

ABSTRACT PROCEEDINGS OF THE
**Central and Eastern European
Game Studies Conference 2017**



**DIGITAL GAMES'
LIFE & AFTERLIFE**

**Zdenko Mago
Silvester Buček
Michal Kabát (eds.)**

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Faculty of Mass Media Communication

DIGITAL GAMES´ LIFE & AFTERLIFE

Zdenko Mago
Silvester Buček
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Abstract Proceedings
of the Central and Eastern European Game Studies Conference
September 28-30, 2017
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Digital Games' Life & Afterlife: Abstract Proceedings of the Central and Eastern European Game Studies Conference, September 28-30, 2017, Trnava, Slovak Republic

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Digital Games' Life & Afterlife

Central and Eastern European Game Studies Conference 2017, held in Trnava, Slovak Republic, on September 28-30, aims to integrate the community of Central and Eastern European game scholars and professionals and serve as a platform for academic exchange and networking. The conference is a continuation of the events hosted by the Masaryk University in Brno in 2014, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 2015 and the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin in 2016. It aims to establish a platform for games studies scholars from and beyond the region and facilitate the emergence of a unique perspective into the international arena of game studies. The theme of the CEEGS Conference 2017 is Digital Games' Life and Afterlife.

The discussion of whether digital games are media or not belongs to the past. With a fully established gaming industry, this subculture has become a part of the culture and all of this has been reflected in popular and academic analyses, as well as critical voices. A range of differences between digital games and other media have been thoroughly discussed, but there is one that is especially relevant and that is making games more difficult to study. Games are interconnected with cutting-edge technologies of their time, a reliance that dramatically accelerates their obsolescence. This fact raises many important questions.

How to play and study games that use hardware from “ancient” times? How do contemporary games enter history of the medium? How do they utilize existing norms and traditions? What do players think of the past, present, and future of gaming? What is the value of past and future games from artistic, academic, historical, and other points of view? What were players, games and industries like in the past and how did they influence the present?

These questions – and many others – are getting more and more valid with each next “old” game. In order to be competent to study and research digital games, or to teach about them, we need to know and understand their relationship with the past and the future. Thus, this year's conference is primarily interested in (re)discovering digital games' life and afterlife.

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KEYNOTES

Practice makes persistent: On history, temporality and memory

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*Melanie Swalwell is a scholar of digital media arts, cultures, and histories. She is the author of many chapters and articles on the histories of digital games, and co-editor of *The Pleasures of Computer Gaming: Essays on cultural history, theory and aesthetics* (McFarland, 2008), and *Fans and Videogames: Histories, fandom, archives* (Routledge, 2017). Between 2012-15, Melanie was Project Leader and Chief Investigator on the ARC Linkage Project “Play It Again”, which, in conjunction with its cultural partners – the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, and the Berlin Computerspiele Museum – researched the history and preservation of 1980s digital games in New Zealand and Australia. She is currently completing a monograph, *Homebrew Gaming and the Beginnings of Vernacular Digitality* (MIT Press) and editing another collection, *Game History and the Local*. Melanie’s latest research is on the histories of ‘creative microcomputing’ in Australia between 1976 and 1992. She is an Associate Professor and ARC Future Fellow in the Screen and Media Department at Flinders University.*

8 bit microcomputers introduced many to the digital era, and playing and developing games in the home was an important moment in the development of a vernacular digitality. Yet such computers are now largely considered obsolete technology, their use an anachronism. But to what extent are these computers actually safely contained in the past? This talk hones in on the temporality of practices associated with homebrew game development in the 1980s to consider how these might form part of an afterlife of 1980s games, and digitality more generally. Whilst discourses of loss and lament often dominate in ‘decline theses’, this isn’t the only way to conceive of techno-historical legacy. Drawing from my current book project on homebrew game development in 1980s Australasia, I seek to bring the contemporary moment into dialogue with the past, tracing the ways in which some microcomputer users are deploying their deep knowledge of – and love for – ‘obsolete’ systems and coding routines, now. Rather than being in the grip of a nostalgia that “sinks...efforts to create things that feel new” (Hilbert, 2004, p. 57), I argue that such micro users are instead bringing the present into a dynamic relation with the past (Seremetakis, 1996, p. 4), as they produce new games, create ‘de-makes’, and de-protect software so that it may be preserved.

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Replaying Replay: What I learned from writing Replay: The History of Video Games

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*Tristan Donovan is a British author and journalist. His books include *Replay: The History of Video Games* that has been adopted as a course text by a number of university courses and translated into Russian and Danish (Spanish and French translations are also in the works), *It's All a Game: The History of Board Games from Monopoly to Settlers of Catan* and *Feral Cities: Adventures with Animals in the Urban Jungle*. He has written about video games for BBC News Online, The Times (of London), Stuff, Eurogamer, Gamasutra, The Guardian, Kotaku and more.*

In this keynote speech, author and journalist Tristan Donovan will reflect on the process of writing and researching his 2010 book *Replay: The History of Video Games* (Donovan, 2010). Starting with an overview of *Replay's* origins, Donovan will explain how his frustration with US-centric histories inspired the book and why the notion of console generations warps our understanding of game history. Using some of video gaming's defining moments as examples, Donovan will make the case for video game histories that look beyond console life cycles and pay attention to the world beyond the screen. He will also explore what makes a game historically relevant and examine how 'gamer' bias affects what games are deemed to be of historical importance and interest.

Finally, Donovan will discuss some of the ongoing challenges faced by those researching and writing about video game history including access to sources and the industry's ongoing shift from a producer of products to a provider of services.

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Pirates and pioneers from the perspective of the curator of the first exhibition of archival games from the Multimedia Collection of Slovak Museum of Design

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Maroš Brojo is an artistic director of Fest Anča an international animation festival situated in Žilina, Slovakia, and a programmer at Fest Anča Game Days, a parallel event focusing on independent digital games. He is a project coordinator of New Talents, the promotional initiative at the Visegrad Animation Forum in Třeboň, Czech Republic. As a curator he works at the Slovak Museum of Design, focusing on digital games and multimedia history, archiving and preservation. He is a member of the Slovak Arts Council, a support program for multimedia and digital games.

The Slovak Museum of Design established a collection of multimedia in 2017. It also includes research into Slovak digital games. The museum's activities began by setting the initial concept of this collection and planning the first games exhibition called *Pirates and Pioneers* that took place at *Fest Anča Game Days 2017*. The exhibition was based on works from 1987-1993, the early period of our game development and it lasted only two days. Its curators and organizers have decided to display five selected games with use of original hardware – Didactic computers and Tesla Color Oravan TVs. The main objective was to present individual works in the original way in which people interacted with during this period. A part of the show were not only the games itself but also the original way of playing, which is an integral part of the overall experience. *Pirates and Pioneers* achieved great success and interest when it comes to visitors. What obstacles, however, were associated the exhibition during its preparation? Is it worthwhile to make a similar exhibition again at all? What did it bring for the museum bring in the wider context of foundation of the entire collection and its primary focus on historical research of Slovak digital games? The lecture provides instructions, based on the first experience of the organizers, to conduct an exhibition of a similar nature. At the same time it deals with the issue of exhibiting and curation of multimedia interactive historical software and hardware and the reasons why the museum attempted to achieve the greatest possible historical fidelity. The experience gained also points to

a wider range of issues related not only to video games but also to their sociological context, the issue of collecting historical documentation and extracting games from original media.

GAME THEORY

The Reflexive Turn? An Overview of Recent Debates on the Status of Game Studies

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In this paper we will argue that game studies scholars across the world are becoming more and more interested in the history and current state of their own academic field. We will examine this interest in papers available internationally in the English language, and we will demonstrate how it plays out in our own ongoing research into the history of video game studies in Poland.

Our literature review so far includes, among other things, looking through all available issues of two highly important journals, “Game Studies” and “Games and Culture” (by September this will be supplemented with an investigation into the archives of other game studies journals, as well as into DiGRA conference proceedings). The results indicate that the interest in question has not been distributed evenly between all historical stages of the game studies field. It first surged in the foundational years of the discipline and in the initial issues of the two aforementioned journals (see Aarseth, 2001, 2002; Frasca, 2003; Lowood, 2006), then disappeared from sight, and finally resurfaced in recent years (see Coavoux, Boutet, Zabban, 2016; Deterding, 2016; Harviainen, 2013; Liboriussen, Martin, 2016; Mäyrä, Van Looy, Quandt, 2013; Melcer et al., 2015; Quandt et al., 2015; Sotamaa, Suominen, 2013). A tentative conclusion would be that initially the debate over game studies was needed to distinguish it from other academic disciplines, and now that the field has developed (Aarseth, 2015), an increasing number of researchers are reflecting on everything that has been done so far.

In the talk we will analyze the papers that take the field of game studies itself as their central topic. We will discuss their goals, their scope, the methods applied, and the main findings. In addition, we will set together

the similarities and differences, as well as international and local trends, taking into account the specificity of the Central and Eastern European context. For example, the number of specialized game studies journals and conference proceedings published in English is high enough to merit an analysis excluding non-core research venues (Melcer et al., 2015), whereas in Poland game studies papers are scattered and locating small paper clusters is much more pertinent. Finally, we will take note of the current diversity movement at the Digital Games Research Association (as exemplified by the July 2, 2017 workshop “Gaming the Systems: Towards a More Inclusive DiGRA”).

As for our own research on Polish video game studies, we will focus on the issues that may be non-evident to outside observers. This includes the multi-layered origins of the field (from simulation game research and computer science, to cultural studies and media studies, to play studies and language teaching research, to literary studies) and the non-linearity of the processes of institutionalization and internationalization. We will thus highlight the risk of oversimplification in presenting local game studies histories, which is similar to the risk faced by scholars in other disciplines, such as film studies (see Grieveson & Wasson, 2008). Furthermore, we will delineate the research methods and procedures as well as data sources employed in our project, emphasizing the practical difficulties and possibilities related to this type of study. We will also briefly compare our approach to that taken in other relevant publications (Filiciak et al., 2016; Krawczyk, 2016; Surdyk, 2009).

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Making sense of self-playing games: from interactivity to interpassivity

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In early 2015, Gamasutra, a popular online website featuring a variety of topics on game design and development trends, publishes an article “The rise of games you (mostly) don’t play” (Parkin, 2015), introducing a niche “idle” game’s genre to a wider audience. Two years later, in February of 2017 a self-playing game is featured as part of a local gaming convention in North Carolina. While the gamers and attendees of the event stroll through the venue, gaming, participating in tournaments, cosplaying, eating, talking or gazing, *Civilisation 6* runs in the background: “Throughout the entire day *CIV 6* will be playing an all-bot auto-play game located on the show floor” (PlayThrough, 2017). That very same year MoMA PS1, Museum of Modern Art in New York, hosts an exhibition by Ian Cheng entitled *Emissaries*. The artist describes it as “a video game that plays itself” (MoMA, 2017).

As confusing as the above examples may seem, they depict a recent trend and fascination with games which play themselves, or require minimum engagement from the human player. Disconnected from the actual gaming challenge, the players may vanish into the bliss of spectacular boredom or choose to do something completely else instead.

Self-playing and “idle” games (e.g. *AdVenture Capitalist*, *Clicker Heroes*, or *Dreeps*, amongst many others) have left the gaming and academic community puzzled. After all, until now they have been primarily understood as objects to be actively engaged with, conflicts to be resolved, and meaningful actions to be taken (Huizinga, 1949; Caillois, 1961; Crawford, 1982; Juul, 2003, Salen & Zimmerman 2003). But digital games are not only the actions of human operators but equally so, those of machines, who may act in response to human players as well as independently of them (Galloway, 2006).

As helpful as the shift of perspective from an anthropo- to an “algo-centric” one is, self-playing games still remain problematic. Most of them are designed with a human audience in mind. How then to understand this gamic schizophrenia or ludic paradox? How to make sense of games that we (mostly) don’t play?

This presentation will map out a possible avenue to study self-playing games, sometimes also referred to as zero-player games (Björk & Juul 2012). In an attempt to analyse this new form of play or what is here framed as

(dis)play, the author will draw on Robert Pfaller's and Slavoj Žižek's concept of interpassivity developed to balance out the prevailing discourse on interactivity (Pfaller, 1996, 2009, 2011; Žižek, 2002).

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Discourse on the presence of games in Polish libraries

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The ongoing discussion on games curation, present in game studies, quite often leads to the conclusion that libraries may have a potential for effective preservation and sharing of different types of games and game-related practices (Barwick, Dearnley, & Muir 2011; Winget, 2011; Maier, 2015). As Garda (2014) points out, in case of Poland there is currently no broader, systematic, institutional effort to maintain games as a part of a national cultural heritage, but of all types of Polish cultural institutions, public libraries system seems to be a subject of laws most conveniently allowing for taking such a role. Most promising characteristics and conditions would be the omnipresence of public libraries (over ten thousands in the whole country, at least one in each municipality) (Budyńska & Jezierska 2015; Ciechorski, 2010), law of legal deposit, under which the games published in Poland also fall (Garda, 2014; Ustawa z dnia 7 listopada 1996 r. o obowiązkowych egzemplarzach bibliotecznych, 1996), statutory obligation to meet the cultural needs of society and to participate in the dissemination of culture (Ustawa z dnia 27 czerwca 1997 r. o bibliotekach, 1997), competences of library staff regarding maintenance, description and sharing of different types of cultural goods (Barwick et al., 2011), and gradual merging of libraries and public cultural centres (Lizewski 2012).

