BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Video Games as a Common Ground conference

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University of Zadar

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Video Games as a Common Ground is organized by the Department of English and the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the University of Zadar (https://www.unizd.hr/).

About

In the simplest terms, a video game is an interactive electronic game with a user interface that provides visual feedback. The phenomenon of video games, however, is anything but simple. Their commercial, if limited, availability in the 1970s and 1980s foreshadowed the popularity that has unfolded at the beginning of the 21st century in an ever-growing variety of genres and stories, game mechanics, visual and artistic styles, hardware capacities, and sensory possibilities. Moreover, they are now consumed en masse around the world and are easily accessible through everyday devices such as cell phones, tablets, as well as gaming consoles and computers. With this diversification and expansion, video games have become a common ground for scholars in social sciences, humanities, and a number of other disciplines and fields of research who are exploring a wide range of topics and social and cultural issues, from game narratives and storytelling practices, economic behavior of players, gaming cultures, social relations, health effects of gaming, educational possibilities of video games, to the politics of gaming, the virtual world, as well as countless other themes.

By engaging all forms of video game research, Video Games as a Common Ground aims to address various topics, issues, and challenges related to video games and gaming in order to understand not only their impact, but also their potential. The conference aims at a cross-disciplinary dialogue that will hopefully lead to new experiences and the expansion of the academic discourse relating to this subject, together with possible (unexpected) future collaborations.

Welcome!

Abela Carmel Anne

Nagoya University, Japan

THE MYTHIC EXPERIENCE: AN AUDIO-VISUAL SPECTACLE OF THE BIWA HŌSHI NARRATIVE AND PERFORMANCE IN GHOST OF TSUSHIMA

Ghost of Tsushima (2020) is a historical video game set during the events of the 1274 Mongol invasion of Japan that reimagines a 13th-century medieval Japanese society. While it is rich with cultural representations that the player can engage with throughout the game, it is through the side quests that it provides a deeper understanding of its historical and socio-cultural environment. According to historical video game scholars Chapman (2012, 2016), Balela and Mundy (2011), and McCall (2019), a video game's form, affordance, and agency can tell us how a player is instructed to play with the reimagined past or what about the past is deemed important. In this presentation, I will focus on the side quest category called the "Mythic Tales", wherein the narratives found here are folkloric and supernatural in nature, with themes of legends and lore surrounding the island of Tsushima. In particular, I will explore the representations of the in-game version of a Japanese traditional performance art, the heikyoku (medieval musical performance), through the medieval storytelling performer known as the biwa hōshi. This includes an analysis of the role of the biwa hōshi and this new mode of experiencing a traditional performance art that relies on familiar Japanese visual imagery (incorporation of folkloric or supernatural entities); sounds; and use of other traditional arts such as sumi-e (Japanese ink painting) and ukiyo-e (woodblock print), through its special audio-visual spectacle only found in this part of the game. I will also examine the kind of narrative that serves as in-game myths through a case study of one of the mythic tales, "The Curse of Uchitsune".

Aksay Kübra

University of Freiburg, Germany

"DEAR DIARY…": JOURNALS, BOOKS, AND ANALOG RECORDS IN VIDEO GAMES

Virtual books and journals are some of the most commonly found representations of interactable objects in video games. A journal in a video game often serves the purpose of reminding the player of their tasks and the portion of the story they have seen until a particular point.

Therefore, it can be argued that the journal can function as both a mechanic and a narrative device in games. Moreover, some recent video games, especially from text-heavy genres such as walking simulators or detective games, make use of journals, notebooks, and books to a greater degree, either as a narrative device, gameplay element, or both. For instance, in the 2017 title *What Remains of Edith Finch*, the player goes through several short stories which are all contained within the pages of the player character's diary, a central artifact in the game. In *Return of the Obra Dinn* (2018), the investigator's notebook is, similarly, an essential part of the game, and the player is tasked with filling out its empty pages, as they gain access to more information about the game's story. In *Moss* (2018), a virtual reality game, the player takes the role of a "reader" who is flipping through the pages of the book where the game's story takes place.

It is interesting to observe that video games, as digital products, make use of analog methods of recording and presenting information to such a significant extent. In this talk, I will take a closer look

into how video games, especially contemporary ones, employ journals and books to integrate the actions of reading and writing into their virtual spaces. I will discuss different uses of journals and books in video games, as well as possible ways they can influence the players' involvement with the characters and stories.

Apperley Thomas
Tampere University, Finland

NERDCORE PORNOGRAPHY: NOSTALGIA AND THE DOMESTICATION OF MISOGYNY IN GAMING CULTURES

The great majority of the existing work that examines the intersections between digital games and pornography focuses on discussing the objectified portrayal of women in AAA videogames (e.g. Phillips 2020) or less commonly pornographic videogames (e.g. Payne & Alilunas 2016; Pelletier-Gagnon, J. & Picard 2015). However, work has also emerged that marks the parallels between the two due to the embodied and affective ways they are experienced (Phillips 2020; Sundén 2012). This paper examines how themes related to affect and embodiment emerge in curated collections of "nerdcore" pornography by examining an original corpus of 74 nerdcore porn images from the first post on nerdcore from July 2006 on www.destructoid.com. The nerdcore moniker was developed and applied by the destructoid online community to describe a genre of photography that portrays women with digital game technology in the style of glamour or softcore porn photography. Nerdcore porn demonstrates a peculiar ordinariness. As an everyday and habitual technology and activity, it seems unsurprising that digital games have become intertwined with sexualized social relations. But the collection offers a synopsis of how these social relations are reworked into a masculine heterosexual fantasy. The original images have been compiled from many different sources, and they include images originally developed for promotions and advertising, intimate personal images, glamour photography, and subcultural pornography. The visual analysis of the collected photographs suggests that their collation and distribution as a group marked out key affective themes within the heteronormative male gaming subcultures for whom they are curated and who are already cued to interpret this diverse material in particular ways. The two key visual themes of the collection are domesticity and nostalgia, which offers insight into how dominant heterosexual masculinity identities, and misogynist attitudes and behaviors, associated with mainstream gaming cultures are cultivated and normalized through the circulation of images.

Augustinčić Tomislav

Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, University of Zadar, Croatia

WHY WAS I DRESSED AS A RENAIGSE? AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC NEGOTIATIONS OF VIDEO GAME DRAMATURGY, DISCOURSE & AFFECTIVE BONDS

The paper offers an autoethnographic interrogation of researcher/player experience in/of the video game *Greedfall* (2019), a single-player action role-playing game (RPG), developed by Spider Studios and published by Focus Home Interactive, whose story and setting take inspiration and offer a commentary on early European colonialism.

On the one hand, the paper aims to show how the game's designers, through the game's story design and the usage of narrative techniques, as well as gameplay mechanics (world and enemy encounter design, combat and crafting system) and NPC models and assets, played on and subverted both historical and contemporary Eurocentric discursive tropes and RPG clichés while at the same time designing, dramatizing and (re)producing the Other by reinforcing cultural difference (cf. Appadurai 1988). On the other hand, the paper aims to show personal affective and interpretative processes and negotiations in player choices (through multiple playthroughs) inflected by the game's dramatic structure.

The paper wishes to contribute to the discussion and understanding of contemporary video games by arguing and showing that: game stories and narratives should be approached from a dramaturgic point-of-view and not just its sujet; when analysing game narratives, researchers should take into account various elements such as environment design, game mechanics, assets use, etc.; finally, stemming from the key feature of player agency, methodological approaches that focus of the particular (cf. Abu-Lughod 1995) and subjectivity (cf. Ortner 2005) offer unique insights.

Bacalja Alexander / Nash Brady L.

The University of Melbourne, Australia / Miami University, USA

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF PLAY IN THE DIGITAL GAME ENGLISH CLASSROOM

The ubiquitous presence of digital games in contemporary culture has extended to the sites and practices of formal schooling. It is now increasingly common for teachers to incorporate these digital technologies into the curriculum for the purposes of engagement and learning.

