *Drive like Ansip!* could be called comic book-like, especially because of the use of speech balloons, but in *Kick out the Minister!*, game's cartoonishness is emphasized even more.

Firstly, the colors of the web game are bright and bold, also primary colors that are usually associated with children's entertainment, are being used. The noteworthy detail is that while the bodies of the ministers are quite heavily stylized (the Minister of Education on Fig. 20 almost resembles a stickman), their heads are much more detailed and almost photographic (probably processed photographic images have been used here while the rest of the game's environment is drawn). This choice of style in this "satirical" depiction of politicians contradicts interestingly with the tradition of political cartoons that frequently focuses on distorting the subject's facial features.



Figure 21: The processed and stylized images of former Estonian Minister of Justice (Rein Lang) and Minister of Economy (Juhan Parts) in the game *Kick out the Minister!*

Secondly, the use of the writing in the game is interesting as well. The written introduction that appears on the screen before player starts playing the game has an anchoring function (Image 38): it tells us how to read the coded image that follows. However, during the active playing time, only one word – *bang* – appears on the screen after every successful hit

(see Fig. 20) (besides the previously described text that displays game statistics). The onomatopoeic word *bang* does not occur in the game in order to compensate the missing sound like in purely visual comic books because the game has a soundtrack: brass instruments playing a rhythmic march-like tune in so called oom-pah style. Hitting the character with a shoe e.g. "the *bang* moment" is accompanied by a squeaky sound-effect that resembles the sound of a rubber toy bumping into something solid.

According to *Ka-boom!: A Dictionary of Comic Book Words, Symbols & Onomatopoeia*, the word *bang* has a long history in comic books where it has marked different sounds, but predominantly very hard and loud sounds like the sound of a gunshot:

BANG [The Adventures Of Tintin: Explorers On The Moon, 1954] The sound of a gunshot: [Madballs vol. 1 #7, 1987] A mechanical sound caused by a sudden impact: [MAD #212, January 1980] A word used by children to simulate gunfire: [MAD #218, October 1980] The sound made by the tire going flat: [MAD #241, September 1983] The sound of hard knocking on a door (Taylor 12).

In the web game, the word *bang* does not seem to add any additional meaning to the image; it does not compensate the missing sound but even seems to be in a slight disharmony with it (the actual sound is not very loud and hard); more interestingly, the word *bang* is in English while the rest of the game is in Estonian or in Russian. Theoretically, if the game designers would have just wanted to visually emphasize the moment of player's triumph – hitting the target – they could have chosen an Estonian (*põmm*, *plärts*, *piraki* etc.) or Russian onomatopoeic word. Therefore, either the internationally well-known English word was incorporated to the image in order to make the designers' work with the game that has two language options easier (to save the trouble of translation), or the word *bang* can be counted

as a visible attempt of intertextuality or "referentiality" in a game that "becomes apparent when comparing computer games with [...] other media" (96).

Consequently, it seems that it is not only the choice of color in the game that refers to the other, earlier "children's" mediums like comic books and cartoons but also the text that borrows from these mediums and enhances so the general "style of the reproduction".

Similarly to *Drive like Ansip!*, *Kick Out the Minister!* is loaded with signs. Every minister that appears on the virtual stage in the game is accompanied with signs and "symbols" that almost remind the attributes of saints in Christian art – the only difference is that the attributes of politicians in the Center Party's web game are not (yet) canonized in Estonian culture.

On the first level of the web-game *Kick out the Minister!* Tõnis Lukas, the former Minister of Education has a stage backdrop that depicts a classroom (see Fig. 20) that evidently refers to his area of expertise and responsibility in the government. However, the second level of the game that depicts Rein Lang, the former Minister of Justice and later Minister of Culture has a backdrop that presents the player an idyllic scene at the forest (see Fig. 21). Forest and bunny rabbits do not belong under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice in Estonia; therefore the backdrop only starts to make sense after the player notices that the minister has been dressed in a fox costume and knows the cultural connotations of this kind of zoomorphism. If the game's first scene setting referred straightforwardly to the job of the represented minister then the second setting refers metaphorically, through the connotations of the fox, to the *nature* of the represented minister (in a common metaphorical and idiomatical speech in Estonia a person can be "sly like an old fox" or act "like a fox in a chicken coop", for example)²². Rein Lang needed to be "kicked out" according to the preceding text in the game, because he "struggles so that you could be laid off more easily".

²² There is also an additional explanation to depicting Rein Lang in a fox costume that I will return to in the end of the chapter.

The third level depicts Juhan Parts, the former Minister of Economy and Communication, as a clown – a traditional and foolproof method of ridiculing someone which also fits with the general carnival atmosphere of the game. The web game informs the player that Parts just "observes how the deficit grows".

The fourth level shows Jüri Pihl, the former Minister of Internal Affairs, in leather and rivets – the fetish style clothing is accompanied with the backdrop that displays different instruments of torture. Tongs and handcuffs on the background probably refer to Pihl's career in Estonian Security Police (Kaitsepolitseiamet) where he was a General Director for ten years (1993-2003). Pihl "plays political games instead fighting the crime".

The fifth level depicts the former Minister of Finance, Ivari Padar, as a farmer in the middle of rural landscape, that unlike in *Drive like Ansip!* and *Ansip Raises Prices!* is definitely not idealized (see Chapter 4.4.1.) – there is a cow standing with its backside to viewer, for example. The farmer attributes are apparently influenced from the fact that 1999-2002, Padar was Estonian Minister of Agriculture. Padar "cut the budget at the expense of the weakest".

The sixth level that should be the final level of the game, shows the player the already familiar antihero, "boss monster" Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, who in this case is dressed as a superhero and is wearing a costume of a comic book character *Superman* (DC Comics). Ansip is blamed in "not being capable of leading the state".



Figure 22: Every former minister has certain visual attributes in the game. Jüri Pihl from the fourth level of the game is depicted as a practitioner of sadomasochism and the bear costume of Mart Laar who can be found from the bonus level refers to his nickname Baby Bear.

The game, however, does not end with "kicking out" Andrus Ansip, but is followed with a "bonus level" that depicts the politician Mart Laar in a bear costume and surrounded with pots of honey. The choice of adding Laar in a game is intriguing, because unlike all the other previously named politicians, Mart Laar was not a minister in "Ansip's second government" – at the time he focused on a job of a Chairman of Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, instead. His presence in the game seems to imply that the Center Party nevertheless perceives him as a "mighty adversary" or maybe the "gray cardinal" of Estonian politics. Bear costume refers to Laar's old nickname Baby Bear (mõmmibeebi) that stuck to him thanks to his beard and puffy cheeks. There is no written explanation why Laar needs to be "kicked out" in the opinion of Center Party.

As interesting as the choice of people who were depicted in the game is the choice of people who were left out of the game. One person, whose absence in the game is particularly noticeable, is the former Minister of Culture, Laine Jänes (Estonian Reform Party). Jänes' career in Estonian Government between 2007-2011 was interspersed with number of bigger

and smaller scandals, besides that, she constantly fell victim to jokes and puns that were caused by her surname Jänes (translates as *a hare* or *a rabbit*).