At the same time prognoses for the further development of libraries (Adams 2009; Tarkowski & Bendyk, 2011; Kasprzak, 2013), as well as research on library users' expectations (Skowrońska, 2014) and their culture-consuming practices (Koryś, Kopeć, Zasacka, & Chymkowski, 2017) show that games could be a desirable addition to libraries' offer for reasons ranging from "making libraries truly contemporary institutions", through promotional, financial, social, and educational motives, to better fulfillment of the libraries' mission of preserving the cultural heritage. A query through the catalogues of different types of public libraries (from National Library of Poland, through voivodeships' public libraries, to medium and small public libraries functioning on the county and municipality levels) shows, that indeed, games are already present in the Polish public library system.

But while game scholars and library professionals discuss among themselves the problem of usefulness of libraries for games, and of games for libraries, libraries also communicate with other types of institutions, with which they cooperate, as well as with the library patrons. Some of Polish public libraries publicly announce presence of games in their collections and of game related activities in their space. Such announcements may take different forms, from simple inclusion of games in library catalogue to whole widely advertised game-themed events. Regardless of scale, the tone of the messages also varies, suggesting different attitudes towards the presence and proper place of games in libraries.

In my presentation I would like to take a look on this specific part of discourse on games and their place in Polish cultural landscape. How is the presence of games in libraries justified? Who is the target audience for games present in libraries? Are games treated as an equally important part of collections as other media, or are they presented as a way to promote a more traditional role of libraries, i.e. place of contact with literature? Does the problem of games as a medium in need of maintenance, research, and sharing appears at all?

The research will follow the approach of the discourse analysis, systematic study of language (texts) and its relations to other elements of the social process (Fairclough, 2013). Analysed data will consist of websites and social media channels of several public libraries from Lesser Poland voivodeship (Lesser Poland Voivodeship Public Library, Library of Krakow main department and ca. 3 of its branches, ca. 3 county level and ca. 3 municipality level public libraries outside of Krakow), with further focus on content like “library mission” sections, lists of offered services and products, invitations to events, and other forms of promotion of game-related collections and activities.

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Ludo-narrative disspes

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The goal of this article is to unearth one largely overlooked socio-cultural factor that drastically influences our capacity to incorporate (Calleja, 2011) ourselves in diverse story-game experiences. This factor is discussed as ludo-narrative disspes (Lat. *spēs*, “hope”), that is, a clash between expected game-story elements and their experienced actualizations.

The concept draws from Donald Hebb’s (1949) groundbreaking neuropsychological theory, which introduced an expectation-based model of pleasure and motivation: “The animal must perceive his own posture and his place in relation to the goal; and his behavior must be affected by this perception as much as by his anticipation, expectancy, or sight [...] In this, as I shall try to show, there is a clue to the sources of motivation, and pleasure” (p. 155, 233).

To Hebb, a fundamental component of motivation and pleasure is the ratio between what the animal expects and what the animal actually experiences. One of his recurring examples is prose fiction; its diverse forms setting different expectations for the reader, and the same expectations greatly affecting the readers’ motivation to read as well as their pleasure of reading.

This theoretical discovery was shown to play a significant role in the development of human achievement motivations in general; not least in the seminal work by McClelland (1953) who conclude that “the types of expectation involved in an achievement motive should lead to an exploration of different types of achievement motivation” (p. 331). Expectations define not only how people experience, but also what people end up experiencing, and to what motivational degree.

While this subject-object relationship got eventually generalized as “genre” in the humanities from literary (e.g. Swales, 1990) and film studies (e.g. Altman, 1999) to game research (e.g. Järvinen, 2007), its phenomenological complexity is scarcely explored as a psycho-aesthetic element. This becomes a critical lack especially in the study of storygames, most of which are often classified as simple “hybrids” with little concern how the awareness of such (unquestionable) ontological hybridity affects the phenomenological experience of reading-play.

To illustrate the case in practice, the article shows how ludo-narrative disspes resonates with the evolution, reception, and community development within the so-called classic adventure games (e.g. Fernández-Vara, 2009; Salter, 2010; Lessard, 2013) in which integrated puzzles function as the sole ludic component. As the dominant critical press and gaming culture has overlooked these specific storygames as “not gameful enough” for a long time by now (see Moulthrop, 1999), the committed consumers of classic adventure games have come to adjust their expectations according to the literary excess, thus avoiding ludo-narrative disspes with a refined spes.

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This choice is blank. Dialogue structures as a medium for player avatar rivalry

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The main theme of my presentation will be the dialogue systems and their elements, as well as mechanics used both to get player's input and to deliver them information about the gameworld. Researching mostly adventure and role playing games, I will structure and analyze said elements focusing on how they create a dynamic opposition – player's intention and possibility space on the one side, avatar's autonomy and agency on the other. The dividing line in this rivalry is the one drawn by the relation between the player, avatar and player character, creating interesting narrative and rhetoric tools.

Dialogue is a key concept in video games ever since the first text-based adventure games were being created. There is an alluring side to this player-parser-gameworld communication, and it is freedom inducing and restrictive at the same time. And although examples of natural language dialogue systems in contemporary games are scarce and can be found mostly in small, indie, the descendant of said mechanics is extremely common and lively evolving. The popularity of a dialogue tree results from the fact that it is undoubtedly easier to create and script such a mechanic than to indulge in natural language processing. However, it also creates a tempting possibility for character exposition and tames player's chaotic interference in the gameworld. Such design choices set in motion many changes, not only gradually stripping the player of their control over the avatar's actions and decisions, but also – by empowering and emancipating the player character – finding a way of conveying narrative information through structures and dynamics not available to other media.

For that to be possible, naturally, dialogue structures needed to take a long and rocky road. In the beginning, since their role was one of exploring and not deciding, dialogue trees were mostly a numbered list of hilarious responses, written to be seen and experimented with, functioning much like the items in the adventure game's inventory. In time, they began resembling sinister whispers in the player character's ear. Time became a significant factor, not only giving the player an external stressor, but also catalyzing the metamorphosis from the list-like structure to the one of an actual tree graph

– true dialogue labyrinth, an independent ergodic structure inside the game itself.

There are few elements of gameplay in which – paradoxically – so much is enforced onto the player while, at the same time, posing as an element of choice and freedom. Ludonarrative dissonance, trite at this point, can feast on dialogue structures without any repentance. It is in dialogue structures, that we can find the most interesting polyphony and the direst competition, the newest milestone in which lies the emancipation of the player character from the structure of dialogue itself – both in mainstream titles and in small independent productions.

As noted earlier, dialogue structures are an interesting game mechanics when confronted with the relations between the player, the avatar and the player character – which are quite nuanced and have a need for an appropriate vocabulary. Because of that I am inclined to use Daniel Vella's (2015) concept of playable figure and proposed by Ea Christina Willumsen (2016) concepts of character autonomy and automated avatar actions. However, to be able to properly observe and analyze phenomena related to dialogue structures: the player character's rebellion and reclaimed voice, additional, more design-focused vocabulary needs to be constructed – one based on tools and definitions that are already in hands of game developers, expanded by concepts referring to this dynamic player-avatar relation. A proposition of such a vocabulary will be addressed in my presentation.

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Games and Utopia: Between game studies and utopian studies

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In my paper I will try to present various places in which the discourse of game studies and the discourse of utopian studies meet and supplement each other. The main problem of my presentation is the relationship between virtual worlds of video games and the concept of utopia. The paper will thus aim to present a wide variety of different definitions and theories of utopia, which seem indispensable in order to further the relationship between video game and virtual reality research and multitude of utopian studies discourses.

In order to show how utopian studies theories can be utilized to enrich video game research I will be basing my argumentation on the concept of the magic circle widely criticized (Calleja, 2015, p. 213; Perron & Arsenault 2009, pp. 109-131; Pergman & Jakobsson 2006, pp. 15-22; Juul, 2005, pp. 106-107) and defended (Stenros, 2012, p. 1; Petry, 2013, p. 47) in video game studies. The main focus of my paper shall be the hermeneutic reading of the concept of the magic circle to show that its usage entails such problems as: the border, the space of the other (Maj 2015, p. 45), change, transformation (Gadamer, 2006, pp. 110-111) and allotopia (Maj, 2015, p. 36). This wide spectrum of notions can be seen as a solid foundation for developing a twofold understanding of utopianism of video games. From the point of view of classical, constructivist and structural theories of utopia (Sargent, 1994, p. 9; Juszczuk, 2014, p. 59; Blaim, 2012) the virtual worlds of video games would be understood as utopias if they fulfil a specific set of conditions which apply to this type of fiction. It would also mean that video game worlds constitute better or worse alternatives to our social reality as Castronova depicted in his work on synthetic worlds (Castronova, 2007, pp. 90-104; Castronova, 2005, p. 148). From the perspective of the poststructural theories of utopia (Jameson, 2005; Levitas, 2013; Moylan 2014; Maj, 2016) games would not have to fulfil any specific conditions, as this approach focuses not on utopia as a specific genre, but as an impulse and desire present in all forms of culture. Researching video games in this theoretical context would mean looking for certain aspects of video game worlds, rules, mechanics etc. in order to show how these aspects can be understood and interpreted as symptoms of utopian desire inscribed in them.

In order to summarise this study I will try to present how two different modes of reading utopia can be utilized to construct a set of interpretative questions for video game research. I hope to show that the utopian problematic can enrich video game studies as it is strictly linked with issues concerning the critique of ideology, economy, politics and social themes present in video games. Some of these question have already been posed by various game studies scholars but the perspective of utopian studies opens up the field of game analysis to new and innovative approaches to said problems. I am only signalling that my paper will build up on the present state of research concerning the concept of the magic circle. The main objective is to propose this notion as an entry point to reading video games in the utopian studies perspective, as one important aspect of utopian studies is also its focus on analysis and interpretation of various texts of culture, that is why it is applied both to classical literary genres, as well as to all forms of new media.

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”Back to Reality”: The case against ludo-fictionalism

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Notions of ludic immersion and games as fictions have dominated the philosophical and aesthetic discussions about (especially computer and video) games from the start. ‘Immersion’ has since been questioned (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) and strongly criticized (Calleja, 2011), but the problematic notion that games are fictional (that ludic representations point to fictional content) is still current. However, it soon became obvious that (especially) multiplayer games represented a new kind of social reality in which the fictional aspects had to share the arena with social behaviour that had little to do with fiction, e.g. Castronova’s discovery (2001) that *EverQuest* money had real value. Similarly, games like Minecraft can be used to build complex machineries – even computer games like Pong – which, due to their technical reality, cannot be classified as fictional. Also, games can have a documentary frame of reference (e.g. *The Oregon Trail*, 1974), which leads to the observation that it is necessary to distinguish between games with a fictional and a documentary referentiality (for an excellent discussion of ludo-documentary representation see Fullerton, 2008). Indeed, much of the later claims of game fictionality seem to conflate the notions of fiction and representation (e.g. Juul, 2005). If the frame of reference of a game can be either fictional or documentary, then game representations cannot be fictional per se. To many games researchers in the 2000s, the games-as-make-believe theory of Kendall Walton (1990) led them to assume that games were a kind of make-believe and therefore fictional, but all games are of course not games of make-believe; and so this paper will argue that Walton has been critically misunderstood, and that his theory do not apply to games in general, or even to games in virtual worlds. These games quite explicitly focalize the objects that players can operate, and so they are not, as the Waltonista claim, Waltonian props, but rather very concrete virtual tools with very concrete functions and affordances (a prop is a nonfunctional object whose only necessary property is a resemblance to the real one, in which case I could use a shotgun, or even a stick as a rifle when I play *CounterStrike*, but I cannot).

With the recent entry of analytical philosophers into game studies (e.g. Tavinor, 2009; Meskin & Robson, 2012) ludic fictionalism has entered yet another, and unfortunately more insular phase, where the philosophers usually only focus on the works of other philosophers, and are primarily trying to establish the concept of fiction in a new empirical field, while ignoring alternative perspectives and terms like virtual and simulation. In the paper, expanding on Aarseth (2007), I will address their claims about games and fictionality, and show how the ludo-fictional hypothesis fails to explain problematic or even obvious examples like the above.

Rather than relying on fictional content to involve the player in a game of make-believe, games in virtual worlds engulf their players by offering real, but nonphysical alternatives as instruments of play and exploration. There is nothing primarily fictional about a virtual gun in a computer game; its empirical properties allow the same kinds of manipulation that a computer user has available when, say they are accessing a PDF in a peer-review process. Neither object is physically tangible, but both exist in ways that a fictional object would not, and they are not any kind of prop, but instead represent themselves, the same way a physical gun or manuscript would. In insisting on the fictionality of virtual objects, the ludo-fictional thesis fails to grasp the most crucial ontological turn in our time: from material to informational reality. It is the empirical reality of games that makes us lose ourselves in them, the sense of actually being there, doing that.

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The afterlife of MMOs: Abandoned games as ruins

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The subject of ruins in the video games has already been raised on several different occasions (Watts, 2011; Vella, 2011; Lowe, 2013; Fraser, 2015). However, most of the existing analyses focus on the meaning and exploration of the digital representations of abandoned cities, modern urban wastelands or the remnants of long-lost civilizations. But what if the digital ruins were actual ruins and not only predefined images of desolated places? The abandoned MMO games seem to be perfect examples of such phenomenon. They were once highly populated virtual environments, full of life and adventures, but in time they became empty, depopulated shells. Most of them have been deleted from the servers and survived only in the players' memory and discussions. However, some of them still exist in a form of ruin-like afterlife.