The subject known as L1 English has a long history of working with print-based media. Yet, over the past two decades, research shows teachers and researchers of English bringing digital games into classrooms for both play and study (Bacalja, 2022; Nash & Brady, 2021). This research has highlighted the connections between gaming and literacy education (Gee, 2003), particularly as the boundaries of English as a discipline expand to match the ubiquity of multimodal and digital texts in the world today (Skerrett & Warrington, 2018). The inclusion of digital games into these contexts raises questions and challenges regarding how to navigate classroom activities that mix disciplinary ways of teaching with new media.

This paper explores the characteristics of the body of research literature on digital games in English classrooms, focusing in particular on the playful literacies that emerge when digital games are met

with pedagogical imperatives. From the 32 papers that met our inclusion/exclusion criteria, we identified six types of play, including: solo play, socially mediated play, turn-taking play, multiplayer play, play as design, and no play. Through the analysis of the characteristics of each type of play, we demonstrate how playful literacies in these studies are a product of socio-material entanglements that arise when teachers' beliefs about the nature of digital games and what they have to offer the English classroom fuse with the affordances of different games and the dispositions of learners. Our discussion explores how the use of digital games in these contexts has the effect of increasing social activity, encouraging a wide range of playfulness, but also disrupting established hierarchies regarding who is empowered to participate in knowledge creation.

Berchild Chris
Department of Theater, Indiana State University, USA

VIDEO GAMES AND THEIR PLACE IN LIVE THEATRICAL PEDAGOGY

As the desire to bring real-time interactive technologies into the live theatre sector has flourished, especially during the most challenging years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the integration of video games and video game engines into live production processes has developed as well. This has not only aided in creating areas for experimentation best termed as "video game theatre," where audiences experience a more immersive and interactive spectacle, but it has also profoundly expanded and altered the fundamental processes of live theatrical process, from dramaturgy, to direction, to design. But how do we teach today's students—and tomorrow's theatre artists—to think beyond the fundamentals of Aristotle and Brecht, and consider their Xbox and PlayStation consoles as tremendous sites for dramatic inspiration?

This paper looks to examine the use of video games and game engine technology (specifically UE5 and Unity) in Live Theatre from a pedagogical point-of-view. What space does spatial and virtual experimentation have in modern theatrical education? What additional training—both technical and conceptual—does working with video games in the theatrical classroom demand? I intend to discuss the areas for integration of video games into a traditional theatrical undergraduate and graduate education, using my own courses as case studies for the integration of video game structure and theory into the fundamental dramaturgy that underlies most contemporary theatrical pedagogy.

Beginning with critical playthroughs of first-person shooters in a Play Analysis course, the fundamentals of video games (and the engines that create them) can be woven throughout a theatrical education—whether the student identifies as an actor, a director, a designer, or a playwright. I will briefly examine the role of video game theory or technology in each of these contexts, in order to suggest an overall approach to teaching video game theatre as a unique immersive and interactive art form.

Binns Alastair

University of Kent, UK

"YOU DON'T PLAY, YOU ENLIST": BALANCING HISTORY AND ENTERTAINMENT IN VIDEO GAMES

This paper explores the delicate balance between historical accuracy and enjoyable gameplay in video games, with a particular focus on the competing interests of the game's creators and consumers. The video game industry is unquestionably the largest and most profitable entertainment industry in the world, and historical subjects are frequently portrayed by games as different as the *Call of Duty* shooter franchise, the *Red Dead Redemption* role-playing games, and the *Civilisation* strategy series. One of the primary appeals of this sub-genre is the devotion to historical detail undertaken by most of these titles, and a love for history combined with a passion for video games has spawned many independent developers to create their own historical titles, including *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* and *Hell Let Loose*. However, these games must tread a fine line between historical detail and player enjoyment, and the creators of these games are employing a variety of devices to achieve this. In this paper, I shall discuss the critically praised *Red Dead Redemption 2*, which received substantial criticism from its players for being too detailed to be an enjoyable game, and how its reception by both media and academia compares with the experience of other historical games attempting to balance the conflicting demands of historical accuracy and player enjoyment, chiefly the *Assassin's Creed* series with its use of educational "Discovery Tours" partitioned from the main gameplay experience, and *Troy: A Total War Saga*, which was updated to include game modes with varying degrees of historical and mythological focus.

Bollmer Grant

North Carolina State University, USA

TERRIBLE GAMES: AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT AND THE LIMITS OF GAME STUDIES

What would it mean to foreground aesthetic failure in how we understand games? This presentation uses examples of "bad" games—games which "fail" for one reason or another, intentionally or not, through excessive difficulty, through clunky controls, through game breaking bugs, through dull or boring gameplay, through silly or hackneyed narratives—to reconceptualize and rethink norms of aesthetic judgement at the heart of both game fandom and game studies. Many, if not all, of the key theoretical concepts of game studies, this talk argues, rely on assumed and veiled judgements of quality. There are numerous reasons for this—the desire to validate games as a form of "art" with an institutional and aesthetic legitimacy, where games are juxtaposed with cinema as an ideal popular "art," for one, along with deeply questionable arguments, both academic and popular, intended to define and differentiate a "game" from something else. In working to define what a game "is" and what a game "does," almost all popular and academic claims depend on ideals that presume an ideal kind of game or gameplay—ideals which, implicitly, presume hierarchies of value foundational for the entire field of game studies and game fandom. In foregrounding failure, this presentation seeks to move away from various assumptions of game studies—that games are "fun," or at least should be; that it is desirable for games to be "persuasive;" that games can cultivate "empathy;" that "play" and "interactivity" are desirable; that games should be "immersive." Instead, it asks, what might it mean to celebrate the boring? The glitchy and "broken"? This presentation seeks to describe why, with few

notable exceptions, a general celebration of the "bad" is lacking in game culture, and what this celebration of terrible games might do in how we understand games and their social significance.

Burlacu Mihai
Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania

GAMEWORLDS AS JUXTAPOSITIONS SIGNIFICANCE: FALLOUT 4 AND CYBERPUNK 2077 IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL MIRRORS

This paper contains an excursus regarding the experiences loaded with juxtaposed significances from video games such as *Fallout 4* or *Cyberpunk 2077*. From a theoretical standpoint, I am drawing upon the hermeneutical phenomenology and the corpus of knowledge based on Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" and his "heterotopology". Methodologically speaking, I predicate my arguments on my research developed in various digital contexts within role-playing games such as *Fallout 4* and *Cyberpunk 2077*. I use the six principles from Foucault's "heterotopology" in order to ascertain a typology of virtual heterotopias present in role-playing games such as the aforementioned ones. From a discourse standpoint, the concepts used in my excursus are borrowed from cultural anthropology. I discuss the ways in which some decisions taken by the creators of the two games have a considerable impact on gamers' experience. Based on the types of virtual heterotopias identified, I assert that the virtual heterotopias that I have identified have a nucleus or nexus, which represents the engine of their existence and the source of their otherness. Furthermore, I emphasize several ways in which virtual heterotopias can become emplacements of entrapment, due to their paradoxical "simple openings" that actually conceal "curious exclusions" (Foucault 1967 [2008]: 20). In conclusion, I suggest several recommendations regarding the design and the research of video games from an anthropological standpoint.