Almost everything that Hilary Nesi writes in her *Modern Bestiary: A Contrastive Study of the Figurative Meanings of Animal Terms* seems fit to describe the use of animal metaphors in Estonia. According to her, "animal metaphors occur more frequently than metaphors in other semantic areas... are common in most, if not all, cultures and ... in many cases they evoke a strong emotional response... Animal metaphors have their roots in traditional, rural society: they are often linked to proverbs and folk stories which.... continue to feature in both conversation and journalism in many cultures (Nesi 273-274). The most common use of *hare* as a metaphor in Estonia associates the animal with cowardliness: someone can be *cowardly as a hare* (arg nagu jänes) or he can have a *hare in his pants* (jänes püksis), but you can also *catch two hares with one shot* etc.

The game *Kick Out the Minister!* is using animal metaphor already twice – depicting politician Rein Lang as a fox and Mart Laar as a bear. When Mart Laar has a long history of being associated with the bear, there is no particular reason why Rein Lang should be depicted as a fox; at least there is nothing to be found from Estonian political folklore that would tie him with a figure of a fox. However, Mart Laar's nickname Baby Bear originates from the legendary Estonian ABC book *Karu-aabits* (Bear-ABC, 1971) and children's TV-series *Mõmmi ja aabits* (Teddy Bear and ABC, 1973-76) that was based on the book, where a baby bear learns ABC. The fictional world of Baby Bear features other animal characters, including Rebase-Rein (Rein the Fox) that in the series were played by the costumed actors.

Therefore, it seems that the game just does not refer to the nickname of one Estonian politician but attempts to assign a new nickname to another (Rein Lang) by borrowing ideas from the evergreen TV-series. Thus it is somewhat curious and surprising that the game did not take advantage of the minister that had a surname that the whole country was making fun

of²³ and who also has a "prototype" in *Teddy Bear and ABC* series – Jänku-Juta (Juta the Bunny) – who is no less famous character in Estonian popular culture than Rein the Fox.

I can think of two explanations, why Laine Jänes, whose name and person would have provided a lot of material to work with, was left out of the game. Only six ministers out of fourteen in the government got a place in the Center Party's web game. It may be that the cultural sector was considered so unimportant by the party or designers that they decided to leave it out in favor of more "important" and "masculine" sectors like finances or internal affairs. The second explanation would be the emergence of unexpected chivalry – as Jänes was one of the few women in the government at the time, the designer could have left her out in order to avoid "making fun of the lady" – however, the sex of the Minister of Culture definitely did not stop anyone before from having a laugh at her cost.

Unlike in *The Ant Game* where text, in a role of an *anchorage*, states the player his goal in the very beginning of the game and leaves the rest of the player's guidance to gameplay rhetoric, *Kick Out the Minister!* relies on text throughout the game. A separate screen gives reasons, why the ministers are unfit for their jobs and urges the player to "kick them out" before each new level.

Although the game is very rich in visual signs, they seem to be more in a role of embellishments, this time. The visual attributes of characters in the web game make them more "colorful" and attempt to add new connotations to them, but do not form very serious or persuasive arguments against the depicted ministers.

Sound, therefore, has maybe the biggest role in *Kick Out the Minister!* than in any other Center Party's game – beside the brass band music on the background that effectively helps to enhance the game's circus-theme, every successful hit with the shoe is also

²³ In addition to constant "witticism" in the press that published articles like "Laine Jänes with iron teeth" (Eesti Ekspress, 10 Feb. 2011), Estonian theater NO99 produced a play *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (2009) – the title referred to Joseph Beuys' famous performance of the same name (1965) but to the former Minister of Culture as well. In March 2011, Laine Jänes decided to change her surname and started using her maiden-name Randjärv instead.

accompanied with the burst of laughter from the imaginary public. Laughter is an integral part of a circus show, however, as the player of the game interacts with the *screen*, this laughter could also be seen as another example of *referentiality* in a game – an average Estonian entertainment consumer is familiar with similar *laugh tracks* aka *canned laughter* from U.S. comedy shows.

Evan A. Lieberman, Kimberly A. Neuendorf et al. who used the sitcom *The Andy Griffith Show* in order to study the effect of a *laugh track* on viewers, reached interesting conclusions. According to their research, laugh track can be seen as "a moderate... enhancement to the comic appeal of a television program... only under certain narrative conditions" (512):

For those programs that are more narratologically limited, structurally, semiotically, and semantically, there may be a small boost in perceived humor and overall enjoyment from the use of a laugh track. In narratives of greater complexity with a higher density of story information, more dramatically intense character functions and intricate moves, and more fully articulated narrative grammar... the laugh track appears to be an impediment to humor and audience enjoyment (*Ibid.*).

According to this description, the laugh track in *Kick Out the Minister!* could be quite strategically placed and may actually serve its purpose. Despite its connotations and referentiality, *Kick Out the Minister!* is still small and simple flash game that has certain narratological limits but even more severe gameplay limits – the game exercises strict control over its player, and tries its best to guide player's interpretation towards the preferred message.

The player does not have to have thorough knowledge of Estonian culture and politics in order to understand that, in the opinion of Center Party, Estonian Government that was active between 2007-2011 was a big joke and its ministers were incompetent clowns who should have been dismissed from responsibility rather sooner than later; nevertheless, having a good pre-acquired knowledge of Western culture, Estonian culture and political folklore makes the game more meaningful, humorous, and probably persuasive as well.

4.3.2. Gameplay Rhetoric and Procedural Rhetoric

Web game *Kick Out the Minister!* seems to have a clear predecessor among non-digital carnival games, the Shooting Gallery. When at a fair, the player sometimes may also use balls instead of a gun to hit the target. In this digital version of the game, he needs to smack targets with shoes. The genre and the theme of *Kick Out the Minister!* (look, soundtrack etc.) are a perfect match.

Kick Out the Minister! is the only web game out of four Center Party games that has levels – the player starts at level one with "kicking out" the Minister of Education and finishes at level six with "kicking out" the Prime Minister. If the player agrees to register his result in-game, he can play the bonus level against the politician Mart Laar. Registering the game online requires player's nickname (for player rankings), real name, age, e-mail address and location (town or county). In addition to that, the player needs to finish the statement "in my opinion, the party with the strongest economic policy is..." where he can choose between the Estonian Center Party, Estonian Reform Party, Res Publica and Pro Patria Union, Social Democratic Party or press the button that reads "I do not care!!".

In *Play the Message*, Gonzalo Frasca has noted: "a game's difficulty level can be used as a rhetorical device. A common technique involves creating games that are extremely difficult – or even impossible – to beat in order to state an opinion about the activity that they are simulating" (132). Stating an opinion through making the player to lose was exactly what *The Ant Game* and *Drive like Ansip!* did – *Kick Out the Minister!* is different, though – almost anyone, and definitely anyone with basic knowledge of video games, can finish i.e. "win" the game.

Curiously, when I first played the game, I found that it was extremely hard to hit the targets and kept losing on second or third level over and over. The only explanation that I can think of is that designers must have adjusted game's difficulty level soon after its release so that every player could indeed "punish" the ministers for their bad job by "firing them on the spot" (Appendix B-3). If the game would be too hard for a *casual gamer* to complete, it would express an opposite rhetoric to what the accompanying press release promised and would cast doubt if the players still are the ones in the state that have "ultimate authority" to sack ministers (*Ibid.*).

The unfortunate side-effect of making the game levels more (casual) user-friendly is that the different levels in *Kick Out the Minister!* are only different by appearance (on representative level) but on the gameplay i.e. difficulty level, there are hardly any differences – maybe only the final "boss", Andrus Ansip, seems to be slightly more evasive now than other ministers and is therefore more challenging to hit. The game's intended message and gameplay have been adjusted with each other with the cost of balanced and challenging game experience – by taking some of the "gameness" out of the game.