To better understand the complex phenomena such as abandoned MMOs, we should not focus solely on the object of a game itself and its environment. Such game spaces, despite their emptiness, constitute dynamic processes, rather than static objects, and the analysis demands a theoretical approach that would capture this. Therefore, in my presentation I will focus both on the process of transformation of MMO world to an abandoned one, and the outcome of it. As main theoretical approaches, other than those relating to the context of ruins, I will use critical thinking of Bruno Latour and Tadeusz Kantor. By employing Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, I will be able to show how video games are in fact assembled in dynamic relational networks as one of actants, and only in this constantly re-enacted connection with others they can sustain their active status. The abandoned MMOs are actants that lost almost all of their alliances and became weak (Latour, 2005). In this moment it transforms into a different state of existence, which Tadeusz Kantor called the poor object. The object becomes poor when it loses all functionalities that were imposed on it by a human. This transition draws it closer to the reality of the lowest rank, which shows object as it is – with no strings attached (Kantor, 2004; Domańska, 2008). From then on the poor object is autonomous and, for example, can become an art form.

In my presentation, I will focus not only on the process of this transition from fully functioning, strong actor to poor and broken object, but also on the outcome of this transformation – the changes in the player's experience and the popular discourse about empty MMO game spaces. The analysis will cover three main areas of research. The first one will concern the fluid materiality of the digital nature of the video game object and the possible perception of abandoned virtual environments as ruin-like structures. This part will lead to questions about preservation of these worlds and about how they function in the secondary circulation after their official death: as only the memory of their existence relayed through collective discussions, or as the preserved museum-like objects. The third part will focus on the feeling of the uncanny which accompanies the exploration of the abandoned MMOs environments. I am interested not only in player's experience and perception of these worlds, but also in aesthetic properties that transform analyzed games into poor, ruin-like objects. Therefore, my research will be combination of my own autoethnographic explorations of these spaces with the supporting contextual analysis of content published by the players (blog posts, YouTube video, reddit comments).

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Games, genres and infra-games: what are we looking at when we address games?

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Despite the fact that most game researchers admit that the notion of a “game” is elusive and that defining it may never be possible, it is rather hard to imagine the field of game studies abandoning it completely. Even though eliminating folk notions from academic discourse is a standard methodological practice, doing away with a term so predominant in popular discourse may seem too radical. Still, as we are going to argue, dethroning the notion of “game” from its default ontological position may end up being very beneficial.

It seems that the conceptual problems (such as the definition of games, some of their elements, e.g. mechanics or game ports)¹ which plagued academic discourse recently started to affect other parties – developers, critics and players – because the language we use to conceptualize games lags behind profound ontological changes that we witness. There are three seemingly unrelated phenomena, which are responsible for this change: the rise of early access games, the idea of “games as service” and the elusive notion of “additional content”. It can be argued that many contemporary games have no actual “beginning” and “ending” moments which could delineate their existence. They oftentimes start as barely functional stubs, reach a fleeting moment of “being complete” and immediately slide into the “post-release” phase. From this point of view, focusing on the smallest moment (the release) seems to be counterproductive. It becomes increasingly hard to understand the reasons why two pieces of software should be treated rather as separate objects and not as two phases of the same bigger object. Why is *Destiny 2* a new game and not only a content update? Why should *Rust* be treated as the same game if it changed most of its properties during the development? The result of this ontological shift is the imminent change

¹ See Aarseth & Calleja (2015), Juul (2003), Newman (2012), Swalwell (2009), Stucky (2014) for different views on the categorization problems associated with games and their elements.

of popular game criticism practices. In order to reflect the processual nature of current games, several popular gaming outlets introduced processual reviews (Polygon's, 2017). We believe that methodological shifts have to happen in game studies as well, and that the best way to achieve it is to change the ontology that backs up our theories: from mid-level ontology to a combination of macro-level and micro-level ontologies.

The macro-level of description of games is a level which does away with single games and looks at bigger sets which may, or may not span over time. The notion of "genre" can be understood as an example of a macro-level concept. From this point of view the game genre (e.g. team based first person shooter) can be treated as the default object of study and particular games can be seen only as parts of this object (parts, which may not be even worthy of special attention). The micro level does away with differentiating between games and focuses only on their singular aspects. The notion of a "game mechanic" (or infra-game) is an example of a micro-level concept. From this point of view, a single mechanic is a default object and particular games can be seen as sets of mechanics. Needless to say, both concepts are problematic in their own right (see Smedstad, Sunnanå, & Aarseth, 2003; Sicart, 2008), but the point is that it might be better to redirect our conceptual resources to fixing them rather, than the increasingly blurry notion of a "game". By tracing genres as evolving sets of infra- games we can better observe game evolution and game history, and their importance for cultural history in general.

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On silvicity and ludic silvas

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Composite ludic artifacts, such as *Frog Fractions* (Twinbeard Studios, 2012) or *The Beginner's Guide* (Everything Unlimited, 2015), confound game critics by transcending genre conventions, thus inviting denigrative terms, e.g. “not-game”, “walking simulator”, or “spoof”. This paper argues against such perfunctory categorizations. Drawing from literary criticism – particularly work by Ryszard Nycz (1996; cf. Bolecki, 1986) – “silvicity” is proposed as a new term for use within game studies, and the aforementioned artifacts are recognized as belonging to a broader category of “ludic silvas”.

Hybrid artworks are notoriously difficult to classify, due to their heterogeneity (i.e. generical complexity) eluding, and thus inviting critical revision of established genre conventions (cf. Garda, 2016). This principle holds true for videogames and other digital artifacts (Ensslin, 2014) just as much as it does for literature (Nycz, 1996). Such “improper”, “impure” works are often denied the very name of “games”, instead meeting with denigrative or negatory – yet sometimes embraced (Samyn, 2010; Fredner, 2014) – terms, for instance “walking simulators”, “spoofs”, “anti-” or “not-games”, vaguely mirroring the scholarly debate on “gameness” and (video)game definitions (cf. Juul, 2003; Karhulahti, 2015a, 2015b; Stenros, 2016).

Particular problems arise when composite ludic artifacts are considered – definition-defying, transgressive in terms of genre and gameplay conventions, as well as auto- and metareferential due to metaludic devices (Ensslin, 2014) employed. Best known among such “troublesome” works are *Frog Fractions* (Twinbeard Studios, 2012) and *The Beginner's Guide* (Everything Unlimited, 2015). While the latter is generally considered a prime example of “walking sims”, the former at best invites comparisons with Nintendo's WarioWare “minigame compilation” series – not unlike a few other composite artifacts, e.g. *Vidiot Game* (GZ Storm, 2012; cf. Grayson, 2012), *Soda Drinker Pro / Vivian Clark* (Snowrunner Games, 2016; cf. *Secrets*, 2016) and *Glittermitten Grove* (Mostly Tigerproof, 2016) / *Frog Fractions 2* (Twinbeard Studios, 2016; cf. Hawkins, 2016).

While overtly idiosyncratic, all listed games share several features. For one thing, each of them at least initially poses as something it is not, either ostensibly (as in the cases of *Vidiot Game*), otherwise rather subtly manipu-

lating the player (The Beginner's Guide) or simply hiding within another game (a trick utilized both by Glittermitten Grove / Frog Fractions 2 and Soda Drinker Pro / Vivian Clark). Furthermore, each of them exhibits the heterogeneity and the topos of varietas by displaying multitude of (mini) games and game-like segments – unlike those in WarioWare, not just short and zany, but seemingly unpolished, fragmented, flawed, or even purposefully unplayable. Another common aspect of aforementioned titles seems to be their vexing relation with videogames and ludic conventions – frequently evoked and problematized, either directly or indirectly, through narrative commentary or imitation and transformation.

Interestingly, Polish literary theorist Ryszard Nycz recognized notably similar features in what he called “sylwy współczesne” – “modern silvas” (1996; cf. Bolecki, 1986), evoking silvae: a miscellaneous literary “collection” genre popular throughout Europe between 16th and 18th centuries (Skwarczyńska, 1970; De Bruyn, 2001; Pisarski, 2010). Each attempt at applying a term drawn from literary criticism to game studies requires critical self-reflection as to not to confuse the disparate subjects of study (Aarseth, 1997, 2012). With that in mind, this paper argues for the adoption of Nycz's notion of “silvicity” for use in the game studies as not just descriptive, but also explanatory. It further proposes that “ludic silvas” should be considered a proper (trans)generic term in discussion of certain class of composite ludic artifacts, encompassing i.e. The Beginner's Guide and Frog Fractions.

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GAME HISTORY

The French New Wave: Political and social issues in French digital games, 1984-1993

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Despite numerous publications about the history of digital games in the United States and Japan, there are few studies which aim to explore the former European trends in gaming design. For example, the French ludic industry remains unknown to the vast majority of game researchers. However, it was this industry where a certain tendency emerged, ranging from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s and relying on political and social issues. Blanchet (2015) labels such movement as “French Touch”, marking technical excellence and the absence of references to national culture as its foundations. Nonetheless, the overutilisation of this term in French press omits the fact that it previously appeared in an unfavourable manner in British journals, as a result of treating games from France as “weird”. This paper suggests a more suitable name for the movement – the French New Wave – as a reference to the European New Cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s. Here, the term “New Wave” is understood as an opposition to the “Old Wave” of previous poor French action games which imitated the American and Japanese megahits from the early 1980s. An article published by Delcourt (1984) in the “Tilt” gaming magazine, giving a critical insight into previous development practices, could be seen as a forecast of the movement. The French New Wave relied more on intellectual adventure games than on the action-centered ones, providing numerous references to actual events and issues with which France had to cope during the 1980s, like political affairs, economic stagnation and postcolonial critique of the past. As a closure of the movement, one should suggest the failure of the French Socialist Party in parliamentary election in 1993, the period which coincided in time with rapid abandonment of political themes in French digital games. Several productions from 1984 to 1993 were analyzed, including those from such studios as Froggy Software, Cobrasoft, Lankhor, Koktel Vision, ERE Informatique, and Delphine Software. The results of the research allow to state that despite frequent differences in setting – ranging from modern crime to dystopian science-fiction – the games of the French New Wave share a similar look on the modern society as immersed in the existential crisis, where the ongoing nomadism, uncertainty of life

and atrophy of human relationships began to emerge as the signs of what Bauman (2000) terms “the liquid modernity”. Given the fact that neither visuals nor specific setting but the mood of moment distincts the French New Wave among historical game movements, the French game studies – and the European ones as a whole – should pay a better attention to cultural circumstances which shape national gaming industries.

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The timelessness of advergames

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“Play to win, but enjoy the fun.” – David M. Ogilvy

Advergames are specifically designed digital games funded by a client (an advertiser), primarily serving to reach the advertiser’s marketing goal either as a standalone communication tool or as a part of an advertising campaign. Simply put, advergames are digital games which were primarily designed for promotional purposes (Mago, 2016, p. 17). Their history (Bogost, 2007; Marolf, 2007; Purswani, 2010) goes back to 70’s when games were inspired by Hollywood movies, but the real branded games’ era started in late 70’s with the arcade *Datsun 280 ZZZAP* (Dave Nutting Associates, 1976). Later there were even bigger adverage projects (mostly released as physical copies) from *Tooth Protectors* (DSD/Camelot, 1983) and *Chester Cheetah: Wild Wild Quest* (KANEKO, 1993) to *Playboy: The Mansion* (Cyberlore Studios, 2005), *Sneak King* (Blitz Games, 2006), *Duty Calls* (People Can Fly, 2011) and others. Many of them became iconic between gamers. For example *Pepsiman* (KID, 1999), the most famous Pepsi Cola adverage released for PlayStation and one of the most famous advergimes ever based on 3D endless running (nevertheless the game has actually got the end, it meets the other criteria of the genre) with soft-drink mascot trying to avoid obstacles (Pepsi branded), is getting used to playing even in present. It has got own leaderboard on Speedrun.com (last played less than a month ago) and was also one of game played on Summer Games Done Quick 2016. According to stated, digital games, even advergimes, have a great potential to become timeless. In the case of advergimes it brings benefit also for involved brand, if it still exists and did not radically change its appearance.

The timelessness is an element of each star brand, means built for eternity (Vedpurisvar, 2009; Wetlaufer, 2001). Mainemelis and Dionysiou (2015, p. 136) define timelessness as a complex experience associated with an intense state of consciousness in which total involvement in the task at hand results in loss of self-consciousness and the sense of time, and it is manifested in four dimensions: immersion in the task, time distortion, a sense of mastery, and a sense of transcendence. These features are typical for digital games, just take a look at the world-wide popular, iconic and

undoubtedly timeless game *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo R&D4, 1985). But a popularity is not the only aspect generating the timeless character of advergames. Many of them were games created and playable for obsolete technologies (whether popular or not), which J. Newman and I. Simons (2009) calls inevitable and natural victims of the market. But their owners, gamers, make a considerable emotional investment in them, thus there is a high chance they will spent their own resources (time, skills, etc.) to keep them “alive”, means still playable and played. For example gamers on their own created the unofficial portable PC version of mentioned Pepsiman with the built-in automatic PS emulator. Several organizations work within similar intentions like those gamers, but they do it with the formal aim of digital games archiving, preservation and museology, because advergames are digital games as well. For example the internet archive Archive.org provides a playable version of the 7up advergames *Cool Spot* (Virgin Games, 1993) through online Sega emulator.

The aim of the study is an examination of advergames’ timelessness based on a comparison of advergames across their history up to the present, taking into account their design elements like a genre, game mechanics, a visual outlook and a brand implementation way. The participation of gamers and organizations on advergames’ preservation will be also taken into account.