Cerqueira Tânia
University of Porto, Portugal

"EVEN'S NIGHTMARE WAS JUST BEGINNING…": LOST IN RANDOM AND THE GOTHIC TRADITION

Lost in Random (2021) is a gothic-fairy-tale-inspired action-adventure video game developed by Zoink, where every citizen's fate is determined by the roll of a cursed black dice. On her twelfth anniversary, Even's sister, Odd, is abducted by the wicked Queen of Random after rolling a six. As Even journeys across the six realms of Random to rescue her sister, she meets Dicey, a sentient dice who has lost nearly all of its pips. In her adventures through the Kingdom of Random to rescue her sister, Odd finds herself in eerie landscapes – from Onecroft and its teapot homes to the dream-like Sixtopia, floating above the clouds – and whimsical characters. This Burtonesque fairy-tale game draws on genres – "milieu" (King and Krzywinska, 2002) – established by other media: one of the prominent milieus is the Gothic. The Gothic is a hybrid mode with an extraordinary capacity to adapt. Thus, common Gothic tropes and motifs have also been incorporated into video games. Looking at digital video games' history, "frequently designers drew on traditions of Gothic fiction, in titles featuring labyrinthine spaces, ghostly adversary, uncanny artefacts and bedevilled heroes" (Kirkland 2021). In *Lost in Random*, the player can perceive Gothic tropes throughout Even's journey – from ghosts and haunted

woods to uncanny monsters. This paper intends to explore the intersections between the Gothic and *Lost in Random* in order to observe how Gothic tropes manifest in this dark fairy-tale, focusing on key themes such as transgression, subversion of power, and liminality. This presentation draws upon scholars of the Gothic that have been intensively working on the field over the last decades and from the reflections in *Videogames and the Gothic* (2021) by Ewan Kirkland.

Couturier Alexane
University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada

TRANSCRIBING ONE'S LIFE THROUGH VIDEO GAMES: A LOOK AT AUTOFICTIONAL AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL VIDEO GAMES

The term "autofiction" is a neologism coined by Serge Dobrovsky in 1977 to describe his new novel: *Fils* (Shelton, 2016). It is neither entirely fictional nor a totally autobiographical work; autofiction (or autobiographical fiction) is "[…] a story in which the author reveals real elements of his/her life, by integrating fiction into them (our translation)" (Ibid., p. 38). It is a hybrid text – a junction between two universes – where real and fictional statements coexist to form a narrative (Bélanger, 2015).

If in literary and cinematographic studies, autofiction constitutes both a notion and a relatively well-established theme and genre, it is quite different in the case of video games. Occasionally present in the current video game landscape, it is understandably not widely studied. Autofictional video games represent an emerging expressive practice – a singular form of autobiographical expression (Genvo, 2012; 2021). Also considered as "author's games" or "expressive games", this particular type of production generally addresses subjects and themes deemed more serious and, by extension, more difficult to "play with" or "to gamify" (e.g., death, chronic illness, etc.) (Sohier, 2018; Poirier-Poulin, 2020).

This communication aims to highlight first, the context and the conditions that have led to the emergence of autobiographical and autofictional video games as a form of expression from a semiopragmatic perspective and second, the challenges and issues arising in terms of game design by presenting concrete examples (*That Dragon*, *Cancer*; *Actual Sunlight*; *Adventures with Anxiety*; etc.). Overall, the presentation aims to question the structure and limits of these video game universes – on the border between reality and fiction.

Eggel Ruth Dorothea
Bonn University, Germany

GAMERS' PLAY-GROUNDS. PRACTICES OF PLAY(ING) AND BEYOND AT VIDEO GAME EVENTS

Video games are celebrated at an increasing number of events, conventions and festivals for video games. These gaming events provide locally situated spaces for thousands of gamers to gather regularly and meet their otherwise digital communities face-to-face. As places where digital games come to matter, they simultaneously afford the intensive use of digital media on site. Digital imaginaries are "embodied", oscillating between digital fantasies and creative performativity (e.g. through cosplay or body modification). Engaged participation online and offline becomes a normative

principle of action, prompting individuals to co-produce and actualize desired experiences. Extensive knowledge about computers, digital gameplay, technological processes, and machines become necessary elements to participate in play(ing). Therefore, they are a contemporary field of embodied and embedded digital gaming practices, where online and offline activities cannot be understood in binary terms. "Virtual" and "actual" are merged into hybrid environments: "It's part of reality and part of virtual reality. It's kind of in-between, where the worlds just connect" (Interview with Yulianis, 2019).

As a cultural anthropologist, my ethnographic research makes these contemporary entanglements of "the digital" with everyday practices visible. My multi-sited and multi-methods approach at 16 events throughout Europe followed the field in physical co-location and co-presence in digital worlds. The events become a play-ground for digital games and facilitate making a game out of everything by affording playful engagements with oneself, other people and objects. Play(ing) becomes a widespread mode of interaction where everything can be turned into a game or be play(ed). Moreover, gamers develop a playful attitude as a disposition, doing every task in a playful spirit. Thus, the events for video games offer places for game-like and open-ended play(ing), becoming play-grounds for gamers.

Goyburu Juan Sebastián
University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

THE PARADOX OF CARING IN VIDEOGAMES

The debate between fictionalism and simulationism in videogames has often been framed in reference to Kendall Walton's prop theory. Such theory, though, was originally developed in order to give an answer to what is known as "the paradox of caring" (Walton, 1978), the conflict between the idea that we know that the characters in a narrative are fictional, yet we care about what happens to them.

In this work, we'll put forward a phenomenological account of the player's relationship with the avatar and the game world, particularly considering Rune Klevjer's take on the subject (Klevjer, 2012). In this view, there's a displacement of the player's bodily space unto the game world, in what the author describes as "telematic presence".

Through it, we can solve in part the paradox by way of claiming that game objects are, in a relevant sense, actually present and non-fictional to the user. Affects are triggered by the presence of game-world objects and their affordances not towards our material bodies, but to our simulated ones. As Klevjer puts it, "...proxy embodiment is a trick at the level of the phenomenology of the body, not a trick of fiction" (Klevjer, 2012, p. 29).

Yet, in some video games (i.e., narrative games), a representative fictional dimension is overlayed on these simulated but effectively present elements, which has to take into account the motivational attitudes generated by those triggered affects. In this way, "...the player and the videogame incorporate each other in reflexive cycles that mediate presence, attention, perception, and agency" (Keogh, 2015, p. 11). To elucidate this link between user and videogame, we'll put forward a version of Antoni Gomila's second-person perspective of intentional attribution (Gomila, 2009).

Howard Kenton Taylor
University of Central Florida, USA

THE (UN)LUCKY CARDER: INSCRYPTION, SUBMISSION, AND METANARRATIVE GAMES

Game designers are experimenting with stories of all kinds, and games have progressed as a medium to the point that scholars want to have large-scale academic discussions about their narratives. More interestingly, however, there are a growing number of games with stories that examine our relationship with game narratives, games which have been tentatively described as metafictional or metanarrative games by journalists and fans. While I will touch briefly on the notion of metanarrative games as a whole in this presentation, I will look primarily at Daniel Mullins Games' *Inscryption* (2021), a metanarrative digital card game that blends horror, alternate reality game, and escape room elements. Relying on Marc LeBlanc's concept of types of fun, a notion he created to describe the different kinds of pleasure that players feel when they interact with games, I suggest that *Inscryption* is a metanarrative game that engages with LeBlanc's notion of submission, or "games as pastime," by presenting its card game elements as a pastime in multiple ways. *Inscryption*'s story suggests that the card game is a pastime that players can submit to and get "lost" in, which mirrors many interpretations of the notion of submission; however, I claim that this card game that appears to be central to its gameplay is actually only a small part of the game's larger metanarrative and gameplay elements. I suggest that *Inscryption*'s metanarrative and gameplay elements address the relationship between players and games and question whether submitting to games as a pastime might be harmful or dangerous. Overall, I argue that games like *Inscryption* blur the line between narrative and metanarrative as well as the line between game and metagame, serving as gameplay experiences as well as metanarrative experiences that explore our relationships with games.