The *Kick Out the Minister!* web game was not the only one that urged their players to register online, also *Drive like Ansip!* asked e-mail addresses from the players, so that they could receive a *National Honorable Mention*, should their score rank among top ten. Players

suspected that Center Party's real motive behind collecting e-mail addresses was to create a list for distributing party's messages and many of them, including the writer of the thesis, indeed started to get "news" from the Center Party after a while. As players did not consciously sign up for e-mails from the party, these e-mails were perceived as spam²⁴ and generally caused negative response among the players.

It can be concluded that the gameplay rhetoric of *Kick Out the Minister!*, especially (but the rhetoric of *Drive like Ansip!* as well), says to the player – it does not matter how good you are in the game; you cannot *really* win (complete the game, get the diploma etc.) until you have registered with us.

How the Center Party actually interpreted the actions of people who had registered in *Drive like Ansip!* in order to see their score and ranking probably surpassed everything that players imagined:

In a circular letter, sent by Priit Toobal, that invited people to play the game *Kick Out the Minister!* party's Secretary General wrote: "It is still possible to play the hugely popular online game *Drive like Ansip!* through which more than 100 000 people have protested against the inactivity of Ansip's government." Question, whether Center Party interprets playing their web game as a protest against Ansip and current government was responded by another question by Toobal: "Can kicking out the minister be interpreted as a statement of support, then?" (Kass).

The example in *Kick Out the Minister!* where the game's representative layer and gameplay layer work well together is their joint efforts on dehumanizing former ministers of Estonian Government. Already the coalition politicians in *Drive like Ansip!* look more like

²⁴ Spam – irrelevant or unsolicited messages sent over the Internet, typically to large numbers of users, for the purposes of advertising, phishing, spreading malware, etc. ("Spam").

objects that are cut out of the cardboard than non-player characters²⁵ that they actually are, however, in the rally game, some level of communication is required with these figures in order to advance in a game. When player crashes his car into Mart Laar or Ivari Padar, the characters "demand an explanation" in a form of a question mark in a speech balloon – player's task then is to pick one of the three "escape routes" and bluff himself out of the tight situation of "governmental crisis".

In *Kick Out the Minister!*, there is no two-way interaction with the coalition politicians anymore. They look even more like cardboard cutouts and are completely objectified. Unlike in *Drive like Ansip!*, the characters of former ministers do not react while being hit – the player sees the word *Bang!* and hears the sound of a shoe hitting a head, but the "ministers" do not make any sounds. Nick Haslam writes about dehumanizing that "denying uniquely human attributes to others represents them as animal-like, and denying human nature to others represents them as objects or automata" (252). In *The Ant Game*, the Center Party ripped Urmas Reinsalu of his human attributes and represented him as animal-like and *Kick Out the Minister!* represents its political opponents as automata. Dehumanization is a common and effective propaganda trick – if a person or group is dehumanized, "it is perceived to lack shared humanity and its interests can be disregarded" (Haslam 255).

Kick Out the Minister! is the only Center Party's web game that does not have a noteworthy procedural rhetoric of its own and that does not aim to form political arguments and to persuade through rule-based representations (besides forcing the players to sign up for the party's newsletter to play the final level).

²⁵ Video game characters that are not controlled by the player but by the computer through artificial intelligence.

4.4. *Ansip Raises Prices!*

Ansip Raises Prices! is Estonian Center Party's last game to date. It was designed as a part of the election campaign for the Estonian Parliamentary elections in 6 March 2011. There seems to have been some kind of mistake in planning, though, because Center Party's campaign posters were on the streets already in January but the game seems to have been released just a few days before the Election Day. Center Party's weekly newspaper *Kesknädal* (Midweek) published a short news article about the game on 2 March 2011.

Odd release time can also explain why the game did not receive any "earned" media coverage – news stories about campaigning that, contrary to paid media (advertising) are "earned" because of the innovativeness of the campaign. Articles about the campaign strategies of the parties were generally published in the beginning of the campaigning period in Estonian media. The alternative but in my opinion slightly less likely option would be that the game was noticed by the journalists but was just not considered "innovative" enough anymore to make it to the news. *Ansip Raises Prices!* was even overlooked by Estonian non-profit organization *e-Governance Academy* that later published the parliamentary elections online campaign analysis which, among other things, examined the election game of Jaanus Rahumägi that was mentioned earlier in the thesis.

The game *Ansip Raises Prices!* was done by the content marketing agency PRB Prenzlauer & Berg OÜ that is led by Raimond Kaljulaid. The Art Director of the game was Pavel Zubarev. In spring 2012, the game could be found from its original site www.keskerakond.ee/riigikogu2011/mang/.

Social and political context of the web game was the price increase in Estonia that started already before Estonia joined with euro area on 1 Jan. 2011 and accelerated afterwards. In March 2011 when the game was released, Estonia had the highest inflation rate in European Union – 5.1 % (Jaagant). Among the crowds, the price increase has been often

associated with the adoption of euro currency. Andrus Ansip who supported joining with the Eurozone said that the new currency will not raise the prices; eurosceptical Edgar Savisaar claimed the opposite.

4.4.1. Semiotic Analysis

Ansip Raises Prices! differs from its two predecessors *Drive like Ansip!* and *Kick out the Minister!*, for it is definitely an election game. It is designed for a campaign and the proof of it can be found from within the game itself, besides stating its aims in a text, *Ansip Raises Prices!* also displays campaign's official slogan. The game starts with a longish introduction:

Help Prime Minister Andrus Ansip to raise prices. By catching milk cartons, vegetables, gas canisters, light bulbs etc. you will help Ansip to raise their prices further. It is not easy, because the price increase in Estonia is already the largest in Europe. Salaries, unfortunately, cannot compete with the price rally.

Be careful, however! If Ansip will be hit with the Centre Party's sign, the Centre Party will roll back Ansip's price increases.

After the elections on 6th of March, we will intend to tackle the prices seriously. If you have had enough of high prices – choose the Centre Party!

PS You know what it means when Minister of Finance Jürgen Ligi appears on the screen – the prices are growing with double speed.

The central concept of the game is similar to *Drive like Ansip!*: player whose avatar is Prime Minister Andrus Ansip needs to collect different items that "symbolize" political actions in order to do something that is actually harmful to the people (shutting down

provincial bus lines in *Drive like Ansip!*, raising the price of bread in *Ansip Raises Prices!*, for example).

In comparison with *Drive like Ansip!*, the signs used in the new game are more one-dimensional. Semiotically speaking, *Drive like Ansip!* has symbolic, iconic and indexical signs while *Ansip Raises Prices!* makes only use of iconic and indexical signs. In semiotics, iconic sign has a direct similarity to the object it represents (example: photograph), indexical sign marks a causal or natural relation (example: smoke for fire), and symbol stands for a convention (example: word) (Cobley 37).

Drive like Ansip! manipulated with controversial signs that can be perceived as iconic or symbolic: besides the obvious resemblance to the objects these images depict, representations of the Bronze Soldier and War of Independence Victory Column can both be seen as "symbols" of conflicts. The first represents the conflict between the different views on history and different ethnic communities in Estonia while the second represents the conflict between politicians and intelligentsia – many intellectuals of the country protested against the design of the monument that has the features of historical totalitarian design.

Ansip Raises Prices!, on the contrary, relies only on iconic (the image of bread marks the increase of bread price, the image of vegetables depicts the increase in vegetable prices) or indexical signs (the lit light bulb represents electricity i.e. the increase of the price of electricity).