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Pagan, Gnostic, Abrahamic: religious representation in CRPGs

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In my presentation, I offer a historical analysis of the main trends in representing religion in computer role-playing games (CRPGs). I use idea of “procedural rhetoric” proposed by Bogost (2007) for ludological part of my work. And for discussing the narrative component I rely upon Roland Barthes and his “Mythologies”. I believe that temples, priests, gods and acts of faith presented in CRPGs do not aim to create a working simulation of some imagined religion, but instead function as “signs” of religious practices. Those signs are interpreted by players according to their own cultural background. Player have to “fill in” lacunas between different signs signifying the religion practices, using their own knowledge about fantastic canon. So by analyzing those signs we can get a grasp on how exactly games portrait religions.

We believe that historically there were two main trends in representing religion in RPG. They can be called “pagan” and “gnostic”, though we, of course, do not imply any direct ties between videogames and those traditions. It is also important to mention that those trends are not mutually exclusive. They serve as description of two different modes that can both be present in a single game.

“Pagan” mode emphasize particularly pragmatic form of relationship between mortals and divine. Most obvious example of this mode is *Baldur’s Gate* series (BioWare & Black Isle Studios, 1998-2004). In those games divinity exists as absolutely non-problematized and obviously real source of power. Gods are granting main hero quests and rewards, occupying essentially the same role in the world as kings or innkeepers. While main character or his companions often have some special relationship with divine, those relationships are, again, un-problematized. For example, in ‘Baldur’s Gate’ main character cannot possibly doubt the fact he is the descendent of Bhaal after he discovers this fact on fifth minute of gameplay. On procedural level, this pragmatic reality of gods is reinforced by the idea of “divine magic” available to some classes, or by some similar form of routine divine intervention. It is important to notice that those interventions never have any ethical or even ritual component outside of universal class and time requirements. Gods cannot stop granting spells to those who worship them.

Term “gnostic” is borrowed from books by Bloom (1992) and Davis (2004). Both of those scholars insisted that at the core of modern American culture lies complex of ideas very similar to ancient Gnosticism. In case of fantastic art it is exemplified by prominence of narrative concerning hidden identities and conflict with false gods trying to suppress information about their flaws. Many CRPGs feature such stories, allowing player to discover that powerful god of imagined universe is a liar, e.g. *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2002), was misunderstood by his followers (Arcanum) or simply acts as an antagonist (Gothic). Main characters, at the same time, are often revealed as “true” gods. In full accordance with the gnostic ideas, they are able to deliver salvation that “false” gods cannot provide. Procedurally this sentiment is reinforced by the fact that priests and temple in games relying on this mode do not have any powers that cannot be duplicated by other, “mundane” means.

In conclusion I would like to give a brief overview of the game *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (BioWare Edmonton, 2014). I believe that in this game BioWare managed to deviate from two modes mentioned above, building relationships with divine not around pragmatic need (pagan mode) or question of truth and identity (gnostic mode) but around the problem of faith. This allows us to observe an emergence of another mode, which can be, of course, speculatively, dubbed “Abrahamic”.

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MenskBand: the first (and the last) subversive Belarusian video game

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Mensk, or MenskBand is historically the first video game in Belarusian language, set in authentic Belarusian environment based on the realities of late 1990s – early 2000s, and also the most prominent political game in Belarus. It was most likely created around 1998: it has been circulating among Belarusian students for many years, and, as recent interviews and questionnaires show, is still remembered in certain communities. Although MenskBand was a singular case, its cultural influence and subversive potential was remarkable, and it remains noticeable after 18 or 19 years of its history.

The aim of this talk is to explain cultural significance of this digital artifact by applying three related analytical lenses: the historical and cultural context in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe, a possible interpretation from fan studies – as this game is also a piece of fan art dedicated to the cult Belarusian rock artist – and finally, in a wider perspective of subversive media.

We base our first part on publications about the history of videogames in Eastern Europe and compare Belarusian political games to situation in Poland (Tobojka, 2015) and Czechoslovakia (Švelch, 2013, 2010), as well as bring up examples from Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. We come to the conclusion that the appearance of MenskBand generally corresponds to the dynamics of video game development in the region – only with a 10 years delay. We argue that local indie game development have been interrupted by rapid growth of commercial game industry.

The second part answers the question about the subversive potential of the game as fan art, following M. Hills's critique of H. Jenkins in "Fan Cultures" (Hills, 2002). We argue that the game was created by so-called "fan-academics" and should be analyzed in this, rather limited, perspective. In this part, we also explain the game fiction, as it is driven by the culture of rock music fans in Belarus in 1990s – 2000s, and show a video of the game play.

In the third part, we present the data obtained through our questionnaires and interviews with players who still remember the game, as well as exclusive anonymous commentaries from its possible creators. We point at

specific methods of uncontrolled circulation that made the game “viral” in the times of dial-up Internet, and compare them to the ethos of a hacker as described by McKenzie Wark (2012). Finally, we raise the question about the possible influence of the game on the society through values that it translated, and explain it with the paradox of the Belarusian society being “settled” and “unsettled” at the same time (Swidler, 1986).

The political situation in Belarus have changed very little since MenskBand was created. Many would argue that many instances of contemporary Belarusian culture have degraded, fallen into arrested development or heavily commercialized. “The Mensk game” remains an idealized memory about the times when political changes seemed possible and independent national culture felt like home and not like stigma. A number of coincidental factors immortalized this, rather basic and derivative game, and we are still waiting for its successors to appear.

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Exolon's eastward journey: Informal distribution of games in 1980s Czechoslovakia

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As Ramon Lobato has written of film, “in many settings, informality is a norm, not an aberration.” (Lobato, 2012) Throughout the history of games, many regions have been left out of official distribution channels and were mostly supplied by grey and black markets. Informal distribution should therefore be at the center of local histories in many regions, including Central and Eastern Europe. The topic has been, to an extent, examined by the growing body of work on cracker and demo scene by authors like Reunanen or Wasiak. However, this work mostly focuses on Western Europe and the Commodore 64 platforms and centers on the cracker community rather than the end users or the artifact (Reunanen, 2014; Reunanen, Wasiak, & Botz, 2015; Vuorinen, 2007; Wasiak, 2012). I will instead focus on the context of Czechoslovakia and its dominant platform, the ZX Spectrum. Following the lead of film distribution scholars Lobato and Brian Larkin, I will analyze how the artifact has been transformed before reaching players behind the Iron Curtain (Larkin, 2008; Lobato, 2012).

By the latter half of the 1980s, tens of thousands of people in the 15-million country owned microcomputers. There was no software market – software, mostly on cassette tapes, instead circulated unofficially through an efficient informal distribution network. The overwhelming majority of games circulated in multiple pirated versions, often imported from the West via Yugoslavia and Poland. As games travelled across Europe, users removed their copy protection, added “pokes” for infinite lives, appended their credits, or even drew new loading screens. The games were stripped of original paratextual elements like cover illustrations and instructions; and the materiality of the original was replaced with improvised material culture of homemade cassette tape compilations.

To explain the workings of informal distribution into and within Czechoslovakia, this paper will follow the story of one particular title: the 1987 British action game *Exolon* for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum (Cecco, 1987). Published at the peak of the Spectrum era, it was a typical hit game of the time, popular enough to spread behind the Iron Curtain in several different versions and along various distribution routes. Based on paratextual

indices collected from online archives, as well as interviews and archival material, the paper will attempt to reconstruct its journey into the country, and more specifically into the collection of one of my interviewees. While it is impossible to pinpoint the exact paths of individual copies of games, I will present several possible scenarios.

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Blast from the past – how forgotten mechanics shape VR games

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Virtual reality is often heralded as a revolutionary technology. It is supposed to be something groundbreaking and paradigm shifting. This attitude can be especially seen in popular discourse and marketing materials related to VR games and experiences (see Shubber, 2014; Adams, 2016). It is evident in the case of reviews of games and editorials both of which can be understood as good probes of common expectations towards the technology. It is not uncommon for VR games to be criticized for being too similar to regular, „flat” games or to use the new technology too sparingly (for an example of this see Klepek, 2016).

One of the key reasons why such expectations are created is that the existing language of video games (as varied and flexible as it is) often seems to be ill suited for VR experiences. The most striking example of this incompatibility of contemporary game design techniques and VR is the problem with nausea that many players experience in VR and that is often associated with the camera and avatar movement in virtual space (for older studies of the phenomena see Parker, 1992; Kolasinski, 1995; Merhi, Faugloire, Flanagan, & Stoffregen, 2007; for a review of literature on the subject see Barrett, 2004). It may seem that the inability of repeating or reusing standard game design techniques should force the creators to discover new ideas.

And yet, ironically, the most prevalent way of solving VR problems is actually using old, often completely forgotten techniques. This leads to a surprising revival of old forgotten genres and styles of play. I analyze three examples of this phenomenon. The first example, exemplified by *Batman Arkham VR* (Rocksteady Studios, 2016) is using the traditional point and click interface similar to games produced by Cryo Interactive in the 2000s. In these games the user was typically able to freely move the head but not the body of the avatar. The second example, exemplified by *Resident Evil 7* (Capcom, 2017) and *Crystal Rift* (Psytec Games, 2016) concerns using the fixed (90, 45 or 30 degree) turning rate similar to techniques used in early first person RPG games such as *Dungeon Master* (FTL Games, 1987) or *Eye of The Beholder* (Westwood Associates, 1990).

The third example is the revival of isometric perspective used in games such as *Wayward Sky* (Uber Entertainment, 2016).

I argue that this phenomenon is the best illustration on why we should never forget about older design philosophies, mechanics and genres as there is no way of predicting the scenarios in which they may be reused. Additionally I point out that using older techniques in new media requires the ability to look past the context in which they originated. This is often very hard as games are, of course, cultural, historical objects. The ability of abstraction from historical context can be best attained by describing games in a formal framework capable of a-temporal re-framing of games. What it means in practice is that the ontological description of games should be capable of recognizing mechanics even if they are redeployed in a completely new medium and created by authors who may not even be aware of its previous history.

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The rules of (fair) play in *Magia i Miecz* and *Portal* tabletop role-playing game magazines

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The presentation focuses on two print magazines published in Poland in the 1990s, that is *Magia i Miecz* (1993-2002) and *Portal* (1999-2003). Both discontinued at the time when on-line blogs and discussion groups overtook the scene, the two long-running nation-wide professional magazines devoted to RPGs influenced the local scene and helped to create a specific style of role-playing in the pre-Internet era. Both magazines could be considered worthy of studies from the game history perspective: they satisfied the demand for RPG-related information (scenarios, guides, reviews, essays etc.) when the Polish tabletop RPG scene had just started to develop rapidly, and while they utilised foreign (specifically English language) materials, they tried to work out an original perspective. No specific and comprehensive analyses have yet been made as to the implicit rules of play suggested in the above-mentioned magazines and the means by which the implicit rules were established and communicated to the readers. The presentation covers research on both magazines, regarding “etiquette, good sportsmanship, and other implied rules of proper game behavior” as expressed on their pages (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 130) and taking into account verbal as well and iconic texts (and their overplay). As Salen and Zimmerman observe, there are situations where “a normally implicit rule is made an explicitly stated, operational rule” and “the boundary between operational and implicit rules can be quite fuzzy” (p. 133). As follows, in *Magia i Miecz* and *Portal* the implicit rules of role-playing were communicated implicitly (could be inferred) and explicitly, turning into operational ones (in the form of direct instructions). Some of the texts concerning the rules of good conduct were prescriptive (that is, stating what the proper behaviour should look like), and some were descriptive (discussing, and more often than not criticising, already existing patterns). For example, as early as in the first issue of *Magia i Miecz* there is a feature by Artur Szyndler, covering explicitly the issue of good v. bad conduct; the text deems *schadenfreude* a negative thing and warns the readers against bleed that may influence characters’ decisions. This could be classified as an explicit and prescriptive statement. On the other hand, the front cover of that

very issue of the magazine, with its depiction of a female warrior holding a sword and wearing heavy plate armour but nearly no cloth on her (exposed) breasts or legs, could be counted in the category of implicitly suggested implicit rules of play, as it communicates a message about female body as an object of male pleasure, thus establishing the male gaze as a norm. The presentation will introduce some notable examples of implicitly and explicitly communicated rules pertaining to what was considered proper gamer behaviour and fair play, specifically with regard to ethics, more specifically – fair play, violence, and sexual harassment. What will also be considered is, however, the lack of explicitly stated discussion of rules on several topics – including the ones listed above. A sub-category of implicit rules that are going to be included in the presentation are the ones verging on regulating social interactions and narrative practices; in other words, the rules that tell the player how to facilitate narration by cooperating with the game master and other players. Finally, the quantitative analysis of the content related to good conduct in *Magia i Miecz* and *Portal* and its distribution in time are going to be presented.

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**GAME INTERPRETATION
AND
CRITICISM**

What is a violent video game?