Ivetić Jovana
University of Belgrade, Serbia

MEDIEVALISM OF THE VIDEO GAME KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE BETWEEN HISTORICAL DEPICTION AND PALIMPSEST-LIKE INSCRIPTION

Medievalism is referred to as recreation, interpretation (imaginative or historically accurate) and the reception of the Middle Ages in post-medieval cultures, through various media. In contrast to eclectic fantasy storyworlds that contain some medieval elements, the intention of *Kingdom Come* is to create a realistic depiction and the experience of the Middle Ages. Paradoxically, this commitment to historical accuracy also shows contemporaneity. In addition to the undoubtable historical accuracy of the architecture, geography, dialogues, system of motivation and events, relation to alterity and perception of causality (with minor changes due to ludological requirements), the game subjects to representations of the Middle Ages already present in several (stereotypical) discourses on the epoch. This form of medievalism is a signal of a palimpsest-like dialogue between medieval and contemporary culture. Rather than distancing itself from the determinants of the medieval way of life, modernity finds itself in it and inscribes itself onto the historically accurate story. This phenomenon is differentiated in the paper from deliberate formal innovations allowed by the medium of video-games (such as blending medieval miniatures with the medium of comics and movies), and also from

medievalism as contemporary orientalism (whether as a fixation on morally or otherwise unacceptable elements of medieval life, or as a nostalgic projection of a simpler life onto Middle Ages).

The goal of this paper is to analyze the discrepancies between the intention of the game and its implications as an expression of the complexity of contemporary attitudes towards the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, by creating a story and storyworld that are true to the Middle Ages, *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* most often surpasses stereotypical medievalist constructions, thus transforming the historically accurate into something susceptive and engaging for the modern player.

Jerjes Loayza
National University of San Marcos, Peru

STREAMERS, EMOTIONS AND VIDEO GAME CULTURE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN LATIN AMERICA

Since March 2020, the pandemic associated with death and fear of contagion in various youth communities has had a profound impact on video game culture in the Latin American region. Stress, fear, desolation and suicide attempts gradually accumulated. It is in this context that some young gamers decided to venture to broadcast their games, either via PC, specifically *Dota 2* games for the Peruvian case, and *Fortnite* for the Latin American case; as well as retro games, such as those from Nintendo, PlayStation 1 and 2, and Sega; and, finally, current games owned by PlayStation, 4, 5 and Xbox Series X.

The result was extraordinary. Dozens of gamers would become video game streamers overnight on different platforms. YouTube, Facebook and Twitch, the latter being the least used for Latin American cases, would be the new playful meeting spaces. Breaking boundaries, communities began to grow on social networks, Watts App groups, Facebook, and even face-to-face friendship spaces once the pandemic weakened thanks to the supply of vaccines.

The paper establishes a study of the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on the new virtual interaction spaces promoted by streamers in Latin America, with a special emphasis on the Peruvian case. The consequences of the development of video game streaming on social network platforms are considered, both by the producers who call themselves "video game creators", as well as by the consuming public of these virtual contexts, who learned to incorporate such spaces of coexistence into their lives. These communities have not ceased and continue to be strengthened, even when many streamers decided to abandon their practices due to the new obligations they had to take in search of economic resources, and when the number of individuals watching said streams also decreased.

Kliagkona Konstantina
University of Portsmouth, UK

THE BLACK FEMALE BODY IN GRAND THEFT AUTO (1997-2013)

Rockstar *North's Grand Theft Auto* (1997-2013) video-game series constitutes one of the most profitable action-adventure productions worldwide. Despite its success, it has received heavy criticism regarding its degrading portrayal of female characters. These are perceived as "trophies," sexually-arousing background spectacles, ornamental objects, and non-playable characters to be rescued,

tolerated, scorned at, sexually assaulted and/or murdered. Yet, literature lacks studies examining the underrepresentation and discrimination of African-American female characters in the game, considering that black adolescents account for the majority of male players. Hence, the focal point rests upon the deconstruction of the image of the most notable women of black descent appearing in the game series via the systematic analysis of the "Mammy," "Jezebel" and "Sapphire" stereotypes upon which these figures are based explained by specific feminist theorists, such as Christian (1980), Collins (2000) and West (2008). The research will attempt to indicate that these racial beliefs continue pervading the game facing little or no significant positive change in spite of the evolution of the graphics and the male figures throughout the years. Such supporting characters manage to fulfill the objectives of the game, serving the "male-gaze" experience as coined by Mulvey (1979), and the gendered-violence requirement for the completion of various "missions." For this purpose, screenshots from the game will be employed to enhance comprehension. Notwithstanding, now that the development of modern video games makes timid steps towards a more active involvement of respectable female figures in the game progress, radical changes must be made. The study will therefore address the need to reconsider the role of this hyphenated ethnicity from a feminist perspective in the present game series and, by extension, the gaming industry with the exclusion of racially discriminated characters and beliefs propagated across space and time.

Lukić Marko
Department of English, University of Zadar, Croatia

RESURRECTING MARTHA — CHALLENGES AND IDEOLOGIES OF HORROR GAME NARRATIVES

While horror literature, as well as horror films, simultaneously function as a well-established narrative medium, and a source of a continuous morbid entertainment, while also serving as a context within which various authors are allowed to challenge social and moral norms by exploring the darker side of human nature, the video game equivalent of these narratives is subject to different rules. While retaining and capitalizing on its emotional and/or visual explicitness, it is also forced to conform to different rules. Starting with the limitations of a particular sub-genre (RPG, FPS, "Walking Simulator", etc.), the unavoidable (non)adequate game mechanics, as well as the recent focus on conforming to a certain level of political correctness, the horror game genre becomes increasingly distanced from the defying and subversive nature of its literary and cinematic predecessors. What the proposed presentation will argue, primarily through the case of the psychological horror game *Martha is Dead* (LKA), as well as its critical reception, is that the authors become entangled in a number of creative and cultural/ideological paradoxes, having as a result not only a diminished gaming/horror experience but also failing (or being forced to fail) to move forward the acknowledged cultural and social norms.

Malenica Frane

Department of English, University of Zadar, Croatia

REVIEWING THE REVIEWS – A CORPUS LINGUISTICS ANALYSIS OF GAMESPOT REVIEWS

Video games and video game reviews have become a valuable source of linguistics information and the focus of linguistic inquiry in recent decades. The correlation between video games and L2 vocabulary acquisition has been established by empirical research in the applied linguistics domain (Sylvén & Sundqvist 2012, Chen and Yang 2013, Zhonggen 2018, Vásquez & Ovalle 2019), which stimulated the idea of implementing different strategies in the paradigm of GameBased Learning (cf. Santos 2017 and Kasemap 2017). Positive user-generated reviews are also shown to be correlated with increased playing time (Guzsvinecz 2022) and the use of NLP (Natural Language Processing) methodology allows us to analyse how different aspects of the game can have an effect on emotions experienced by the reviewers (Arik 2022, Britto & Pacifico 2020, Anees et al. 2020, Guzsvinecz 2022). Research by Cho et al. (2020) compares the feasibility and usefulness of qualitative human-based reviews versus automated text analysis methods and indicates that the machine-based methods can be successfully used for identifying the main topics of games, especially when dealing with large databases. This paper aims to employ a similar methodology as Cho et al. (2020) to compare the reviews of different game genres (e.g. Adventure, FPS, Sports, Strategy) collected from the GameSpot website (www.gamespot.com/). The reviews will be acquired via the rvest package (Wickham 2021) for webscraping in R and the analysis will be conducted using the traditional corpus linguistic methods for text analysis (e.g. collocations, keyword and n-gram analysis) from the quanteda package (Benoit et al. 2018). The main aim of the paper is to see whether there is a difference between reviews of games belonging to different genre in terms of the most frequent and/or the most representative words and phrases used.