Another visual similarity between *Drive like Ansip!* and *Ansip Raises Prices!* is their use of landscape. J. Cherie Strachan and Kathleen E. Kendall, researchers of visual rhetoric and political image making, write:

In particular, as the medium of television matured, candidates have increasingly relied on visual symbolism to construct persuasive imagery. As a result, candidates are

increasingly apt to use powerful visual symbols—including portrayals of icons, past political heroes, the flag or even idealized American landscapes—in their attempts to convey messages intended to persuade American voters. (137)

Both games, *Drive like Ansip!* and *Ansip Raises Prices!*, have put the "Estonian rural landscape" – in one case clearly idealized, in second case more stylized²⁶ – in the foreground of the game. The city in the background of *Ansip Raises Prices!* is definitely the city of Tallinn, its silhouette is an iconic image in Estonia that "everybody" recognizes²⁷. Also the stylized "city of glass skyscrapers" in the background of *Drive like Ansip!* is probably representing Tallinn as the capital city has the largest number of high-rise buildings in Estonia.

The cultural texts in Estonia are overflowing with town vs. countryside and Tallinn vs. "rest of Estonia" dichotomies and mixed feelings about these different lifestyle choices: describing them all would exceed the limits of this thesis. However, it is useful to know that both categories have many connotations and the prevailing one in the Center Party web games seems to be "city as a destination"²⁸.

²⁶ Idealize – "regard or represent as perfect or better than in reality" ("Idealize"). Stylize – "depict or treat in a mannered and non-realistic style" ("Stylize").

²⁷ In this sentence I am not using the word *iconic* as a term of semiotics but in its more widespread meaning – "relating to or of the nature of an icon" ("Iconic").

²⁸ For further reading about town as a "bad environment", "ideal" or "destination" in Estonia and more specifically in Estonian literature I would recommend the publications of Elle-Mari Talivee, unfortunately majority of them seem to be in Estonian.



Figure 23: Idealized (and somewhat stylized) Estonian landscapes in *Drive like Ansip!* and *Ansip Raises Prices!* (from left to right).

Besides having similarities with *Drive like Ansip!*, *Ansip Raises Prices!* has common elements with *The Ant Game* as well. Both games were done for specific election campaigns, one for the elections of European Parliament in 2004 and the other for the elections of Estonian Parliament in 2012. Despite the 8-year gap that separates the two games, they both address the voter in a similar manner – writing "you" with the capitalized first letter.

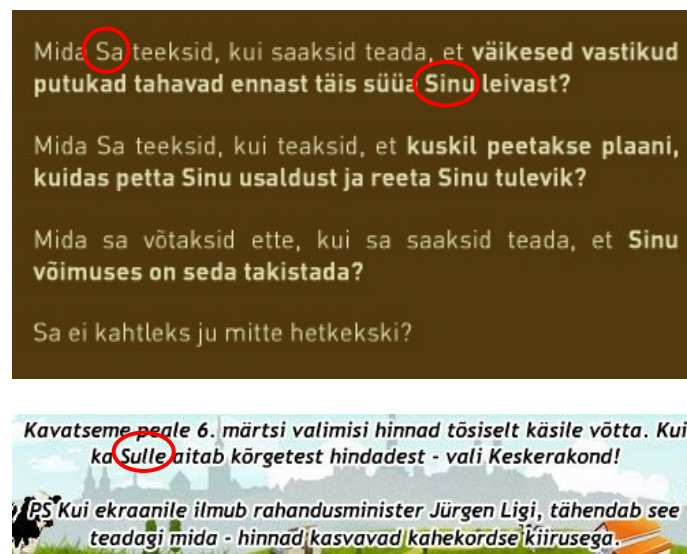


Figure 24: The use of capitalized 'you' (intimate) in *The Ant Game* and in *Ansip Raises Prices!* Words referring to 'you' (*Sa*, *Sinu*, *Sulle*) are highlighted with red circles.

Harald Haarmann who has studied the semiotic of politeness writes that "in a comparative view of world's languages the marking of politeness by personal pronouns is of most frequent occurrence" (118). In Estonian language, there is a distinction between *sina* 'you' (intimate) and *teie* 'you' (polite) which correlates with the distinction between singular and plural for the 2nd person. There is an unwritten but commonly accepted rule in Estonia that strangers and older people are being addressed as *teie* and friends, family and adolescents as *sina*. The rules about capitalizing the first letter of personal pronouns for politeness in formal texts, especially in letters, are more oblique. Estonian Language Institute's web-page *Keeleabi* (Language Assistance) does not suggest capitalizing the first letter of the word unless capitalization changes its meaning. According to this rule, capitalizing *Teie* is appropriate, because it indicates the number of addressees: capitalized first letter implies one addressee, in case of several addressees, *teie* (2nd person plural) is written with a lower-case first letter. That would mean that capitalizing the first letter of *sina* is not necessary, because it would not change the meaning of the word. However, the Estonian Language Institute's specialist still accepts both forms of politeness *Sina* ja *sina* when **addressing children and adolescents in particular** [emphasis added] (Raadik).

The linguistic choices in Centre Party's web games are, therefore, quite complicated and conflicting. They have chosen to address their voters with the personal pronoun that signifies intimacy and familiarity but have added a touch of politeness to it with capitalizing its first letter. These kinds of "compromises" illustrate quite vividly the struggle of politicians who are trying to figure out how to achieve the appeal of an "everyman" for the voters but treat them with deference at the same time. According to Raimond Kaljulaid, the targets of the Center Party's web games "were all internet users in Estonia" (Appendix A-6), so the possibility that the games specifically targeted the younger audience with the choice of language can quite possibly be left aside. From another point of view, addressing game

players as adolescents strengthens the preconception of video games as "children's medium", even if in this particular case, that seems to be an unintended side-effect.



Figure 25: In *Ansip Raises Prices!*, Andrus Ansip has joined his forces with Minister of Finances, Jürgen Ligi. When Ligi appears on the screen, Ansip needs to catch items falling from the sky twice as fast.

Based on the imagery of the Center Party's web games, it seems that their mythology portrays mostly Reform Party's Chairman Andrus Ansip as an antihero, "boss monster" or arch-enemy. In *Kick Out the Minister!*, the trend continues: once again we see an all-powerful Ansip who seems to raise the prices in Estonia almost single handedly. However, this time he has an accomplice, Estonian Minister of Finance Jürgen Ligi (2009-) who, in the game, has been attributed with supernatural qualities – his appearance on the screen is accompanied with the sound of thunder and he is surrounded by thunderbolts.

Traditionally, gods have been associated with thunder all around the world: there is Indra in Hinduism, Zeus in Greek mythology, Thor in Norse mythology, Taara / Tarapita in Estonian mythology etc. Also Christian God occasionally appears in the form of storm and

thunder²⁹ – theologians call this phenomenon a "storm theophany". The color-scheme of Jürgen Ligi's eerie black and red thunderstorm, associates with the Christian devil, though. It is often thought that Christian tradition of red-colored devils comes from passage in the Bible: "And there appeared another sign in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads" (Rev. 12.3).

Additionally, it should be noted that the image of Jürgen Ligi appears over Toompea Hill that has been Tallinn's and later whole Estonia's traditional seat of power for centuries – nowadays it houses the buildings of Estonian Parliament and Government of Estonia. In the times of discontent, the geographical position of governmental buildings has led media and people to compare Toompea Hill with Mount Olympus and politicians with Olympian gods or demigods. Representing Jürgen Ligi as malicious and threatening superior being is just another form of dehumanization that was discussed earlier in Chapter 4.3.2. In the game, he represents "them", the politicians up on the Toompea Hill whom disgruntled citizens and opposing politicians like to accuse of having lost all contact with the life and reality of a common man.