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My MA thesis from 2016 contained the discourse analysis of video games conducted in order to examine the social perception of video games. One hundred carefully selected Polish Internet articles were analyzed, with a special attention drawn to the collective mental formations and motifs which made a particular video game the topic of the article. The various compilation of documents, which intently did not include specialized and thematic Internet portals, allowed the evaluation of the discourse around the medium which turned out to be rather positive. In short, the following main points were indicated: the benefits of using video games in education, the aid for older people to maintain intellectual abilities, and the promotion of Polish culture abroad (the research coincided with the year of releasing the game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt RED, 2015) which evoked the patriotic narrative of success. The games *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios, 2014) or *Dying Light* (Techland, 2015) also need to be mentioned as they contributed to reinforcing the glory of a Polish developer, too. However, what emerged from the research as particularly interesting were the following metacategories of video games: regular games, educational games, violent games, and online games. These generalizing labels functioned outside particular discursive formations and, as a result, facilitated communication and effective dispute. They were better or worse understood by all participants of the discourse, which made them a little vague and often overused.

In this paper I would like to broadly discuss a violent video game, which is the most interesting and probably the most harmful of all socially constructed metacategories listed in the previous paragraph. Active users and researchers of video games know that this is an artificial category supported by the critics of the medium, ignoring the rating system, and reducing the video game to its single and hyperbolic feature. Unfortunately, some reviewers still use it in their public comments despite disapproval from the academic community. What is more, so-called “black lists” of the most violent video games are published regularly.

The aim of the talk is to introduce the features of a violent video game which emerge from the narrative of the articles, video materials, and Internet rankings. The paper broadens the chosen topic of the MA thesis and presents the original empirical project. The games which are labeled as the

most aggressive and violent will be indicated as well as the institutions/experts engaged in editing the lists of harmful games in Poland. Additionally, the criteria and reasons of criticizing such productions will be reconstructed. The attempt to determine dynamics of the changes in marking particular games as dangerous for (not only young) gamers will be also made.

The paper is recommended especially for those who are interested in the social perception of video games which goes beyond the narrow circle of specialists and dedicated gamers. The qualitative analysis of the existing materials results in numerous interesting remarks and inspirations for further research as well as for planning educational and promotional activities connected with digital culture.

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The aesthetic worthlessness of flower

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This analysis of the video game „Flower” explains how it is kitsch, rather than a work of art. Flower was critically acclaimed (Santiago, 2009; Nicholson, 2009), and many consider it a rebuttal (Burden, 2012) of Roger Ebert’s position (Ebert, 2010a; 2010b) that videogames can never be art. Subsequently, it was the first game to be appended to the permanent game collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The blindness of both curators and critics towards Flower’s dubious artistic merit is both philosophically problematic and damaging to the reputation of art game designers.

Thomas Kulka’s (1996) equation to determine aesthetic worthlessness provides an established basis from which to conclude that Flower is kitsch. Negative (a), positive (b) and neutral (c) aesthetic alterations to its design indicate a lack of artistic merit. This judgment can be arrived at by applying the formula $(a-b) \times (a+b+c) \times (1/(c/(a+b)))$.

The same result can be obtained by its comparison to kitsch artifacts of other media (Kinkade) and fine/applied art (Monet), respectively. Kulka (1996) acknowledges such transmedial comparisons of aesthetic phenomena that also hold up game designers to honourable standards. The following analogies and aesthetic theories indicate Flower to be kitsch:

The developers prioritize pleasure and emotions over beauty. Their avoidance of what Kant (2015) terms as disinterestedness leads to a reversed causation: pleasure in the object results in the aesthetic judgment and not vice versa. Flower resorts to transparent symbolism, possesses derivative interest and lacks sincere meaning or ambition to reveal something about the world (Friedland, 1990). Its level design and the ‘avatar’ are fungible; the game can barely be improved or deteriorated (Kulka, 1996). The starting scenario – atmosphere of the apartment and health of the plant – is exaggerated to the point of caricature (Broch, 1933; Rosenkranz, 2015).

Flower’s fiction is exceedingly sensual: the player carries pollen of presumably anemophilous flowers and galvanizes the landscape. The developers capitalize on the emotionally charged topic of climate change through the portrayal of wind farms in two occasions, once behind a sunset, and the other in the moonlight. The wind turbines have merely a decorative purpose in the game. The fictional setting is good, and it gets better until the point of total categorical agreement with being (Kundera). The blatantly happy ending

is symbolized by a triumph over the non-threatening spike-shaped lattices embellished by the growth of a giant tree with a spherical and light pink crown and a thick, bisque-colored trunk. The display of the environment resembles high dynamic range photography and echo Thomas Kinkade's appliance of pseudo-light – light from impossible sources like from a flower bloom. The developers aspire to a pleasant experience which they facilitate by elevator music and casino style sound effects. The player consummates a falsification of nature by injecting outlandish colors into what is already adequately painted vegetation.

The impeachment of Flower's artistic status will create temporary discomfort within the community, but in the long term, a critical perspective will aid the integration of video games into the system of fine and applied arts.

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Victims, helpers, perpetrators – representations of background characters' social identity in Dragon Age: Inquisition and Witcher III

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My presentation will focus on the comparison of ways in which background characters are represented in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (BioWare Edmonton, 2014) and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt RED, 2015). Special attention will be paid to the representations of „common people”.

The analysis on which this presentation is based, is a part of broader comparative study of representations of political power present in *Witcher III* and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* and it further explores one of dimensions that turned out to be important in the primary analysis. Because of that it functions within certain theoretical context combining Hannerz's (1996, 2006; Kjell, Hannerz, & Westin, 2000) theory of cultural creolization and Bourdieu's (1984) theory of economy of cultural goods used in conjunction with bogostian notion of procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2007). Those three theories will serve as a framework to interpret relations between representations present in both games, their place in field of video game's field and cultures from which they stem.

Hannerz's (1996, 2006) theory argues that worlds economic centers are holding symbolic power by providing the meanings and symbols that can later be reconfigured and creolized through adding new meanings by the peripheries.

Key notion taken from Bourdieu's theory is field. Bourdieu (1984) defines field as an area of social relations facilitating its own specific set of rules and principles of functioning within it. What constitutes the video games' field is a unique set of properties that video games share as a medium: their interactivity combined with narrativity that results in distinctive ways of reception and production.

The notion of uniqueness of rules of video games' field is tied to concept of procedural rhetoric. Procedural rhetoric states that uniqueness of games as a media stems from their ability to convey meaning by interactive processes. According to framework presented above, games should contain and answer to the beliefs of communities in which they function. Also one

can argue that relation between the centers and peripheries should be represented in media stemming from them.

The author will answer a number of questions related to social identities of background characters and signifiers of those identities. What are identities represented by background characters? What is the order of importance of identities represented by background characters? Do „common people” in both games are represented as homogenous groups or are they internally divided? What are signifiers of divisions and/or unity between background characters? Are those signifiers: textual, visual or procedural? Are those identities essentialized? What is the relation of player character to the „common people”? Do they have any form of agency or are they passive subjects of influence of external forces? Do those representations tell us something about how both games conceptualize functioning of the society?

The two main research methods used in the study on which this presentation will be based were: gameplay analysis based on the think-aloud protocol study model (Jääskeläinen, 2011) and computer aided content analysis of cut-scenes from both games and. The material from playing through both games, relevant for the subject of the study, was recorded and uploaded in to MAXQda program and then coded and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (Jørgensen, 2012, 2013), the same was done with aforementioned cut-scenes. Result was a coding structure, illustrating themes and concepts prevalent in representations of background characters in both games, on base of which the aforementioned research questions were answered.

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The infectious aesthetic of zombies – An exploration of zombie narratives and unit operations of zombie-like entities in videogames

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This document details the abstract for a presentation on the pervasive nature of the zombie aesthetics in videogame and its transformation through the translation from cinema to an interactive medium (Apperley, 2006). The main goal of the presentation is to examine the nature of pervasive dynamics and aesthetics in videogame design that have their roots in traditional, non-ergodic media (Aarseth, 1997); how they are applied, what are their patterns, and divergent points that can lead to readjustments of the original narrative themes (Bizzocchi & Woodbury, 2003). We chose to focus on the post-Romero zombie mythos and aesthetic (Sconce, 2014), as it is a major influence over all things pop-culture (Opatic, 2014; Sconce, 2014) and has made a big impact on videogames, with more than 140 major title featuring zombies in the last 35 years.

We will argue that the implementation of zombie aesthetics has both its pitfalls and unexpected upsides. On one hand, the interactive, processual (Malaby, 2007), and procedural (Bogost, 2008) nature of videogames creates a very wicked design challenge (Rittel & Webber, 1973), in which the power given to the player is clashing with the classical narrative themes (Atkins, 2006) of zombie fiction. On another hand, the dynamics (Hunicke, LeBlanc, & Zubek, 2004) and unit operations (Bogost, 2008) of zombie-like entities creates almost immediately recognisable processes, artefacts, and entities, which points beyond the superficial appearances (Aarseth, 2004) of zombies.

In the first part of our presentation we will focus on narrative themes (Neitzel, 2005) and encapsulated unit operations that are at play in traditional zombie narratives (Opatic, 2014). This section will act as fundament for our latter section by using document analysis methodology (Bryman, 2012), followed by investigation of why and how a rigid translation of the narrative themes may readjust the original message in an interactive

environment. We base this on the dichotomies of the fear of isolation, unseen consequences of neglecting global problems, an inability to meaningfully face the challenges – a theme often attributed to post-Romero zombie narratives (Opatić, 2014; Sconce, 2014), and the power and kinship that can be experienced through videogame mechanics and co-operational multiplayer modes (Rigby & Ryan, 2011), often featured in zombie themed videogames.

In the second part of our presentation we will examine the previously discovered unit operations and how they are expressed in videogames. We argue that the pervasiveness of zombie-like entities in videogames stems from the structure of the games' programming, platform (King & Krzywinska, 2002) limitations of the past, and the ability to create well-recognisable shorthands and operations that are easy to understand for the players. We posit that the pervasiveness of the encapsulated operations that are usually attributed to zombies, points beyond surface aesthetics, and the same dynamics can be observed across a wide variety of videogames, regardless of theming (Clearwater, 2011).

We offer this presentation as a playful exploration of one of the most infectious tropes of today's pop- culture (pun intended). We hope to shed light on aspects of pervasive patterns in game design and transmedia, supporting further discussions on the transition of units and narrative elements from non- ergodic media into videogames and the connection or disconnection of other prevalent themes to game dynamics such as the Hollywood action and adventure movie tropes in videogame storytelling.

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“War has changed.” – A look back on military power in Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

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This paper takes a retrospective look at the different visions of military power presented in Hideo Kojima’s 2008 videogame *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (Kojima Productions, 2008). Following on from Veli-Matti Karhulahti’s observation that MGS4 represents “a ludonarrative hybrid of the highest degree, a product that operates evenly on two radically diverse modes of engagement” (2015, p. 12), I argue that the critical and subversive potentials of MGS4 with regards to military power are inextricably tied to its identity as a multimedial artifact. To that end, I employ the theory of remediation put forth by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) as an ontological framework for analyzing MGS4, arguing that it remediates several different types of media (most notably cinema and television), and even presents a space for qualitatively different types of ludic experiences.

Lauded as “the most technically stunning video game ever made” (VanOrd, 2008) at the time of its release, MGS4 represented, in narrative terms, the last chapter in a saga whose plot covered a period of over fifty years, as well as a technological showcase for the (at the time) advanced computational and rendering power of Sony’s PlayStation 3 console (McWhertor, 2008). Thanks to the numerous instances of self-referentiality (Wolf, 2009), MGS4 can also be said to be continually in conversation with the preceding games in the series, in a manner which quite often meta-referentially foregrounds MGS4’s material nature and status as a digital entertainment product belonging to the Metal Gear gaming franchise. Bearing these complexities in mind, in my analysis of MGS4 I focus equally on its scripted narrative, presented primarily in the form of cinematic cutscenes and radio conversations, as well as on its ludic space which said narrative frames and contextualizes, and which is strongly medially and materially idiosyncratic and reflexive, with the aim of comparing and contrasting how the theme of military power is presented and developed in both of these modes of engagement.

With its continual evocation of its predecessors and its own ludo-material status, as well as with its fundamentally multimodal communication strategies, MGS4 crafts and presents a rich, technologically advanced ludic

sensorium which resists unambiguous thematic interpretations, enabling as it is of both adrenalized reenactments of military actions and of diametrically opposed styles of play much more in line with the firmly critical trajectory of its scripted narrative. With that in mind, it can be argued that MGS4's mixed, complex identity is, in fact, its standout characteristic – the proverbial utilization of every trick in the handbooks of design (game, cinema, narrative, and interaction, among others) embodied in a painstakingly curated technological artifact which seeks to engage its users at every step of the way and from all possible sensory angles. Looking back on MGS4 nearly a decade after its release, this quality makes it a landmark videogame entity, one which inevitably draws our attention to the oft-overlooked composite medial nature of videogames (Keogh, 2014), as well as notably showcasing several possible ways in which a theme as multifaceted and sensitive as that of military power can be rendered in videogames by capitalizing not just on their ludic aspects, but also on the rhetorical strategies and strengths specific to the multiple media remediated therein.

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Mnemonic filters: Mainstream shooters and discourses of memory (the cases of *Battlefield 1* and *Wolfenstein: The New Order*)

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The paper aims to investigate how mainstream FPS games that touch upon culturally sensitive historical topics attempt to balance respectful treatment of depicted themes and ludic approach based on game conventions. The analysed titles are *Battlefield 1* (EA DICE, 2016), set during the World War I, rarely depicted in games focused on individual battle experience (Chapman, 2016), and *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (MachineGames, 2014), a shooter set in alternative history in which the Nazis won the World War II, containing direct references to the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities.