Marini Anna Marta

Universidad de Alcalá, Spain

GAMING THE US–MEXICO BORDER: MIGRANTS, ENFORCERS, AND THE NECROPOLITICAL EXPERIENCE

Based on real accounts, Alejandro Iñárritu's VR installation *Carne y Arena* (2018) situates the participant among migrants caught by border enforcement agents in the desert. Enhanced by haptic devices—as well as game-like interaction with both migrant and enforcer characters—the overall experience is unsettling and intended to reproduce border-crossing trauma. Several videogames located on the US–Mexico border and developed to reproduce the encounter between enforcers and migrants offer the point of view of both actors. Some are inherently racist and against immigration, from the flash game *Border Patrol* (2002) to the hyper-stereotyped *Border Control* (2019) featuring a Donald Trump NPC. Others, though, provide criticism towards border immigration necropolitics in different ways. Besides satirical commentaries such as *Deported: Drain the Swamp* and *Deported 2: Build That Wall* (2018)—a science fiction game with Pac-Man mechanics revolving around a satirical take on Trump's nativist discourse—a few games have tried to reproduce the harrowing migrant experience. Among them, in Rafael Fajardo's *Crosser and La Migra* (2003) the same border setting can be played as migrant or officer, rewarding players if they save migrant lives either way. The *Migrant*

Trail (2014) allows the player to customize their migrant avatar and embark on the border-crossing. Originally created as an art installation, *Borders* (2017) is a top-down stealth game in which the player must hide to avoid enforcers and survive dehydration, while encountering the skeletons of dead migrants along the way. Based on asylum seekers' case files, *The Waiting Game* (2018) includes the story of a domestic violence survivor from El Salvador and painstakingly reproduces the passing of time, in thrall to smugglers, enforcers, and bureaucracy. This paper offers an overview of videogames reproducing the undocumented migrant experience on the US–Mexico border, focusing in particular on their connection to real-life recounts and the aim—and devices employed—to elicit feelings of frustration and empathy in the player.

Moise Andreea
University of Bucharest, Romania

THE NEUROTYPICAL GAZE: APPROPRIATION OF PSYCHOSIS AS HORROR GAME ENTERTAINMENT IN HELLBLADE: SENUA'S SACRIFICE

Released in 2017, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (Ninja Theory) relates the main character's psychosis, manifested in the game as voice-hearing, pareidolia, flashbacks, delusions, and hallucinations, and framed within the allegorical context of Norse mythology. Senua is a Pict warrior who, after the massacre of her tribe and the sacrifice of her lover Dillion, embarks on a journey towards and into Helheim. While *Hellblade*'s crew worked closely with experts and people diagnosed with psychotic conditions, the game was met with considerable critique as well, notably from the neurodivergent community of players, since its writing and development emphasise a distinctly neurotypical gaze intent on sensationalising and appropriating mental illness as a form of entertainment within the context of a horror survival game. My purpose is to examine the ways in which psychosis remains linked to the genealogy of the tropes of "madness" and "insanity", as the video game's cultural politics perpetuate harmful stereotypes, continue to metaphorise and exoticise mental affliction through its discourses and voyeuristic gamification of medical symptoms, thus solidifying a position of ideological neurotypical dominion that turns *Hellblade* into a vaguely and vacuously empathic freak-show. As video games portray social and political realities and they always engage with the conflicts of their day and age by either reinforcing or challenging them in a process of mythologising, these expressions can often bear the mark of discriminatory processes through the reinforcement of discriminatory tropes, ableism and sanism included. In *Hellblade*, the "insane" belong outside of society, and their "enlightening" difference underlies their separation from the realm of neurotypical "normalcy", a process of exoticising that shuns otherness. Similarly, the reliance on Norse mythology reveals itself as a traditionalist and stigmatising viewpoint that invalidates mental disorders in order to actively reinforce self-penance.

Murphy Cason
Iowa State University, USA

NO LONGER "MERELY PLAYERS": PORTING THE ELEMENTS OF THEATRE INTO VIDEO GAMING

Live theatre, much preferring the creative spirit of practical effects, has never been an early adopter of digital technology. However, this pandemic has forced our collective hands—and technology has become a critical theatrical tool in a way it never has been before. In place of old geographically-based theatre companies, communities and practices have been relocated and recreated across new platforms.

One of the more curious combinations of exploring a new form has been that of theatre and video gaming. World-building games, like the popular early-pandemic release *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, emphasize collaborative forms of social interaction, even while players remain in physical isolation for long periods of time, while also offering an escape from the stresses of the outside world. It should be no surprise then artists have engineered ways to connect with audiences pivoted from the physical forums of theatre venues to the virtual forums of gaming co-op modes, chats, and channels. For this presentation, I will center the discussion on three audience-oriented "elements" of gaming— creativity, immersion, and community—and the complex ways theatremakers and audiences together have been redefining the boundaries of contemporary theatrical presentation, all while leveling some of the inherent barriers to access that exist in the former model.

By examining a few case studies of theatrical events that have deployed concepts of gaming—including but not limited to: G.A. Tovstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theater's Minecraft performance of The Cherry Orchard; Flagstaff Shakespeare Festival's 16-bit game-inspired concept for *As You Like It*; Tender Claws' *The Under Presents: Tempest on Oculus*; and Celine Song's *The Seagull* on *Sims 4* on Twitch—I hope to outline a new framework of, as Susan Bennet urges us, "viewing the theatrical event beyond its immediate conditions and to foregrounding its social constitution" in order to envision the future of this theatrical-gaming hybrid.

Parker Holly and Holroyd Deanna
University of Lincoln, UK / The Ohio State University, USA

CREATING NEOLIBERAL TECHNO-UTOPIAS IN STARDEW VALLEY: AFFECT, "PLAYBOUR" AND COMMUNITY

In an age of neoliberal pressures and fast-paced living, the features commonly associated with slow country living (farming, foraging, crafting, local festivals, etc.) have come to be idealised for their therapeutic qualities and community-building practices. This was particularly the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, when national lockdowns restricted mobility, limited social interaction, and forced a widespread retreat into the domestic sphere. In this period, the desire to "return to simple pleasures" was not just evident from the revived interest in sourdough starters and banana bread, but also from the upsurge in the popularity of contemporary country-life video games, such as *Animal Crossing, Stardew Valley, Apico,* and *Spirittea.* However, rather than offering an escape from the fast pace of "real-life", as is often assumed to be the case, these contemporary country life video games subscribe to neoliberal "success narratives", with players experiencing a sense of achievement-

induced satisfaction when they are rewarded for the labour of studiously tending to flowerbeds, crops, and animals.

With this in mind, this paper analyses the resource-based narratives within the role-playing game (RPG) *Stardew Valley,* through the lens of affect theory and postmillennial game theory, to interrogate how the game employs farming as an embodiment of "playbour" (play labour). We argue that the narratives embedded within *Stardew Valley* reflect the neoliberal focus on productivity, community and autonomy, and the commodification of play, to produce a techno-utopia informed by neoliberal ideologies. We then examine the affective dimensions of the discourse within *Stardew Valley's* associated digital communities (*YouTube, Reddit, Facebook)* to assert that the online relationships surrounding the game are not only exemplary of relationship-building practices in the digital age, but are also indicative of affective desires for connection that emerge in response to the neoliberal conditions experienced in both the 'real-life' peri-/post-COVID-19 context, and the in-game narrative.

Platz Jenny
Providence College, USA

DIGITAL ESCAPISM FOR SELF-BETTERMENT: THE COTTAGECORE EXPERIENCE OF STARDEW VALLEY

Eric Barone's 2016 game *Stardew Valley* begins with the player leaving behind a soulless job and moving to a farm. On the farm, the player tends to the scenic homestead, hunts cute monsters, crafts, and befriends the townspeople. Through these chores, the player escapes into the fantastical existence of farm life. The player has a *cottegecore* aesthetic experience through plot and game mechanics like glamorized labor, pastoral escapism, the critique of capitalism, and self-contemplation. In my paper, I will first use video game theory on the mental health benefits of player productivity in games to argue how the soothing task-based farming gameplay mirrors the glamorized depiction of farm labor in *cottegecore* culture. Through the game, the player gets to complete the labor rather than just fantasize about the work and can gain benefits of digital productivity such as a sense of control and accomplishment when real-life existence may lack these elements. Second, I will claim that through avatar identification the player can digitally live in the *cottegecore* world, which can result in the ease of depression and stress through the game's relaxing features. Moreover, through the game, the player can escape to a utopian world where the gamer can safely contemplate and enact various sexual and gender identities, all conventions of *cottegecore*. The player can achieve self-discovery and betterment. In this paper, I will use research on video game and avatar identification and queer and class theory.