4.4.2. Gameplay Rhetoric and Procedural Rhetoric

The gameplay of *Ansip Raises Prices!* is similar to classic Atari 2600 game *Kaboom* (1981) where the player needs to catch bombs dropped by *Mad Bomber* and to subsequent Gonzalo Frasca's newsgame *Kabul Kaboom* (2001). Compared to other Center Party games, it resembles *Drive like Ansip!* the most: player's avatar is Andrus Ansip, he collects items that "symbolize" unfavorable political decisions and in the end of the game, the player is presented

²⁹ And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire (*King James Bible*, Ezek. 1.4).

with results of his actions as Prime Minister. However, there is a crucial difference between the two games.



Figure 26: Final results of *Drive like Ansip!* (on the left) and *Ansip Raises Prices!* (on the right). First game shows the player the percentage of taxes and inflation he "raised" during the game, the second game presents him the price increase he "caused" by playing. While *Drive like Ansip!* also displays player's final score (highlighted with blue), *Ansip Raises Prices!* only encourages to "Play again!".

Drive like Ansip! was built on the rhetoric of failure – it was not possible for the player to race against the emptying *popularity meter*. Despite of that, the game could still be categorized as *agôn*³⁰ – competition. It had a scoring system that enabled players to compare their scores and to compete against each other and regardless of the fact that the game did not have an in-game winning condition, it had a winning condition outside the game – the score among top ten granted the player a *National Honorable Mention* from the Center Party.

Ansip Raises Prices! does not have any kind of winning condition. The player is supposed to catch objects falling from above, but failing to catch them is not penalized – the player does not lose points and the game does not end like it did in *The Ant Game* after the player let three ants to slip past him. The more player catches the milk cartons and loafs of

³⁰ In Roger Caillois' categorization, *agôn* is a group of competitive games where adversaries confront each other and "the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits" (Caillois 14).

bread, the more he raises their prices – when he catches the logo of the Center Party, however, the price increase disappears and he starts from zero. There is no point of avoiding Center Party's logo too, because slowly increasing the "score" does not really lead the player anywhere – there is no final score as such and the results of the game are not recorded anywhere. The only way out of this meaningless, purposeless item collecting is to press the red button that reads *Aitab*.



Figure 27: Center Party's campaign slogan *Aitab!* in *Ansip Raises Prices!* and on the campaign banner of candidate Kalle Klandorf on the streets of Tallinn. Klandorf's banner reads: "Enough of low pensions!" (Putting).

Aitab! was Center Party's slogan at the time of Parliamentary Elections in Estonia in 2011. Once again, the party uses a word that has a double meaning – wordplay was also used in *Drive like Ansip!* and *Kick Out the Minister!*. *Aitab!* can be translated from Estonian to English as *enough!* or *(he/she/it) helps!*. The slogan suggests therefore two possibilities of interpretation: "The Center Party helps!" or "Enough of current politics!". In the beginning of the campaign, advertising expert Marek Reinaas commented the choice of the slogan as follows: "The Center Party has always found rather efficient expressions... and *Enough!* is again a nice find... They must, of course, try to avoid it from backfiring – that it would not be *Enough of the Center Party!*" ("Reinaas").

The procedural rhetoric of the game is controversial, in a way. Object collecting that leads to nowhere is not the rhetoric of failure this time but rather the rhetoric of utter aimlessness. It can even be asked if *Ansip Raises Prices!* is a game after all? Defining play and games is a huge task on its own that number of scholars have still undertaken. For Gonzalo Frasca, one of the most important characteristics of *game* is that it "assigns social status to [players] quantified performance" (Frasca 70). *Ansip Raises Prices!* has no tools for measuring player's performance, therefore it also cannot assign social status to anyone. At best, the game could be classified as *mimicry*, where "the play... consist of... becoming an illusory character" and "the pleasure lies in being of passing for another" (Caillois 19-20).

From the perspective of tension, replayability or immersiveness, none of Center Party's web games has been particularly good. From that aspect, *Ansip Raises Prices!*, could be seen as a "new low" to beat, but despite of being a really dull game to play, it has still quite clever procedural rhetoric. The game may seem goalless, but it's one and only goal is to make the player realize the pointlessness of collecting the items i.e. "raising the prices" and turn to the Center Party for help. Pressing the red *Enough* button ends the game, therefore the message in the game's procedural layer could be formulated as: "Only voting for the Center Party stops Andrus Ansip's endless price increase".

5. CONCLUSIONS

Estonian Center Party's web games are definitely *serious games* as they have been created for another purpose than mere entertainment and they "translate existing political goals in videogame form" (Persuasive Games 57). Based on the interview with Raimond Kaljulaid, the existing political goals of the Center Party were: to get more attention to its candidate, to direct the attention of the voters to the decisions of the Estonian Government and to show that Center Party would have made different decisions (see Appendix A).

Besides that, they are also persuasive (games), because they attempt to influence people's attitudes and behavior. It would not be wrong to classify them as *advergames* that is a subcategory of *serious games* and *election games* that could be seen as a subcategory of *advergames*. From the perspective of *advergames*, Center Party's games are interesting because in most of the cases they do not feature the "product" – the party or its ideas – itself in a game play but use the techniques of negative advertising instead and focus on attacking the party's political opponents, mainly Estonian Reform Party.

Despite the fact that only two games out of four have been launched at the time of official election campaigns, I would still classify all Center Party's web games as *election games*, because of the Center Party's political strategy that is known as *Permanent Campaign* – perpetual head-line grabbing and fight for attention. Definitely, all of these games are *political videogames* – they all have a political message, they all have been used in politicking – in an activity that is directed towards achieving political power. Three games out of four are using procedural rhetoric to form political argument and therefore they should even fit under Ian Bogost's strict definition of *political videogames*.

In certain conditions, the games could even be perceived as *newsgames*, because they address actual pressing issues of domestic policy like price increase, teacher's salaries, cuts in social welfare etc.

All Center Party's games suit for a *casual gamer*: the gameplay of these web games are based either on classic arcade games or non-digital carnival games. Sticking to the familiar, "timeless" genres "enables players to pick up a game in a genre and not have to start learning from scratch" (Davidson).

These simple flash based games can be seen as democratic,³¹ because they can be played on any contemporary computer that is connected to the internet despite its processing power³². The web games do not need latest graphics cards or sound cards to run and the advances in hardware do not enhance the playing experience (maybe only very slow internet connection could damage the experience).

Estonian Center Party's games have simple controls, short play sessions, and they are accessible to players that have minimal knowledge of video game conventions. For the same reason, they probably do not interest players who are looking for an immersive gameplay and challenges: Center Party's games are two-dimensional and their gameplay is not particularly well designed. This can mean unbalanced difficulty levels (*Kick Out the Minister!*) or even a game that is missing a goal and means to measure player's advancement (*Ansip Raises Prices!*).

The tradition of election games in Estonia started at the same time than in United States of America: Estonian Center Party's *The Ant Game* was launched in the beginning of 2004 and Ian Bogost's and Gonzalo Frasca's *The Howard Dean for Iowa Game* in December of 2003. While *The Howard Dean Game* was created by professionals, *The Ant Game* was an "indie project" (Appendix A-5) that was presented and received as a prank of Center Party's

³¹ Democratic – favouring or characterized by social equality; egalitarian ("Democratic").