The discursive analysis of the games will be based on Pötzsch's concept of filters of selective realism – a set of devices that „supress unpleasant, yet salient features and consequences of military and other violent conduct” (Pötzsch, 2015, p. 4). Pötzsch, writing about realistic shooter games set in modern times, proposes four kinds of filters: violence filter (limiting the shown violence to battle related acts targeted at the enemy), consequence filter (deemphasizing negative impact of shown action), character filter (determining which characters can „acquire identity other than combatant”), and conflict filter (limiting possible understanding and solutions of in-game conflicts) (4–6). In addition to that, the paper will focus on such aspects of game conventions (and their discursive consequence) as the player perspective and position, objectives and their justification, action affordances, framing of victory and failure.

The analysis of used filters will be supplemented with memory studies perspective to investigate how „medial frameworks” (Erll & Rigney, 2009) of games can have influence on remembering; the games will be shown as „forms of popular history” (Chapman, 2016a), participating in and engaging with existing modes of remembering the sensitive historical topics (WWI and the Holocaust, respectively). Special attention will be given to discursive exclusions and omissions in the games in comparison to cultural memory pertaining to these events in other media and the tensions between used conventions of the mainstream shooter genre and ambitions of depicting sensitive historical content. The status of the games as products

aimed at global market, which demands that the content should not be too controversial, will also be accounted for, as well as the controversies that emerged in the gaming communities despite these precautions.

The possibility of applying Molden's (2016) term of „mnemonic hegemony” and Bull and Hansen's notions of „antagonistic” and „cosmopolitan memory” (both perspectives inspired by Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of hegemony) to games will also be assessed.

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Having all the time in the world cannot be enough: Analyzing the temporalities of “The Sexy Brutale”

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This paper is dedicated to analyzing the temporalities of *The Sexy Brutale* adventure game (Tequila Works, 2017) from semiotic perspective. Temporal aspects of digital games seem to have been subject to an extensive study for at least a couple of decades already (Aarseth, 1999; Juul, 2004) and understandably so taking into account the influence of narrative theories in the field of game studies (although that surely was not the only reason). But expectedly, studies of video game temporalities went beyond analyzing the ways temporal structures of games may or do affect narratives: relations between temporality and player’s experience were taken into consideration as well (Mateas & Zagal, 2007; Nitsche, 2007; Mukherjee, 2009; Lenhart, 2011).

Game developers also addressed the issue: in one of his conference speeches Nikolay Dybovsky (2006) claimed there could not be any sufficient adaptation or application of the concept of time in video games unless game developers challenged the deeply ingrained reversibility of action and drastically unequal distribution of what we could call “temporal agency” as it was presented, for example, in West-Pavlov’s “Temporalities” (West-Pavlov, 2013). For example, in most cases every change in a game world is dependent on the player-controlled objects so even a burning house will burn forever unless a protagonist activates the proper trigger thus letting the building collapse.

Nowadays there is a number of games which at least claim to deprive the player of her absolute rulership over change and event by distributing the temporal agency among NPCs and thus allowing the players to watch as the game world “lives its own life”. Apart from familiar day/night cycles or mindless roving of NPCs in the cities’ streets (as it is used to being done in most RPGs) it also means allowing NPCs to experience their own stories without direct involvement of the player.

The Sexy Brutale is one of such games. The game uses the main trope of *Groundhog day* movie (Ramis, Albert, & Erickson, 1993) and other similar stories: the main protagonist finds himself locked (spatially) inside a casino mansion and simultaneously locked (temporally) within the day all of the

mansion visitors were murdered. The accentuated feature of the game is that all NPCs mind their own businesses and make progress in their scripted stories regardless of main hero's presence or attention.

But do they truly possess temporal agency if their actions are scripted? Doesn't an AI-governed state in Europa Universalis have a more abundant temporal agency compared to characters like these? Moreover, if other NPCs and protagonist himself are conscious about his ability to affect time (reverse it and change the past), how exactly does this affect both the story and the way it is narrated? This paper aims to address these and many other questions by analyzing the temporal structure (distribution of temporal agency, spatial-temporal relations etc.) of *The Sexy Brutale* and the ways it affects player's experience, games' story, narration and ideology (here understood as the final connotative level in Umberto Eco's terms). Our current hypothesis includes the following:

1. Player's experience gets enhanced by the possibility to observe the continuity of events instead of spotting series of discrete states, e.g. watch a character go and enter a location in real time instead of being told "the character moved to another location" after the character allegedly does it "off-screen".

2. Seemingly present, temporal agency of NPCs in *The Sexy Brutale* appears to be virtually non-existent and akin to that of the sun going up and down since their motion is comparably cyclic and any actual change and progress can be made only by the player-controlled character.

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Narrative video games as a “tactical medium” – a case study of *Papers, Please*

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Video games are a medium that, unlike other narrative forms, fosters the conditions for participatory experience. The specific potential of the interactivity of a narrative video game makes it possible to place a player in a complex situation; choices and decision-making in the situation of moral dilemmas is a totally different experience than watching somebody else making them from a safe distance.

The specific features mentioned above allow video games to influence players in a different way than the “old” media do. In *Tactical Media*, Rita Raley (2009) claims that the new media tend to approach internalization in a new way. Instead of a direct message, they use more subtle signals – they engage the consumer in a “micropolitics of disruption, intervention, and education”. In the case of some video games, “critical arguments are made via the emphasis on the effects of gameplay actions” by modelling causality and consequences. By rewarding desirable players’ actions, and punishing the undesirable ones, a game can influence a player’s further decisions, judgement and behavior. According to Raley (2009), such games are well suited to political themes.

In my paper, I would like to analyze Lucas Pope’s *Papers, Please* (2013), to demonstrate how the mechanics pointed out by Raley work in a video game that attempts to “emulate” a totalitarian state. *Papers, Please* is undoubtedly a title that, apart from the means typical for traditional media, uses the mechanics pointed out by Rita Raley. On the one hand, the totalitarian world of the game is constructed and presented using “conventional” methods – audiovisual layer and narration – on the other hand, *Papers, Please* employs the interactive potential of video games to engage players in moral choices, in order to emulate the totalitarian system in which the narrative is set. It also models causality and consequences through the punishment and reward system and other game mechanics, to force the player to participate in the machine of oppression in such a subtle way that many players do not even realize that they take part in it. The game forces the player to make difficult, morally ambiguous decisions, creating a narration in which it is impossible to make “ethically right” choices without

disobeying the regulations. Using the system of punishment and reward, the game manages to incriminate the player. Even though he or she is given an opportunity to make decisions, within the totalitarian system presented in *Papers, Please*, each choice leads to oppression, and the only real choice the player has is who to oppress.

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Playable game history: Evoland and the player as media archaeologist

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The fascination with the relatively recent history of video games has seemingly endless manifestations in contemporary culture, from subcultures which experiment with ‘defunct’ gaming technologies to countless popular culture references to classic gaming franchises. This can be seen as an aspect of ‘retromania’, defined by Simon Reynolds as “the fascination for fashions, fads, sounds and stars that occurred within living memory” (Reynolds, 2011, p. xiii-xiv). Games themselves often hark back to the 8-bit and 16-bit eras through ‘retro’, described by Reynolds as “a self-conscious fetish for period stylisation (in music, clothes, design) expressed creatively through pastiche and citation” (Reynolds, 2011, p. xii). This paper will argue, however, that many ‘neo-retro’ games offer more than ‘period stylisation’ – they offer a playable history of gaming using both restorative and reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001).

Video games can offer their players increasingly extensive tourist experiences into bygone eras, sometimes as relatively straightforward period settings, sometimes as ahistorical pastiche. Games from a variety of genres appropriate popular culture of the past in terms of aesthetics and also narrative structures, tropes, and socio-cultural connotations. These ‘nostalgia games’, as defined by Sloan (2016) often remediate generic universes of past media, including video games themselves. As Sloan notes, “the maturation of videogames and, by extension, the gaming audience, has logically led to a period of introspective original games that demonstrate a fascination with the history of the medium.” (Sloan, 2016) In other words, there are a number of ‘neo-retro’ games which seem to comment on video games, their history and their generic universes.

In this context, I will be looking at *Evoland* (Shiro Games, 2013) as a ‘neo-retro’ (Sloan, 2016) game and an instance of playable game history. *Evoland* offers its players a journey through part of the history of games, from 8-bit to HD, through the lens of JRPGs like *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, Capcom, Vanpool, & Grezzo, 1986-present) and *Final Fantasy* (Square Enix, 1987-present) The game is peppered with many humorous references to these games, including characters Clink, Kaeris and Zephyros,

transparent references to recurring *Legend of Zelda* character Link and *Final Fantasy VII* (Square, 1997) characters Aerith and Sephiroth. This paper will examine how video games history is presented here as a strict and straight-forward evolution of graphics, music and gameplay elements, and how these advancements are presented as literal rewards to the player. The self-reflective nature of *Evoland* and similar games will then be interrogated using Svetlana Boym's concepts of restorative and reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). The paper will argue that, while the game appears to be an instance of restorative nostalgia, which "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home", it is, like other neo-retro games, an instance of reflective nostalgia, which "delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately" and "can present an ethical and creative challenge" (Boym, 2001, p. xviii). Finally, the paper will argue that in *Evoland*, players become more than tourists enjoying gameworlds old and new, they become media archaeologists in the worlds of gaming past.

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Broken bodies and the passing of time. Injuries in sport video games

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Injuries are an indispensable part of professional sport. They can decide title races, derail careers, break millions of hearts in an instance. They are one of the few constants in the rather frantic sports media cycle. They add to the drama or kill the competitiveness of a series, they make performances legendary or make fights painful to watch. Undeniably, they put everyone in a real ethical conundrum, especially when one thinks about consequences of using a distinction between being hurt and injured.

Due to how complex this problem is and how we talk and write about it – the way it encapsulates performative, narrative, ethical aspects of professional sport – it is especially interesting to see how injuries are presented in sport video games: both in simulation and sports management.

The aim of this presentation is to show how these games tackle the issue of in-game injuries and subsequent recovery. Questions will be asked regarding the positioning of injuries in relation to the passing of time – both minutes and seconds during a match or a fight and weeks and months during a season or a career. How differently are the injuries that occurred during a simulated match or a fight and those which happened in real life and were later added to the game via roster update evaluated? In what way is the idea of a sports game changed by the possibility of instant treatment like in *FIFA* game series *FIFA Ultimate Team* game mode? On the other hand, in what way does the prolonging of squad member recovery by choosing the cheaper treatment in *Football Manager 16* or *17* put the manager in an ethical jeopardy, especially when e.g. it helps with squad rotation? Lastly, questions will be asked about designing bodies in the career modes (*FIFA*, *Pro Evolution Soccer*, *NBA 2K*, *UFC*) and whether can the player design something faulty and in time completely broken?

The underlying thought in this search for at least few answers is that, while talking about the simulation, body and numeric representation or TV broadcast quality in sport video games, we sometimes forget that virtual bodies on screen need to move in a distinct way. These bodies and the way they move need also to give the possibility of performing within the rules of the game on an exceptionally high level and give the player the opportunity

to tell the story of a match or championship season. In conclusion, by considering different aspects of injuries in sport video games, there is also a possibility to find something new to say about the whole genre.

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PLAYER STUDIES

Let's Talk about Let's Plays: an ethnographic study at the intersection of gaming and YouTube

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For a while now, the concepts of “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006) and “prosumerism” (Toffler, 1981) have been pivotal in media studies. Both terms refer to the lowering of barriers to media creation and the increasing visibility of peer media production, whose immediate and conversational nature represents a stark contrast to the prior paradigm whereby media producer and media consumer was seen as a dichotomy. The rise of participatory culture is evident across the entire mediascape, from the indie game movement (Van Best, 2011) to YouTube “reaction” videos.

Another manifestation lies at the intersection of the two realms: that of gaming and video production. I am referring to so-called Let's Plays: YouTube videos of digital games' playthroughs accompanied by the player's voice narration and (non)verbal responses (Glas 2015). Typically, Let's Plays are posted regularly or semi-regularly on dedicated YouTube channels, with playthroughs of a single game often being broken into multiple parts of approximately the same length, corresponding to discrete playing sessions.

Let's Plays cover a more diverse range of games than conventional reviews. It is not uncommon to find obscure indie titles coexisting with mainstream games on the same channel. In fact, on indie and hobbyist game portals such as GameJolt and itch.io, links to Let's Play videos have become almost as common as text comments.

Like the games they cover, Let's Plays range widely in popularity, with those posted on the most visible channels, such as PewDiePie and Chuggaaconroy, attracting millions of views and hundreds of comments, and the more obscure ones being limited to only a handful of views.

To attract audiences, Let's Play creators can resort to a variety of methods, from identifying obscure but intriguing games to play, to making visually appealing cover art for each video based on the aesthetics of the game it covers, to acting out different characters' voices, to producing videos in pairs or groups and relying on the back-and-forth between the players for comic or analytic value. Along the way, “Let's Players” hope to acquire a unique and recognizable style which will shape their community of followers and help them express themselves most fully.

While some Let's Play channels are only active for a short time, their creators then moving on to pursue other interests, for many Let's Plays have become a lifestyle, necessitating considerable time commitment and emotional investment. In return, successful creators are not only able to receive rich feedback from their followers, but also support themselves through video monetization.

Despite their increasing cultural visibility, Let's Plays are yet not well-represented in game studies scholarship (Hale, 2013). In particular, Let's Players' own perspective has not received much attention. The present paper aims to address this lacuna and describes a (nascent) ethnographic project dedicated to the Let's Play culture. Through interviews with North American YouTubers presently or formerly active in the Let's Play scene, it attempts to elucidate the creators' own perspective on their pastime.