Poirier-Poulin Samuel
Université de Montréal, Canada

"LEAVE HER BETTER THAN YOU FOUND HER": PICKUP ARTISTS IN GAMING CULTURES

Originating in the United States in the 1970s, the pickup artist community is now infamous for its seduction techniques derived from social and evolutionary psychology (Oesch & Miklousic, 2012) that aim at seducing, manipulating, and ensuring sexual success with women. As Hambling-Jones and Merrison (2012) highlight, "a common community belief is that the means of seduction are not rooted in physical attractiveness, social status or wealth, but in the interaction" (p. 1116). The expansion of the Internet since the 1990s has had a considerable role in the spread of this community, allowing its members to discuss their seduction techniques on forums and blogs in anonymity, to produce YouTube channels and online courses, and to self-publish their work on Amazon (Dayter & Rüdiger, 2016; King, 2018; Xia & Chen, 2022). Pickup artists are now using the video game medium to reach a wider audience and share their "knowledge."

This paper proposes a preliminary analysis of the Super Seducer video game series (RLR Training Inc, 2018–2021), created by seduction guru Richard La Ruina. The series consists of a gamified version of pickup artist techniques with full-motion videos and dialogue trees. It puts the assumed straight male player in everyday scenarios (coffee shop, grocery store, bar, etc.) where he must seduce women in order to get their phone numbers, go on a date, or have sex with them. Drawing on feminist scholarship on exclusionary practices and gatekeeping in gaming cultures (e.g., Fron et al., 2007; Gray, 2020; Humphreys, 2019; Vossen, 2018), I will explore the multiple intersections between the Super Seducer series and a toxic gamer culture that continues to exclude women, queer folks, and people of colour. More specifically, I will examine how the Super Seducer series uses the conventions of the "interactive drama" (Reed et al., 2020, p. 64) to present women as passive objects that can be easily manipulated while giving male players the impression that seducing them is only a matter of saying or doing the right thing.

Rall Hannes
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE: TRANSFORMING A SHAKESPEARE PLAY FOR A GAMIFIED IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Pericles, Prince of Tyre is the story of a family separated at sea and brought together again by fate. It is considered the first of Shakespeare's late "romances" and far less popular than widely known plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth,* or *Hamlet*. However, the play's episodic structure and its maritime travelogue make it particularly suitable for an adaptation as a game: There is rich potential for world discovery.

Therefore, the author is currently conducting a research project at Nanyang Technological University Singapore that adapts the play for a serious game in VR. This is carried out in close collaboration with the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon. The research is also supported by a major grant by Singapore's Ministry of Education.

In our project, we are seeking to integrate a linear narrative with the interactive potential of a game. Moreover, we are transferring the vaguely Mediterranean setting of the original play to a Southeast Asian environment that will reflect local art history and culture. A group of interdisciplinary researchers from the fields of Shakespeare studies, English studies, performance, interactive, animation and computer sciences are working together with local artists to create a scientifically relevant and innovative adaptation.

My paper will unpack the challenges that arose during script adaptation, visual development and initial production steps. It will further highlight the new narrative possibilities that emerge from a fully immersive environment. A particular emphasis will be placed on explaining the interdependencies between scientific research and creative practice and its resulting cross-pollinating benefits.

Stirling Eve and Wood Jamie
Sheffield Hallam University, UK / University of Lincoln, UK

THE AGENCY OF ASSASSIN'S CREED: A SPECULATIVE DESIGN FICTION

Computer games are digital places of cultural meaning-making. Computer games which are set in the past (e.g. the medieval setting of *Assassin's Creed II*) combine the past and present in their storyworld. A design fiction, as described by science fiction author Bruce Sterling, allows us to suspend disbelief about change while at the same time open up space for discussion, by using prototypes within a "storyworld".

We present a speculative Design Fiction that draws on data from a survey of student gamers' perceptions of their learning about the past through playing video games. We use these to create a story to imagine how these might be realised in a future university. Through the fiction, we explore both what students thought that they had learnt about history through playing "historical" video games in their free time and how they thought that they had learnt it.

This paper examines history students' perceptions of their learning about the past through playing video games. Our aim is to understand students' roles as active agents in learning about the past through virtual play rather than as passive consumers of digital products.

Sundin Jessika
Karlstad University, Sweden

VIRTUALLY LITERATURE: MEDIATING SECONDARY WORLDS THROUGH MEDIA SIMULATION OF BOOKS IN VIDEO GAMES

Book reading might not be the first expectation of the way a video game portrays its game world. Yet the fictional worlds of video games are full of text entries, such as quest journals, codices and in-game books, in particular fantasy roleplaying games. The texts provide ambiance, information and stories about fantasy games' secondary worlds, a term this paper will use to connote constructed fictional worlds that are not portrayals of our own primary world. The frequent use of text entries illustrates that the mediation of complex secondary worlds in video games is in part dependent on using other media.

This paper aims at bringing the theories and models of both media representation (Elleström 2014) and media simulation (Makai 2022) into discussion with the mediation of secondary worlds in video game text entries. The representation of media entails a media product that represents another media, either another media product, a media type or the characteristic of a medium. However, in video games it is, particularly in cases such as the virtual books of *The Elder Scrolls* (TES, Bethesda Game Studios, especially the third, fourth and fifth iteration [2002-2011]), perhaps more accurate to view this phenomenon as media simulation, rather than media representation. For instance, the game books of *TES* not only look like but also function very much like ordinary books, just virtually in the game world. There is, therefore, a difference in representing and simulating other media. This paper will demonstrate that analyses of the mediation of secondary worlds in video games should take this difference into account and be prepared to ask questions about the fictional levels of mediation in video games.

Šekrst Kristina
University of Zagreb, Croatia

SEX, LIES, AND VIDEO GAMES: COGNITIVE MECHANISMS IN PRETENSIVE REALITY

Self-involving interactive fictions are fictions about those who consume them, differing from canonical fictions such as most novels, TV shows, and films, which might be interactive in a minimal way (Robson and Meskin, 2016). Consumers of canonical fiction have no influence over the structural properties of their objects, while in SIIFs they do (cf. Tavinor, 2012). Walton (1990) differentiates between work worlds, associated with the fictional work itself, and game worlds, occupying propositions only true in the game world. A philosophically interesting point here is a different notion of truth since video games become an extension of the self: "I killed a dragon" is a proposition that is true in the game world.

For Asheim (2012), the reality status of make-believe objects in fiction is ontologically different than in video games, consisting of a reference to consciousness. A church could be transformed into a museum or it could look like a hut, but it is still believed to be a church and holds a different value. I will observe this stance from aspects of the philosophy of mind and cognitive science. First, I will claim that all the propositions describing the game world are actually shortened propositional attitudes which constitute a meta-layer of discourse. Second, I will connect such mental states to cognitive peculiarities in make-believe studies, from childhood development (Jaswal, 2010) to pretensive reality in adults. Nichols and Stich (2000) argue that pretend play in adults requires 1) establishing a premise 2) inferential elaboration 3) embellishment 4) production of appropriate pretend behavior, while Kapitany et al. (2022) emphasize the socially shared pretense. I will argue that the same cognitive mechanism in both children and adults has philosophically different mental phenomena connected with the same outcome, pretense reality: either a full immersion or with an extra layer of work-world awareness, i.e. knowing consciously that the game world is not true.

Vukojević Borislav

Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Using different media to stay engaged in the game: How media can influence the content experience for players of World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft (*WoW*) is one of the first MMORPG games to gain global popularity. From its classic version in 2004 to the new edition in 2020, the game has gone through a drastic revolution. Although no longer the most popular MMORPG game, *WoW* is a great example to analyze because it has such a long history. Furthermore, in 2019 a classic version of *WoW* has been released which, in turn, enables it to be re-experienced, meaning that the base of current players who are playing both versions is still quite large.