³² According to Internet World Stats usage statistics, there were 969,700 Internet users in Estonia as of June 2010 that makes 75.1% of the population ("Estonia Internet Usage").

youth organization. Because of the temporal coincidence, I do not believe that the first Center Party's game would have been influenced by U.S. election games; rather it is a continuation of the earlier tradition of independent political amateur web games on a new level. Independent Estonian web games with political messages that have been created by anonymous enthusiasts, are circling in Internet at least since the year 2000. However, there is very little information about election games in other countries beside U.S and Estonia and the existence and practices concerning these games are something that needs to be researched further.

In my opinion, the effect of Center Party's web games on the tradition of political video games in Estonia has been positive – the media attention that their games received have definitely familiarized Estonians with the concept of political video games and election games. In Parliamentary Elections of 2011, Estonian Reform Party's candidate Jaanus Rahumägi attempted to use web game as a carrier of his campaign message (although without much success). The scene of independent political web games in Estonia seems to be active as well. While all Estonian political web games that I have encountered have had very simplistic gameplay and have been technologically very limited then recent web games from *Imepilt* have brought unprecedented artistic quality to the scene.

While political web games often receive at least some kind of media attention in Estonia, the interest of the media and the players is not guaranteed. Much depends on the innovativeness and the message of the game but even more may depend on marketing – in my opinion, it was probably insufficient marketing that let Center Party's last web game *Ansip Raises Prices!* to fall completely under the radar.

The influence of persuasive games on players is impossible to measure without studying the players themselves. My research did not focus on players this time, but on games – more precisely – on representative and procedural persuasive components of video games. I used Estonian Center Party's four web games as a test subject in order to analyze the types of

persuasive messages that video games as cultural artifacts and media are able to transmit. I was also interested in finding out, what kind of messages can be contained on video games' procedural *core* layer and representative *shell* layer and how they function – together and separately.

In his PhD Dissertation *Play the Message*, Gonzalo Frasca points out, that video game researchers tend to pay more attention to the rhetorical potential of game rules than of the games' *playword* aka representative *shell*. In his opinion, there may be several reasons for this like the "system-centric view that the playworld is an afterthought, something that gets laid over the game mechanics and that can be easily replaced with something else" or the fact that game designers may be more interested in experimenting with rules than graphics. The reason, why rules seem to be favored over representation may also lie here:

The rhetorical characteristics of the playworld are similar to the ones of audiovisual works because they share images, sounds and texts. Because researchers are already familiar with this form of rhetoric, it may be less appealing to them to analyze it. The rule component of games presents an uncharted rhetorical territory that is more attractive for scholars (Frasca 94).

I would like to argue, that rhetorical characteristics of the playworld may *look* similar to other work that has images, sounds and/or texts at the first glance but they behave differently and form different kind of arguments than in other media. The example could be the case of the *speech balloons* in *Drive like Ansip!* and onomatopoetic word *Bang!* in *Kick Out the Minister!*.

Speech balloons are a graphic convention that are known for centuries but nowadays are mostly associated with comic books. In comic books, speech balloons are integrating

words with picture, forwarding the reader the words or thoughts of the character or explaining, what happens in the picture. In *Drive like Ansip!*, speech balloon is just a decorative afterthought, the real integration and explanation happens in another place (on separate screen). The case of *Bang!* in *Kick Out the Minister!* is even more obvious – the video game medium can make use of real sounds and does not need to use onomatopoeic words in written form in order to express a sound. Therefore, even if certain elements in those two web games looked very similar to the features of other media, in games, they did not fill their original purpose but were carrying out a completely different task – making the games *appear* as if they were something else, namely the comic books.

It also became clear, in my opinion, that it is very hard, if not impossible, for procedural rhetoric to form arguments without the help of the signs from game's shell layer. Procedural rhetoric simulates actions but the *meaning* and *value* of these actions are mostly mediated to the player by representative means – without the text and controversial signs in *Drive like Ansip!*, the player would not receive a procedural argument that Andrus Ansip's politics is doomed to fail because of his *wrong* decisions.

When comparing procedural and representative arguments then the advantage of game's representative layer or its *content*, seems to be that it can start persuading the player *before* he starts playing the game. The players of pro-Arab shooters *Under Ash*, *Under Siege* and *Special Force* would probably have not bought these games if it would have depicted players as American or Israeli soldiers fighting Arabs. Because of the important message in the representative layer, these games become popular even if they were not very technologically advanced.

The other interesting thing is that both, game's core and shell level, seem to be able to form very clever persuasive messages, but while all different parts of game's representative layer – visual, textual, and aural – have their own unique ways of persuading the player and

they are able to insert multiple persuasive messages even to those short and simple web games that were studied in this thesis, then procedural rhetoric seems to be able to form only one or two messages within a web game.

However, as in all Center Party's games that used procedural rhetoric for forming political arguments, the messages that were expressed by procedural rhetoric could be considered the *main* messages of the games, it is very much possible, that this single procedural message was also the most persuasive one in the whole game. Definitely, the persuasive power of simulation cannot be underestimated as well.

One other reason, why I think that video game's representative layer is not so similar to other audiovisual works and is worth of attention and study is that on many occasions, game's representative layer and procedural layer seem to be working together in order to form the persuasive message. This is something that cannot be found from other media. In *Kick Out the Minister!*, the characters of the game were objectified with the help of sound, image and text and utterly dehumanized by the gameplay rhetoric that did not allow reciprocal interaction with the characters – together, game's two layers formed far more powerful message than they could have done separately.

My conclusion is that video games have a lot of rhetorical potential but their persuasiveness depends on how this potential is applied. I agree with Gonzalo Frasca's opinion that "if campaign videogames some day become a common genre, it is likely that they may require a far more complex gameplay" (Frasca 111). As more and more people play videogames³³, increased amount of people probably develop certain expectations towards the medium. Therefore, bad level design, mediocre graphics and other indicators that imply that the game is not competitive compared to commercial games most likely obstructs the players from receiving the message and being persuaded in the desired way.

³³ According to the last years data from EAS (Entertainment Software Association) the average game player in U.S. is 37 years old and has been playing games for 12 years. Besides that, videogames are being played also by 29 percent of Americans over the age of 50 ("Industry Facts").

There are subjects that did not fit within the framework of this thesis. One subject that was left out completely but seems to be almost untouched by scholars and should definitely be studied is the *ethics* of persuasion through video games.

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APPENDIX A: E-MAIL INTERVIEWS³⁴

From: Ave Randviir <ave.randviir@mail.ee>

Sent: 17 November 2010. 18:09

To: Mart Viisitamm <mart@keskerakond.ee>

Subject: Magistritöö Jyväskylä Ülikoolis

The first [Center Party's web game] was your campaign ad for the 2004 European Parliament elections [in Estonia]. Could you tell me how the so-called "ant game" was developed?

Re: 17 November 2010 20:15:57

I am afraid that I am the wrong addressee to these questions. There was a big team behind the Euro-campaign. I personally cannot answer to any of the questions as I was very far away from all the details. Best I can do is try to remember and ask around who actually were involved with the project. Rather, they were people like Linnar Priimägi, Tarmo Lausing, Raimond Kaljulaid, Simmo Saar etc.

Sent: 24 November 2010. 1:27

You [...] were not involved with the making of the "ant game" [...] but have you seen the game, played it, and if the answer to that is yes, what is your general opinion of it [...]?