Initially driven by the author's curiosity as an indie game developer who discovered half of the online reactions to his game were Let's Plays, as opposed to text comments, the paper will highlight some of the complexities revolving around such issues as authorship and propriety, inter- and meta-textuality, performance, and identity. So far, only a handful of interviews have been conducted, but by the time of the conference I hope to boost that number to 20 or 30, enabling me to draw more grounded conclusions.

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‘Even if we lose a game, we know everyone did their best’: Women’s experiences of competition in multiplayer videogames

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Women’s experiences playing multiplayer games have been diligently mapped since the 1990s as a resilient minority slowly creeping into a major demographic (Schott & Horrell 2000; Taylor, 2003; Hayes, 2005; Yee, 2006; Beavis & Charles 2007; Taylor, Jenson, & de Castell, 2009; Williams, Consalvo, Caplan, & Yee, 2009) with non- static gaming preferences (Yates & Littleton 1999; Carr 2005). Subsequently, women’s preferences to multiplayer gaming have been found to be informed by their masculine or feminine attributes (Poels & Malliet 2012), but also by reacting to surrounding perpetual expectations of performing a certain kind of femininity (Vermeulen, Castellar, & Looy, 2014; Ratan & Williams 2015; Butt, 2016; Cote, 2017). This study contributes to the discussion by focusing specifically on how female players perceive and discuss their competitiveness in a variety of games and modes of gameplay.

Women of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds who played multiplayer games were considered for the study. Ten unique semi-structured interviews of 20 to 60 minutes were conducted in person during the spring 2017. The interview consisted of mapping each player’s videogame preferences, the company in which they played and how they played, how competitive they considered themselves and whether they believed there to be a gender disparity in competitiveness. The responses of the study are summarised as follows:

1. Three ways of playing together with others were discussed: playing multiplayer games online, playing multiplayer games offline and/or locally,

and playing single-player games together with friends or family. The biggest influence for finding new multiplayer games were suggestions or requests to join in from their various social circles.

2. The social aspect of multiplayer gaming was important to all interviewees. They played and discussed videogames with friends, family and dating partners. Culturing a fun and safe atmosphere was mentioned as important in general. Some found play with friends to alleviate stress associated with competitive play. Others also liked to compete against friends, but only in controlled environments.

3. Eight respondents played in online multiplayer environments. They played varied roles, but in line with previous research (Ratan, Taylor, Hogan, Kennedy, & Williams, 2015; Butt, 2016) most played or had played supporting characters (e.g. healers) as their main role. Everyone discussed their preferred roles in relation to supporting characters either as their background, current preferred role, or through antagonism.

4. Most respondents considered themselves competitive or partly competitive. Those who considered themselves non-competitive established a difference between how male and female players perform competitiveness (cf. Vermeulen, et al. 2014). Six of the respondents exhibited knowledge or interest of professional play and were empathetic of the hardships they considered female players to face. Larger societal issues of difference in the upbringing of boys and girls were brought up in general.

5. Almost all players were or had been worried about their performance or the repercussions of playing badly. Six interviewees were worried about being or had been harassed specifically because of their gender. Strategies for coping with harassment (cf. Cote, 2017) were referenced readily and half of the respondents playing online multiplayer games expressed that they keep their gender identity inaccessible to others.

The results of the study imply that women in multiplayer gaming are a varied group in general, but the main attraction in multiplayer games is found in them allowing for social experiences with other people, often via teamwork. The centrality of finding other players or friends with an equal view of teamwork and competition, and how seriously games should be played, permeated in all of the discussions. Despite recurring self-perceived competitiveness or confidence, all interviewees framed their personal experience in videogames as one of having started at or still being bad in videogames.

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Representation of history in computer games and attitude change: Empirical study design

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Historical computer games are becoming the most common form of the popular history, especially among the younger generation (Chapman, 2013; 2016; Kapell & Elliott 2013). By dealing with historical events, computer game developers construct digital representations of these events, inevitably framing them in a certain context and therefore offering players concrete memory-making potentials. The empirical study described in this paper aims to measure the ability of a historical game to affect players' implicit and explicit attitudes towards historical events represented in the game (Greenwald et al., 1998; Karpinski & Steinman 2006; Likert 1932; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). As Darvasi (2016) put it, computer games are able to create immersive and interactive environment at such level, which we are unable to duplicate in reality. So far, the empirical research about effects of historical computer games on player's attitudes is limited. Only several empirical studies focused on this topic, measuring mainly the explicit player's attitudes (see, e.g. Cuhadar & Kampf 2014, 2015). Participants in our proposed empirical study will be gradually exposed to two sets of complementary and/or contradicting perspectives on historical events contained in a chosen game. The primary aim of this research is to evaluate effect of this intervention on participants' short- and long-term attitude changes towards contested historical topics in the game. As a research tool we will use a modified version of *Czechoslovakia 38-89: Borderlands*, a serious educational game portraying the Second World War and post-WWII arrangement in Czechoslovakia and Central Europe. The game is dealing with multiple historical topics, e.g. the coexistence of Czechs and Germans in the border regions of Czechoslovakia, the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia,

and the rise of communism to power. The game was developed in cooperation with Czech historians and teachers. The game itself is multiperspective by its core design. Historical events in the game are presented to players through dialogues with various survivors and eyewitnesses of the given time period. We carried out a pilot study in April and May 2017, in which we collected data from 18 participants. During this laboratory experiment the participants were exposed to two contradicting perspectives on the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia contained in the game *Czechoslovakia 38-89: Borderlands*. Order of this exposure was predefined differently for each experimental group respecting the principles of between-subject design. During the experiment we measured explicit and implicit attitudes of our participants by pen and paper questionnaires and computer administered SC-IAT test (Karpinski and Steinman 2006), followed by qualitative focus groups. The data from the pilot study are being analyzed in the time of writing this paper, yet the preliminary results suggest the usability of our research design and tools. Second pilot study will be held in July and August 2017 with approximately 25 participants. Our final study, planned for autumn 2017, will also evaluate the game effects on longitudinal attitude change by a delayed data collection scheduled one month after the intervention. Overall, the research aims to evaluate the ability of the video game medium to change player's attitudes towards historical events as well as to measure at what level the possible attitude change occurs in subjective relation to such historical events. In a broader perspective, our research aims to deepen our understanding of formation of historical awareness in the 21st century and the role historical computer games play in this process.

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Integrating a competitive game into a university curriculum: experimental study and survey results

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This study discusses the initial development and recent results of an ongoing attempt to bring a competitive strategy game into a university classroom. It started in early 2016 and is meant to enhance and complement the Strategic Theory course taught within the Strategic and Security Studies programme at Masaryk University. This course is mandatory for all students of the bachelor programme and traditionally consisted of lectures, written essays and compulsory reading. Since last year, one of the essays has been replaced by obligatory and marked participation in the browser-based version of the venerable boardgame *Diplomacy*. Therefore, what is being used is not an educational game, but rather a game adopted for educational purposes.

As there was no precedent or even stated demand for such change of curriculum, it posed a series of particular challenges. From the very beginning, it was supposed to be a competitive multiplayer game (as opposed to the more common singleplayer, narrative and puzzle-based educational games). The chosen game had to accommodate a wide variety of students which attend the course. Some of them are avid gamers with hundreds of hours spent in modern strategy video games while others are professed non-gamers, who would consider it a waste of their time. The game had to be free, as no additional funds were made available. It also had to fit into existing timing. This year, building on the feedback from the previous year, the game was played at a pace of one turn per day, with one initial lecture dedicated to explaining the game and its objectives. For the purpose of grading, students are required to write an “After-Action Report” explaining their strategy, progress, and reasoning (therefore, the grade is not really based on their in-game results). Some challenges are still not completely resolved, namely the issues of drop-outs and substitutions.

The second part of the paper analyzes the results of the anonymous surveys, which were conducted among the participating students at the end of each of the two semesters during which the game was played (91 students in Spring 2016 and 66 students in Spring 2017). The first survey was also complemented by a small focus group to discuss the results in more detail. It shows interesting results regarding player experience, expectations,

perception of difficulty, gender (male and female players/students judge each other differently when it comes to gaming ability and adapt to it accordingly), and whether it is even useful and relevant to what is being taught. One of the more surprising and insightful results was, contrary to the initial ambition, that students very rarely used what they learned from lectures or literature during the game, but, instead, the process of playing the game made them considerably more motivated about the subject matter of the course. In other words, reading or hearing about strategy did not make the students better strategists in the game, but playing the game made them more interested in strategy.

These results and lessons learned from this ongoing educational experiment should be of particular interest not only to the educators that are interested in using games to enhance their courses, but also to the game developers who would like to create games which can be used in this manner. The relative success of this experiment also paves the way for more ambitious and involved future projects.

A virtual ethnographic approach to senior gamers community

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Although in media the most recognised image of a gamer is still associated with young people, it becomes more obvious that mature gamers are also becoming a more significant group. Back in 2008, a research conducted by Pew Internet & American Life Project exposed the potential of mature and senior gamers who represented 40% (age group 50-64 years) and 23% (age group > 65 years), respectively, of all adult American gamers (Lenhart, Jones, & Macgill, 2008). For Europeans, the 2012 ISFE (2012, p. 9) study showed that 28% of males and 27% of females aged between 55 and 64 years played video games. Surprisingly, the data suggests that senior gamers tend to play games more frequently than those middle-aged (Lenhart, Jones, & Macgill, 2008; Cookman & Mena, 2016, p. 2).

This emerging role of senior gamers was noticed by some researchers, but only few studies focused on the oldest users of video games. Here, we may distinguish three main areas of interest: improvement in quality of life, interface design guidelines and the least popular considerations about active elderly players (De Schutter, Brown, Vanden, & Abeele, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, some authors suggest that since 1980s, when the very first papers on gaming in later life were published, the number of academic articles on this topic that were published in the next 30 years has not increased significantly (De Schutte, Mosberg, Nap, Maribeth, & Hunicke, 2015).

Most analyses of elderly gamers were based on surveys and interviews (unfortunately often including small samples), but some of them included data gathered via less obvious techniques like focus group research (see Nap, de Kort, & IJsselstein, 2009) or observations of play sessions (see Levy et al., 2012). However, I adopted a different approach. I decided to focus on self-descriptions which were published by seniors (aged > 50 years) on two public internet forums for adult gamers, Senior Gamers (www.seniorgamers.net) and The Older Gamers (www.theoldergamers.com). In order to obtain information on senior gamers' characteristics (including their gaming history, motivations and expectations), I will analyse messages published in introduction sections of the mentioned forums ("The Barracks" and "Introduction"). Although the range of interesting forum posts extends

from 2005 to the present, the amount of analysed data will be limited to messages in which authors decided to reveal their age. Moreover, I will study only posts published by users aged > 50 years. Thus, this study can be labelled as a digital ethnography, which address different forms of technologically mediated communication and covers some types of online data and specific techniques of data collection (Varis, 2016, p. 55). In the case of my project, these are content analysis of internet forum posts.

During my presentation I will attempt to face some common beliefs, such as a notion that senior gamers are mainly interested in casual games (see Nap, de Kort, & IJsselsteijn, 2009, p. 251; Allaire et al., 2013, p. 1304) or that they are not interested in online gaming with other players (see Kaufman, Sauvé, Renaud, & Dupl  a, 2014, p. 217). Additionally, the ethical issues of online studies will be mentioned (i.e. “invisible observation”, also known as “lurking”).

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Gender issue reborn: A case study of Hong Kong League of Legends players

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While traditionally a male dominated space (Taylor, 2009; Maric, 2011), women have slowly been gaining presence in the global esports scene, from women's colleges in America offering esports scholarships (Stephens College) to the popularity of fictional characters such as D.Va in *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016) or Feng Min in *Dead by Daylight* (Behaviour Interactive, 2016). This paper looks at women's gender performance in esports based on participant observations during The Queen's Cup held in April 2017 both at the venue and on the event live chat on Twitch.tv. Additionally, open interviews were carried out with audience members at the event to find out their opinions and reasons for participating. The collected materials were analysed parallel to media interviews with the same female players. The original video material is primarily in Cantonese, and was later translated into English.

The Queen's Cup (女王盃) was an all-female *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) tournament organised in Hong Kong. Female teams were invited to participate in seeding matches before being placed into tournament matches. Based on our observations, women were strikingly absent from the audience appearing as players and a caster only. This paper will explore players' and caster's gender identities particularly where gendered bodies are being constructed and performed. Witkowski (2009, p. 54) argues that „the sport of eSports is a live experience on bodily engagement” while Hamari & Sjoblom (2016, p. 255) suggest that „the essence of these sports stems from how the performance visually looks”. The Queen's Cup, however, hosted the actual teams in rooms separate from the audience. No webcams were used to show the players during the match, but a female caster was present in the room. As a result, the tournament was primarily a digital performance, with the players not being able to share a bodily experience with their audience. Furthermore, those viewing the stream of the event

experienced the game very similarly to the ‘live’ audience. Regardless, aspects of female gender foregrounded in the competitors’ player performance and were clearly part of how the female caster was addressed on Twitch chat, too. Team Dream Force team members wore team jackets in the colour of pink and black with further branding on their official pink-coloured Facebook fan page, which refers to them as „Hong Kong Girls Team”. Their player names reflected female gender as well. We will build on Karhulahti’s (2016) postulation of varying streaming frames (play frame and interview frame) for discussing how colocation contributes to framing one’s gendered stream performance. The female caster’s experiences will be compared to those of the female players who were not collocated with the event audience.