The subject of this paper can be divided into two parts, which are interconnected. First, the emergence of new media technologies has significantly changed the way players remain involved in the community and gaming experience; second, the medium itself influenced the gaming experience, with its characteristics that conditioned players on community, communication, and collaborative problem-solving.

The main research question in the paper is: To what extent has the medium (a particular version of the game *WoW*) directed the gaming experience towards communication with others, the community, and mutual problem-solving? Other research questions are: How were the players of the classic and modern versions of *WoW* involved in the game? Can it be said that modern versions significantly reduce the importance of communication, in favor of independent problem-solving? This presentation is based on research that involves in-depth interviews conducted within the game, one focus group, and ethnographic observations in classical and modern *WoW*.

Wills John

University of Kent, UK

RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2, THE VIDEO GAME WESTERN, AND REDEFINING IMAGES OF THE HISTORIC WEST

This paper explores the video game Western, part and its relationship with popular imagery surrounding the American West. The video game Western arguably represents the next technological as well as cultural representation of the "Wild West" in all its complexities. Following in the footsteps of the classic celluloid Western, a number of popular video games in the 1970s put cowboys and Indians on arcade screens, creating a pixelated, playable West for a new audience of gamers. The "West" served as a novel, participatory digital story for fresh audiences. However, content and aesthetics proved decidedly simple, and game worlds proved heavily reliant on prior filmic presentations. By the 2000s, thanks chiefly to technological advances, video game Westerns offered more depth and complexity. Arguably, in Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption* series (2004-2018), the gamic West has matured. In this paper, I look particularly at notions of the sublime and myth-making in Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption 2*, a hugely successful video game title (with sales now exceeding 34 million units). I argue that Rockstar exploits prior notions and images of the "sublime historic West" to forge distinctive moments of pause and reflection in its title, to give both "rewards "and "breaks" to the player. Invested chiefly in a mix of mundane and active tasks across the gamic West, this "Red

Dead sublime" offers an intriguing sense of mythic, even transcendental, connection to "the West," and helps the player define their own "Western moments".

Zlatović Andrej
University of Belgrade, Serbia

Archaeologist and Social Scientists as Game Designers

The industry of game design is a complex phenomenon that is everchanging in an attempt to conform to market trends. The role of a game designer is therefore not only to project the mechanics and gameplay loops, but also to set the focus and vision for the game being made. In recent years games have been coming out with an ever-expanding emphasis on scientific accuracy, specifically in the field of social sciences. Perhaps the most famous example of such an occurrence is when Ubisoft Montreal the studio behind the *Assassin's Creed* series, hired a historian to work full-time consulting the game developers. Other famous past examples include the way Don Rawitsch, creator of the popular early computer era game Oregon Trail, modified key game elements based on historical evidence he found and later used the game in the classroom to support his teaching. This paper addresses the particular ways in which social scientists can enrich the games they help create with their knowledge and create unique interactive experiences for players.

Based on an in-depth interview with Digital Panache Studios' lead game designer Marc-André de Blois and other sources, this research aims to analyze how social scientists can transform the video game industry.

De Blois and the studio independently released their 2019 game Ancestors: The Humankind Odyssey, which consulted biologists and anthropologists for its production - a process that is becoming increasingly common in video game production and shows that the social sciences can provide an exciting background for many future game designers.

Zlatović Anja
Belgrade University, Serbia

TOPICS OF SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM IN THE VIDEO GAMES

Video games in the contemporary world have become one of the most popular means of entertainment. As they have been developing, they have not only become widespread, but also more complex, artistic, and activist. Many games on the market nowadays include, in some form, economic and political topics and ideas not only through gameplay, but also in the narrative. Along with other political movements, games started including the topics of socialism and communism, offering various perspectives and discussions that players can engage with. Depending on the type of the game, topics can be either major plot points or background details. This work concerns those games in which subjects of socialism and communism (even when not explicitly mentioned) are serving as important narrative and action tools for the player. We will present various approaches games took, from the critique of the Objectivist-style capitalism in *Bioshock*, the simulation of the bureaucracy in the dystopian Communist-inspired dictatorship of *Papers Please*, to an explicit discussion of Communist ideas in *Disco Elysium*. This research looks at how these topics are addressed in the context of various

new trends, ideas, and mechanisms used in the gaming industry. It will look into how video games incorporate socialism and communism into the game narrative, depending on whether the publisher is an indie company or a large corporate entity, and explore the ways in which video games represent, employ and understand socialism and communism.

Presenters

Abela Carmel Anne
Nagoya University, Japan

Carmel Anne Abela is a Ph.D. Candidate from the Graduate School of Humanities, Nagoya University, Japan.

Aksay Kübra
University of Freiburg, Germany

Kübra Aksay is a lecturer, researcher, and Ph.D. candidate in American Studies at the University of Freiburg. Her research interests include video games, virtual spaces, heritage studies, and digital media.

Apperley Thomas
Tampere University, Finland

Thomas Apperley is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies at Tampere University. He conducts research on digital games and playful technologies with an emphasis on their impact and influence on culture, particularly areas such as social policy, pedagogy and social inclusion.

Augustinčić Tomislav
Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, University of Zadar, Croatia

Tomislav Augustinčić is a Research and Teaching Assistant and PhD student at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology of the University of Zadar and an active member of the NGO SF:ius. His PhD research problematizes south Slavic participation in 19th/20th-century colonialism and colonial/colonialist subjectivity, by analysing the bequest of two fin-de-siècle Croatian explorers of eastern Africa and South America. Fields of research include social memory and postsocialism studies, literary anthropology and textile studies.

Bacalja Alexander
The University of Melbourne, Australia

Alexander Bacalja is a lecturer in language and literacy and a member of the Language and Literacy Research Hub in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne. Alexander's research focuses on contemporary literacies, including the critical and digital literacies taught and practiced in school and work environments. Alex is particularly interested in the play and study of digital games in educational contexts and how we might approach these texts from critical perspectives.

Nash Brady L.
Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA

Brady L. Nash is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Teaching, Curriculum, and Educational Inquiry at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, The United States. Brady's research examines critical and culturally responsive approaches to digital and multimodal literacy education in K-12 and teacher preparation contexts.

Berchild Chris
Department of Theater, Indiana State University, USA

Chris Berchild is a professor and chairperson of the Department of Theatre at Indiana State University. During his time at Indiana State University, Berchild has worked with numerous emerging technologies in a theatrical context, and established the Interdisciplinary Center for Media Technology in the Arts at his home department. His most recent research focuses on the application of video game engines in the live theatre through integration with more established practices and technologies.

Binns Alastair
University of Kent, UK

Alastair Binns is a 1st Year PhD student at the University of Kent, UK. His currently untitled PhD thesis looks at concepts of "perspective" in historical video games, and how this issue is reflected in narratives, representation politics and the historical experience within video games.

Bollmer Grant
North Carolina State University, USA

Grant Bollmer is an Associate Professor of Media Studies at North Carolina State University, where he teaches in the Department of Communication and the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media (CRDM) Ph.D. program. He is the author of three books, the most recent of which is Materialist Media Theory. His next book, The Affect Lab, is forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press.

Burlacu Mihai
Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania

Mihai Burlacu is a lecturer at the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Transilvania University of Brasov. He teaches, among other disciplines, Social Anthropology and Applied Anthropology. Dr. Burlacu is a member of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) since 2008. Between October 2018 and September 2021, he was also an ambassador for Romania of the Applied Anthropology Network, within EASA and co-organized two international events in that capacity. One of his research interests is the study of digital worlds, with an emphasis on digital heterotopias within gameworlds.

Cerqueira Tânia
University of Porto, Portugal

Tânia Cerqueira holds a Master's degree in Anglo-American Studies from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto. She obtained it with a dissertation titled "'Are you afraid of your own shadow?': The Monster and the Construction of Identity in Monsters of Verity". She is currently a PhD candidate at the same university and has been granted an FCT research studentship [Ref. 2021.04547.BD]. Her thesis's main focus is the relationship between the Gothic tradition and young adult dystopias. She is a collaborator at the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS) and a Young Adult Studies Association member. Her main research interests include young adult fiction, dystopia, monstrosity, Gothic, and posthumanism.