Re: 25 November 2010 19:36:41

³⁴ All interviews are translated from Estonian to English. Original e-mails are held by the author of the master's thesis.

I saw the game after it was publicly released to the Internet for everyone to play and press-release had been sent to the media. I do not approve this game and probably it would have been best to remove it from the Internet immediately. That kind of violence and using a face [in a game] that resembles [another] politician does not suit me at all. However, there have also been interesting and fun political games that are fun to play. Definitely, there could be more games like these in the future.

From: Ave Randviir <Facebook>

Sent: 24 November 2010. 1:42

To: Raimond Kaljulaid <Facebook>

Subject: Magistritöö Jyväskylä Ülikoolis

I contacted Mart Viisitamm, a protagonist of a first web game, who [...] recommended speaking to you about the game. I am interested in various questions, for example: how the decision to advertize a campaign in [a game] form came to be? How long was the time period from the [game] idea to the production? Who were the designers of the game? How did the commissioners and designers cooperate? Who did you see as a target of the game? How did you distribute [the game]? What was the feedback to the game? Etc.

From: Raimond Kaljulaid <raimond@prb.ee>

Sent: 10 December 2010. 13:26

To: Ave Randviir <averandviir@gmail.com>

Subject: Vastused

Hello Ave!

I will try first to answer about all e-campaigns in general and then reply to your more specific questions. When talking about these campaigns, it is crucial to understand that [games] *Drive like Ansip* and *Kick out the Minister* were both part of the entire Center Party's official campaign, but Mart Viisitamm's personal campaign were a campaign of an individual.

How the decision to advertize a campaign in [a game] form came to be?

In Viisitamm's campaign, it was not related to the central idea of the campaign – as much as we had one at all. We knew from the beginning that there is no real chance for Mart Viisitamm to become a member of European Parliament. As he was, so to say, Center Party's Youth Council's candidate, people came up with youthful and sometimes funny ideas that would get more attention to him. That is exactly what this game achieved and nothing more was expected from it. Media attention was remarkable.

It was a whole different story with the two following campaigns that are much richer in content.

It needs to be understood that the campaign of one of the biggest party in Estonia must form an integrated whole and its separate parts cannot be designed independently of general principles and views that the party represents in the campaign.

Therefore, the logical process of planning a campaign is gradual: firstly the situation is analyzed; then, the general principles, key-messages and courses of action are decided, and only after that it is possible to think about specific media channels and creative solutions.

The campaigns of the leading parties generally use all available media-channels – television, radio advertizing, print advertizing, street advertizing, direct mail etc. etc. The role of internet media and also social media in the internet is becoming increasingly important. In the realm of internet, Center Party has been a remarkably active customer, demanding innovative and high quality solutions. The Chairman of Center Party, Edgar Savisaar, was the

first top politician in Estonia who opened his blog in the internet, being the Minister of Economy at the time.

At the same time, it is very important to understand that internet is just one possible instrument for forwarding the message and the content of the creative task will be finding out how to forward campaign's messages in the specific medium, or more precisely – through the medium.

If discussion starts from a specific idea (someone comes up with the thought, that it would be fun to produce a game, for example), and then the reasons for executing the idea will be searched for, you have started from the wrong end.

At the time of the local elections and European Parliament elections in 2009, the general domestic situation was definitely of great importance – as everywhere else in Europe, the problems caused by financial crisis and different political decisions were carried over to the campaigns of European Parliament elections, even if the results of these elections do not have a direct and immediate influence on the domestic politics.

However, the election results have a remarkable symbolic influence on the positions of the parties and they are changing the internal politics even if the real election results (the people who will later represent Estonia in Brussels) are not incurring these changes directly.

The purpose of the game *Drive like Ansip* was to direct the attention to the decisions of Prime Minister Andrus Ansip's government (Center Party is in the opposition to it) like rising the gasoline tax, cutting family allowances etc.

The *Kick out the Minister* campaign, where it was possible to "give a shoe" (means also "to fire" in Estonian) to the government ministers for particular decisions had actually the same purpose.

Additionally, its purpose was to show that Center Party would have made different decisions in the same situation – to stand out amongst the competitors.

Whilst the form is entertaining, the content is unequivocally related to the values that parties are representing and to the decisions they are making.

How fast did you arrive from the initial game idea to its realization?

I do not remember, how long did it take with Viisitamm's campaign, but I believe that it was a relatively simple thing as was created with couple of days.

Drive like Ansip and *Kick out the Minister* projects are more elaborate and their preparation demanded more time.

However, the golden rule is that [the project] that you would be preparing for couple of months for the private-sector customer needs to be ready with few weeks for the political campaign. Political campaigns are very dynamic and intensive.

Who were the designers of the game? How did the commissioners and game creators cooperate?

For Viisitamm's campaign we used a young designer. As it was more like an indie-project, there was nothing very formal about it.

Drive like Ansip and *Kick out the Minister* are technically produced by the internet marketing agency that was called *Nitro* at the time. *Nitro* was a joint enterprise of the owners of *Idea* advertising company and Finnish *Nitro*. Erstwhile, it belonged to the *Euro RSCG* communication agencies group in Estonia.

Additionally, the advertising company *Idea* who was Center Party's agency at the time and *Media Contacts* (also part of *Euro RSCG* group) [who acted] as a mediator for internet advertising were related to the campaigns; as well as the whole campaign team, including the leaders of the campaign, who are responsible of homogeneity of the messages, timing etc.

The games were produced by *Nitro*'s designers and programmers.

Cooperation between and the agency and a client works as it always does.

Who was the target audience of the game?

The target audience of the game was all internet users in Estonia. As the internet usage in Estonia is quite high, the large part of voters is using the internet.

How did you distribute the game?

Estonian media, who wrote much about *Drive like Ansip* game in particular, did a good job. In addition to that, we supported the campaigns like *Drive like Ansip* and *Kick out the Minister* with internet advertising. If I remember it correctly, there were no bought advertising at all in Viisitamm's campaign. It distributed itself. A lot was written about it too, in online-media.

What kind of feedback did you receive to the game?

All these campaigns have been remarkably successful. Game *Drive like Ansip* were played by over hundred thousand people (if I remember it correctly), minister's game was played by tens of thousands of people.

Although there were also people who criticized our endeavors, the necessary message was actually forwarded to necessary people.

I remember that Viisitamm's game was played by many as well.

How to evaluate the results?

The Chairman of Reform Party, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, promised that Reform Party will win the European Parliament elections and will get three seats in the parliament. In

reality their results were poor and they won only one seat. It was very far from being a victory.

Additionally, Ansip promised that Reform Party will rise to power in Tallinn after local elections, but that did not work out as well: they lost to the Center Party and remained in opposition.

Before the elections, the Center Party was represented with one seat in European Parliament, but has now two ambassadors. The third mandate fell short by just a few votes.

It was not considered possible that the Center Party could get an absolute majority in the city council once again. The right-wing parties even changed the election law, to give them certain advantages, in order to prevent that. Even this practice of uncertain ethics did not bring results; the Center Party had so much support in Tallinn that they could have formed the city government alone.

Of course, all this is not caused by the internet campaigns alone, but it shows that the messages of the party and the way they were communicated were the right ones and found the support of the voters.

APPENDIX B: PUBLICATIONS OF THE CENTER PARTY

Lugejakiri: **Sõda Res Publicale**

Kui Res Publica avas oma europarlamenti valimiskampaania kuulutusega, et nende peamiseks vastaseks on Keskerakond, siis teadsid asjaosalised väga hästi, mille alusel nad seda teevad. Nende sõjakuulutust on kuuldud. Nad tahtsid sõda ja nad saavad selle! Mina jään rahva poolele.

