

# Musicking in the cybermedia: digital games as musical venues

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## Abstract

What is the space devoted to music in contemporary digital games? This paper will explore the nature of digital games as venues for musical encounter, focusing on music and non-music games alike. Music forms an integral part of game engagement, with extensive compositions or sparse musical fragments being deployed in game environments through multiple modalities. While forms of *mise-en-scène* compatible with the filmic tradition remain, dynamic or generative musical systems are often used, determining different sonic juxtaposition for different play sessions. Digital games are objects capable of reconfiguring during use (Aarseth & Calleja 2015), and musical content is also involved in this process.

In this sense, playing with digital games involves experiencing music in an active fashion, with significant musical participation. This paper frames musicking with digital games as ergodic musicking (Oliva 2019, Oliva & Poutiainen 2022), reimagining Christopher Small's concept of musicking (1998) within the context of cybermedia. Ergodic musicking is understood as "a modern form of musicking, capable of deconstructing established musical roles such as composing, improvising, or dancing. Ergodic musicking, however, is not just a mixture of previous forms: it is instead a unique musicking" (Oliva 2019, II).

Musicking with digital games is considered as a non-totalizing activity that accompanies ludic engagement. Ergodic musicking is in that sense not "aesthetically autonomous" (Adorno 1977, 39): as prominently noted, "musical things are not always strictly musical" (Blacking 1973, 25), a consideration that will be applied to digital games.

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