Couturier Alexane
University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada

Alexane Couturier is a PhD student in semiotic studies at the University of Québec in Montréal (Canada), her research interests focus mainly on video games as an emergent expressive practice (autobiographical and autofictional video games as well as social impact games), historical and political representations within this media and more broadly to censorship and propaganda in the digital age. She is also a member of the Homo Ludens research group (UQAM), whose work focuses on gaming practices, digital devices, and online communication, as well as a researcher for the Canada Research Chair on Gamer Communities and Big Data.

Eggel Ruth Dorothea

Bonn University, Germany

Ruth Dorothea Eggel is a Ph.D. candidate, teaching and research assistant at the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Bonn University, Germany. She studied Cultural Anthropology/European Ethnology and Gender Studies in Graz, Austria. Her dissertation, titled "Embodying Gaming" explores large-scale gaming events in Europe, at the intersection of digital anthropology and popular culture.

Goyburu Juan Sebastián

University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Juan Sebastián Goyburu is currently an advanced undergraduate student at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Buenos Aires, and a course coordinator and teacher of Computational Thought at the Technical High School dependent on the same institution. He's currently writing his thesis on phenomenology and the aesthetics of videogames. He's also researched time travel narratives in popular media and their relation to traumatic history, having already presented its results on, among others, the Latin American Studies Association's XXXIV International Congress (2016), Revelation Academic Conference (2014), McGill University English Graduate Student's Conference "Unmasking Masquerade: Exploring Disguise and Display Across the Humanities" (2014).

Howard Kenton Taylor

University of Central Florida, USA

Dr. Kenton Taylor Howard is a lecturer in University of Central Florida's Games and Interactive Media program in Orlando, Florida. He is also a graduate of UCF's Texts and Technology PhD program. He has published articles in the *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* journal, the *Well Played Journal*, and *One Shot: A Journal of Critical Play and Games.* He has also presented and published articles at the Digital Games Research Association conference, the Foundations of Digital Games conference, and the International Conference for Interactive Digital Storytelling.

Ivetić Jovana

University of Belgrade, Serbia

Jovana Ivetić has enrolled in the PhD programme (Language, Culture and Literature) at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade in the current academic year. She graduated bachelor's and master's studies at top of the class, both with theses based on the narratological approach to hagiographies. She speaks English and reads in Italian and Russian. Fields of her interest and research include medieval literature, narratology, popular culture and feminist theory. She recently started publishing papers.

Jerjes Loayza

National University of San Marcos, Peru

Sociologist and Lawyer. Master in Sociology and Doctor in Social Sciences from the National University of San Marcos. Associate professor of undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the same university. Visiting professor at the Universidad de la Frontera in Temuco, Chile. Member of the UNESCO Chair – DCMÉT. Associate researcher of the Peruvian Educational Research Society. He has been Jurisdictional Advisor to the Constitutional Court (2014-2018). Director of the Academic Department of Sociology and Editor of the Sociology Magazine of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos.

Kliagkona Konstantina

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Konstantina Kliagkona is a graduate of MSc in Criminology & Criminal Psychology in the University of Portsmouth, U.K., and a BA (Hons) degree holder in English Language and Literature from the Aristotle

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Marko Lukić is Associate Professor at the English Department at the University of Zadar, Croatia, where he teaches courses on American literature, gothic and horror genre, popular culture, and cultural theory. His research interests include American popular culture, human geography and spatiality in literature and film, and the contemporary horror genre. His most recent book is titled *Geography of Horror - Spaces, Hauntings and the American Imagination* (Palgrave).

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Cason Murphy is an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Iowa State University, with his M.F.A. in Theatre Directing from Baylor University and his B.A. in Theatre Arts from UCLA. He is the author of *The World at Play: Performance from the Audience's Perspective*, a textbook that offers an audience-oriented view of theatre, dance, music, film, television, podcasting, video gaming, and other emergent

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Holly Parker is a PhD researcher at the University of Lincoln (UK). Holly's current research focuses on affect theory and performance studies in twenty-first-century fiction, forming an interdisciplinary study that rests on the cultural backdrop of neoliberalism and postmillennial digital culture. She has recently published a journal article in *Alluvium* on affect and Minecraft. Part of her research for this broader project will also feature in a book chapter in *Ready Reader One: The Stories We Tell About, With, And Around Video Games*, ed. by Megan Condis and Mike Sell, under publication with Louisiana State University Press.

Holroyd Deanna
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Deanna Holroyd is a PhD researcher at The Ohio State University (USA), Deanna's research lies in the intersection between politics, communication, cultural studies, and the digital humanities, as she attempts to delineate the mechanisms through which cultural tendencies and discursive "truths" become widely adopted, and why they occur at particular cultural moments. Her most recent research on the right-leaning media representation of the Black body in the era of COVID-19 and the BLM protests is currently under publication with Routledge as a chapter in their *COVID-19 and Politics* series.

Platz Jenny
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Jenny Platz earned her M.A. in Cinema Studies at San Francisco State University where she concentrated on the role of women in exploitation films and the works of Quentin Tarantino. In 2017 she received her PhD in English at the University of Rhode Island. She has presented at PCA, NeMLA, Slayage and other conferences on topics such as video game theory, horror, and social media. She has published in *Enthymema*, *postScriptum*, and *Slayage* and wrote chapters in *The Lifetime Network* and *Unraveling Resident Evil*. She currently teaches film and digital media composition at the University of Rhode Island and Providence College.

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Eve Stirling is a Principal lecturer and design researcher at Sheffield Hallam University Art and Design department. Her research uses practice-based and visual research methods to explore the everyday (often digital) lives of participants. Current research focuses on design fiction and the sustainable and inclusive use of secondary data exploring pathways to zero.

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Jamie Wood is Professor of History and Education at the University of Lincoln, where he has worked since 2013, He has worked extensively on the social and religious history of late antiquity, especially that of the Iberian Peninsula.

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My name is Jessika Sundin. I am PhD Student in Comparative Literature at The Department of Language, Literature and Intercultural studies, at Karlstad University, Sweden. I have yet to publish as I quite recently started my position but my master thesis, titled "The Expanding Storyworld: An Intermedial Study of the Mass Effect novels", is available at the link below.

http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1294741&dswid=8042

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Kristina Šekrst is a Ph. D. in Logic at the University of Zagreb. She holds a master's degrees in Philosophy, Comparative Linguistics, Cognitive Linguistics and Croatian Language and Literature. She is the author of an Ancient Egyptian grammar, and a contributor to various papers and talks regarding philosophy, linguistics, logic, computer science and film studies. She is currently teaching linguistic and philosophical courses at the University of Zagreb.

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Wills John

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John Wills is Reader in American History and Culture at the University of Kent, UK, and his research specializes in US popular and environmental culture. Since 2009, he has edited the *European Journal of American Culture*, and his sixth book*, Gamer Nation: Video Games and American Culture*, came out with Johns Hopkins University Press in 2019.

Zlatović Andrej

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Andrej Zlatović is an undergraduate of archaeology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, aiming to finish his bachelor's degree by the end of the semester. My whole life I have been engaging with video games, even briefly doing volunteer work for ESL (Electronic Sports League) in 2016. I have also worked as part of the independent Llamaware Studios in the production of multiple games as a game and sound designer. My archaeological interests are the way archaeology and digital spaces interact and the potential of creating a digital archaeological simulation.

Zlatović Anja

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Anja Zlatović is a research associate at Belgrade University, the institute for ethnology and anthropology. I am finishing my PhD concerning the question of digital post-mortem identity and social media profiles of people that passed away at the department of ethnology and anthropology at the University of Belgrade. My anthropological interests include thanatology, digital anthropology and identity.