Respublikaanliku fraseoloogia taha varjub suutmatus vastata kõige lihtsamale küsimusele: kelle leiba hakkab Eesti inimene Euroopa Liidus sööma? Mina tahan europarlamentis ajada vaid sellist poliitikat, et Eesti inimesel jätkuks pärast 1. maid 2004 laual omaenda leiba, et eestlane võiks tulevikuski uhkusega ära elada omaenda käte ja vaimu jõust. Et jätkuks mõttekat ja tasuvat tööd just nimelt siin, Eestis. Et inimesed ei oleks sunnitud suunduma võõrsile, sööma võõralt laualt.

Respublikaanlike fraasidega varjatud salaplaan tuleb valguse kätte tuua. Kujundlikult osutab nende ideoloogiast lähtuvale ohule minu sõprade väljamõeldud vaimukas internetimäng, kus huvilised võivad tõrjuda Res Publica euro-esinumbri näoga putukate, rahvapõlgliku ideoloogia kehastuste pealetungi.

Mis puutub laikudesse, mis mängus pihtasaanud putukatest maha jäävad, siis nendele, kes arvavad, et see on veri, võiks meenutada: putukatel ei olegi vereringet! Putukatest mahajääv ollus on sama ebamäärane nagu respublikaanide arusaam Eesti rahva tulevikust.

Mart Viisitamm (Keskerakond)

Viisitamm, Mart. "Sõda Res Publicale". *Postimees*, 19 May 2004. Print.

*Letter from a reader: **War to Res Publica***

When Res Publica opened its European Parliament election campaign with an announcement that their main opponent is the Centre Party, the involved parties knew very well, what it means. Their declaration of war was heard. They wanted a war and they will get it! I will stay on the side of the people.

Behind Res Publican phraseology hides a failure to answer the simplest question: whose bread will Estonian people eat in the European Union? I want to pursue such a policy in the European Parliament, that after 1 May 2004, Estonian people have enough of their own bread on the table; that also in the future, Estonians could support themselves proudly with their own hands and spiritual power. That there would be meaningful and worthwhile work, precisely here, in Estonia. That people would not be forced to go abroad, to eat from a table of a stranger.

The secret plot that is disguised with Res Publican phrases must have been brought into light. A witty online-game was devised by my friends which refers, metaphorically, to the dangers of their ideology – in the game, people can fend off the attack of bugs with the faces of Res Publica's number one candidate, the onslaught of the embodiments of people-despising ideology.

As for spots, which are left behind by hit insects, then those who think that it is blood should remember: insects do not have a blood circulation! The substance that remains of the insects is as indeterminate as Res Publicans understanding of Estonian nation's future.

Mart Viisitamm (Centre Party)

Tere!

Ehk mäletad veel üht mängu nimega "Juhi nagu Ansip!" kus peaministri rollis olles said Eestit juhtida ja õiglaseid plusspunkte koguda. Päris-Ansipi juhtimine pole vahepeal kahjuks paranemismärke näidanud. Sinul on aga võimalus oma oskused taas proovile panna. Seekord kodanikuna, kelle käes Eesti riigis on teatavasti kõrgeim võim.

Mängus "Anna ministrile kinga!" on Sinul võimalus virtuaalselt seada õiglus jalule ning karistada Eestit ühiskonda lõhestavaid valitsuse ministreid andes neile päevapealt kinga. Mängi mängu ja proovi kui tugev oled. Muide, sellele valitsusele "kinga anda" ei saagi keegi teine kui Sina. Valimistel jalgadega ehk siis jällegi kingadega hääletades.

Mängu mängimiseks mine aadressile www.keskerakond.ee/annakinga/est/

Parimate soovidega,

Eesti Keskerakond

"Keskerakond spämmib". *Anna tulla!* 17 March 2009. Web. 9 April 2012.

Hello!

You might remember a game named Drive like Ansip! where you could lead Estonia in a role of Prime Minister and gather fair plus points. Unfortunately, real Ansip's leadership has not shown signs of improvement. You, however, have an opportunity to test your skills once again. This time as a citizen who, as we know, has an ultimate authority in the state of Estonia.

In the game Kick out the Minister! you have the possibility to set things right virtually and punish the government ministers who rupture Estonian society by firing them on the spot. Play the game and try out how good you are. By the way, no one else but you has the power to "kick out" this government: by voting with feet, or shoes, at the elections.

To play the game, go to www.keskerakond.ee/annakinga/est/

Best regards,

Estonian Centre Party

Toobal: Tahad Ansipi valitsusele kinga anda? Nüüd on see võimalik!

Keskerakonna pressiteade

16.3.2009

Alates tänasest on internetiaadressil <http://www.keskerakond.ee/annakinga/est/> üleval lõbus satiiriline poliitmäng valitsustsirkusest. Tegemist on jätkuga siiani internetis üleval olevale virtuaalsele meeleavaldusele www.protest2009.eu.

"Soovime seekordse kampaaniaga juhtida tähelepanu lihtsale tõsiasjale, et Eestis on kõrgeima võimu kandjaks rahvas. Praeguse valitsuse ja selle ministrite tegematajätmist tõttu kannatab iga Eesti pere, iga Eesti inimene. Keskerakond soovib inimestele meelde tuletada, et nad ei pea olukorraga leppima," teatas erakonna peasekretär Priit Toobal.

"Läbikukkunud valitsuse ning sellesse kuuluvate poliitikute edasine saatus sõltub sellest, millise hinnangu annavad neile ning nende erakondadele valijad. Ministriile "kinga anda" võib igäiks," lisas Toobal. "Riigis ei muutu enne midagi paremaks, kui Eesti läbi aegade kõige suurema majanduskriisini viinud Ansipi valitsus ametist tagasi astub."

Endiselt on võimalik <http://juhinaguansip.eu/> aadressil mängida ka ülipopulaarseks osutunud internetimängu "Juhi Nagu Ansip", mille kaudu üle 100 000 inimese Ansipi valitsuse tegevusetuse vastu meelt avaldanud on.

Lugupidamisega,

Tanel Kiik

Keskerakonna infospetsialist

"Toobal: Tahad Ansipi valitsusele kinga anda? Nüüd on see võimalik!". *E24.ee – firmateated.*

16 March 2009 Web. 9 April 2012.

Toobal: Want to kick out Ansip's government? Now you can!

Center Party's press release

16.3.2009

As of today, there is a fun satirical political game about the governmental circus on the web page <http://www.keskerakond.ee/annakinga/est/>. This is a follow-up to the virtual protest www.protest2009.eu, that is still available in the Internet.

"This time we want the campaign to draw attention to the simple fact that nation is the highest authority in Estonia. The inaction of the current government and its ministers is hurting every Estonian family, every person in Estonia. Center Party wants to remind people that they do not have to accept this situation," said the party's Secretary General Priit Toobal.

"The fate of the failed government and its politicians depends on the assessment of the voters. Everyone can "kick out" the minister", added Toobal. "Nothing in the country will change for the better until Ansip's government that has brought Estonia to the time high economic crisis will resign."

On the site <http://juhinaguansip.eu/> it is still possible to play online game that proved hugely popular, Drive like Ansip, through which over 100,000 people have protested against Ansip's government's inactivity.

Sincerely,

Tanel Kiik

The Centre Party Information Specialist