Drawing attention to their gender makes the team stick out in terms of branding and team identity, yet „many men in the scene, though, find the existence of women’s tournaments an outrage, an injustice” (Taylor 2012, p. 126) as was reflected in the material collected. This paper will therefore conclude with discussing how such an event contributes to the stereotypical objectification of female players on the one hand and to the acknowledgement of women’s actual esports involvement on the other hand. The former forcefully contributes to reinventing computer games as a male pastime therefore resuscitating the age-old, largely defeated stereotype.

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Does death count as a long rest? Community-building potential of game mechanics in Dungeons and Dragons fandom

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Much like other texts of culture, games – both non- and digital ones – seem to have a potential to inspire their audiences to approach them in various forms of creative engagement, including fanworks and fan practices within online communities. In turn, the specificity of the medium – the interactive and procedural qualities of games – allow for the uniqueness of said means of engagement. Namely, game-related fan practices and works instead of being concentrated solely on narrative and world-building elements of the source text, tend to approach its ludic layer as well, thematizing the rules, structure, and mechanics. Those types of practices seem to be particularly noticeable when the system of a game in question is the main aspect of the shared experience among the fans. For example, in case of tabletop roleplaying games – in which a game session follows a set of rules provided in a manual, but its narrative outcome is determined by a game master and players, while simultaneously randomized by the element of chance – fans are much more likely to establish a set of references based on the shared experience of engaging said rules during gameplay, rather than on the highly personalized narrative outcome of the gameplay itself.

This paper seeks to discuss a case study of fan practices thematizing Dungeons and Dragons – one of the first and most well-known fantasy roleplaying games – and explore the potential of game rules and mechanics to generate a set of references used as a core of fan activity. (For the purposes of this paper Dungeons and Dragons is treated as a singular title, due to various editions sharing similar characteristics generally recognized within the fan community, although with acknowledgement of the differences between the editions.) Following the abovementioned characteristics of tabletop RPGs, the game uses a pre-defined set of rules, includes chance-based dice rolls, while specific narrative outcomes emerge during sessions. Thus, the activity of the D&D fandom focuses mostly on the topics of either the common aspects of world-building and archetypes in the fantasy genre, or on the ludic layer of the game, including dice rolls, class system and

class-based skills, alignment chart, or specific rule-determined elements (such as free action, initiative rolls, critical fails).

The paper will follow the player-centric approaches in game studies, attributing meaning to the players engaging with rules (Sicart, 2011, 2014), and searching for meaning in the game-related activities, which occur outside of the gameplay itself (Calleja, 2011; Jones, 2015). It will also vastly draw from the tools and perspectives provided by the fan studies scholars, especially those who focus on the community-shaping potential of fan practices (Hellekson & Busse, 1996) and on digital fandoms (Booth, 2010). By combining those approaches in the analysis of the selected examples of works and utterances provided by fans on the subject of Dungeons and Dragons in the context of the fandom, the paper seeks to search for a common set of references shared by the participants of the fan community, and to discuss strategies of approaching the source text partaken by them in the face of the lack of a common ground in relation to the narrative layer. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the creative potential of the rule-based game structure, both in terms of the impact the rules have on a gameplay experience and how it translates to the emergence of a larger frame of reference, which serves as a basis for communication within the fan community. In doing so, the paper seeks to discuss the uniqueness of the game fandoms resulting from the characteristics of games as a medium.

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Social allegories of videogame spaces

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The following paper deals with the question of how social constructions of spaces affect digital game environments as well as how the player relates to these spaces. This will allow us to investigate how this affects a player who comes to inhabit this space, which in turn presents us with certain questions. For example, is such a space, based on a social construction, familiar to the player? If so, how does this affect player navigation and their sense of place in the game? Furthermore, how does environmental storytelling, which incorporates these social constructions of the space, relate to spatial navigation?

In order to tackle this question, I shall focus on the social construction of island spaces and how this translates into a digital game space. In looking at and deconstructing island spaces, we can begin to see the perceived formal properties and tropes which are closely associated to islands. Islands are generally conceived as bounded, which implies that an island is complete within itself, possesses a hard edge between the land and the sea, and is separate from other lands by virtue of the sea acting as a separating space (Stratford, Baldacchino, McMahon, Farbotko, & Harwood, 2011, p. 115). However, in island studies, Gillis (2007, p. 277) argues that these formal properties do not relate to any tangible traits of island, instead they are actually social constructions of island spaces. In turn, these perceived formal properties of islands form the basis of a social construction of islands which do not relate to the reality of islands. For example, the sea may be perceived as a connector rather than a separator. Based on these perceived properties, islands become the central theme of popular tropes, such as isolation and insularity; myth and mystery; and prison and paradise.

Within this paper, I will take a phenomenological approach (Tuan, 1977; Klevjer, 2012) to spaces in games, while also looking at theories of spaces in digital games, such as Espen Aarseth's *Allegories of game spaces* (1997), who draws upon Lefebvre's notion of social spaces (1984). In this paper, I will argue that if digital games are drawing upon a shared social construction of space which relates to certain predisposed emotions, guides and prompts players, then it is also orienting players into place in an intuitive manner. The preconceived shared social space allows for recognition of familiar landmarks, a cohesive and recognisable storytelling environment as

well as eliciting emotions that players are predisposed to in certain spaces. This argument will be made through grappling with single player games set on an island, such as *Myst* (Cyan et al., 1993), *Dear Esther* (The Chinese Room, 2012), and *Proteus* (Key & Kanaga, 2013). Furthermore, this paper will highlight the point that while adopting a phenomenological framework in digital games, one should emphasise both body and world in relation to how the body is spatially understanding and interpreting that world. It follows that the player is not navigating in a vacuum – they draw on their spatial knowledge and ability in order to traverse the world. This leads us to the conclusion that the social understanding of a space must also be acknowledged in terms of the player traversing and interpreting the digital space.

This paper offers insights into how we are drawing upon a social understanding of a space in both the construction of a digital island space in a game as well as how we are traversing and relating to that space. Furthermore, a deconstruction of spaces from the perspective of the social may allow us to further accentuate aspects of the worlds we are creating or allow us to challenge established social constructions.

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Communion reloaded: Social network analysis of religion-centered gaming pages on Facebook

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Today, we are witnessing exponential growth in user-generated data, as well as a proliferation of social media that connect vast numbers of users. Analysis of this “big social data” opens up new perspectives for research in social sciences and humanities (Manovich, 2011; Boyd & Crawford, 2012, Halavais, 2015). As Manovich (2011) argues, the rise of social media along with the progress in computational tools that can process massive amounts of data makes possible a fundamentally new approach for the study of human beings and society. In particular, we no longer have to choose between data size and data depth. We can study exact trajectories formed by billions of cultural expressions, experiences, texts and links. The possibility to analyze vast, user-generated content in an automated fashion provides us with an opportunity for a “distant reading” (Moretti, 2005) of social network sites and their audiences. This distant reading highlights structural aspects, which are not necessarily visible on the level of a “close reading,” such as content analysis or interviews, and thus paves the way for further research.

The primary aim of this paper is to present a new methodological and interpretative framework for the analysis of big social data – in particular, user-generated data obtained from Facebook – in the field of game studies. The paper introduces a new, formally-defined, quantitative method called *Normalized Social Distance* (NSD). The method calculates the distances between various social groups, based on the intentional stances expressed by members of these groups in their activities on social networks. NSD results can be visualized in graphs, clusters or dendrograms, and standard methods of network analysis can be applied to them. As such, NSD provides an opportunity for a distant reading of social network sites, enabling us to formally represent and analyze the structural aspects of big social data.

The case study presented in this paper serves as an example that highlights the use of NSD on a concrete dataset and explains possible further

interpretative approaches. Thematically, the case study focuses on religion-centered gaming pages on social networks (Bernauer, 2012; Luft, 2014). These are Facebook pages providing news, reviews and other gaming-related content and that describe themselves in religious terms and/or state religiously-motivated aims in their descriptions (e.g. Christian Gamers Alliance, Gamers 4 Christ, Muslim Gamers, Atheist Gamer, etc.). The case study explores 15 religion-centered gaming pages on Facebook and analyzes publicly available data about 10275 of their users. It aims to explore these pages' audiences and their similarities, differences and affinities through NSD computed from their fans' likes. In particular, the research questions for our case study are: How "close" or "far" from each other, in terms of NSD, are religion-centered gaming pages on Facebook? How are these pages clustered? Does the self-declared religious affiliation of these pages play a role in the way they are clustered?

The results of the case study indicate that there exist several tightly-connected clusters of religion-centered gaming pages on Facebook, whose audiences are significantly "close" to each other and share similar intentional stances. These clusters are divided primarily along the lines of self-declared religion, with different Christian gaming pages' clusters being significantly "closer" to each other than to other religious clusters. There also appears a local bridge between Atheist and Christian gaming pages' clusters.

The method proposed in this paper could be relatively easily adopted by other researchers in different contexts to support their research with empirical evidence. It is particularly viable when dealing with research questions concerning large datasets of user-generated content, self-presentation, and manifestation of intentional stances. It is along these lines that game studies can benefit from NSD the most.

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**GAME DESIGN
AND
PRODUCTION STUDIES**

Subversive tactics and the post-release cycle in streamed play

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In this proposal, I would like to investigate the post-release part of video games' development cycle in the context of popular live streaming video platforms, with a particular focus on Twitch.tv and Douyu.com. My understanding of the post-release cycle will be focused on the game design perspective (Bethke, 2003), which encompasses actions such as implementing patches and updates, but also curates the fans' discussions and information flow on the various internet-based channels. For a modern video game product to be commercially successful, its post-release media presence must be assisted and supported via the aforementioned streaming services. It is the economic imperative not only in case of the frequently updated always-online franchises (*Path of Exile*, *World of Warcraft*, *Diablo*) but also the niche cRPG products, like *Torment: Tides of Numenera* (Fargo & Infinitron, 2017).

I am interested in the negotiation that occurs between the streamers and the companies holding rights to the particular games which are broadcasted on the popular gaming channels. I want to investigate the players' tactics that are aimed at criticizing, mocking or just playfully engaging with the official terms of use. Such behaviors include suggestive naming of an avatar while playing competitively, or deliberately showing game exploits. The other form of subversive critique aimed at the game content itself comes from the viewers in the form of short messages connected to the monetary donations. Their text, often supported by the reading of a voice synthesizer, can contain content that surpasses the censor mechanisms build in the broadcasting software. This establishes a precedence that can have serious consequences for the streamers themselves, as the Twitch.tv or Douyu.com policies do not count unattained fan's activity as an extenuation.

In the post-release phase of development, especially in the high-budget segment of the industry, modern games are in the much more labile state than they used to be prior to the advent of the internet streaming services. I would argue that the reason for it lies not only in the technological advances and the new internet-based DRM policies that enable fast patch

implementations, but also in the necessity to address the unconventional practices of play popularized by the influential broadcasters.

To analyze the interplay between the players, their audience and the developers (or the corporate executives responsible for the post-release life cycle of the game), I will refer to the Veli-Matti Karhulahti (2016) terms describing the participatory experience of live streams: interview frame and play frame. The first one deals with the conversation practices of the streaming services' chat, while the second refers to the competitive aspects of the broadcasted gameplay. I am particularly interested in the actions that disturb these kinds of frames, but still remain a part of the aforementioned three-element communication process.

In my analysis, I will refer to the tools that enable tracking the online streaming gameplay data, such as Quantcast and SullyGnome. The extracted metadata will be subsequently used to determine a place of the actions described above in relation to the frames of perception and interpretation forming an internet video broadcasting service.

My thesis reads as follows: the post-release development cycle of video games has been dramatically altered by the presence of streaming services, and becomes increasingly harder to control by the developers precisely because of the subversive actions and the unconventional forms of players' critique enabled by those mediums. Even though the play frame remains under a scrupulous observation of both human and non-human agents that analyze the game data, it is the interview frame that actively shapes the reception and dramatically influences the economic performance of the broadcasted titles.

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Towards a (ludic) resonant and sensory environment: Space, music and locative gaming

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This paper describes the case of GPS Musical Crosswords Puzzle, a Brazilian locative game. We aim to present how this game can create a resonant sensory environment caused by music and sound sign, which are impregnated in the Northeast Brazil. To support our ideas, we describe the locative game project „GPS Musical Crosswords Puzzle” supported by the concepts of soundscape (Schaffer, 1991), acoustic space (McLuhan, 1997) and resonate sensory environment (Machado, 2011).

GPS Musical Crosswords Puzzle is a locative game based in Petrolina, Brazil. It's available for Android and iOS systems. The game uses the regional culture from the Northeast of Brazil, especially the songs, as a resource for design of puzzles and game mechanics. Sensitive Cities Lab (LabCEUS), Federal University of Pernambuco, Federal University of Recôncavo Baiano and the State University of Bahia supported this project in the year of 2015, with funding resources from the Brazilian Ministry of Culture. The paper will structure according to the following proposal:

Games and locative media: to start our work, we are going to present the concept of locative game, showing that this game genre is not an isolated phenomenon. Otherwise it's another step in the development of others games, which uses the space as the support for players' interaction, such as alternate reality games and pervasive games (Nieuwdorp, 2005; Montola, Stenros, & Waern, 2009). Simultaneously, we are going to present the definition of locative media (Lemos, 2010) to understand the resources used in design of game mechanics and puzzles (Huizinga, 1950; Jørgensen, 2013).

Locative games and the city: in this topic we'll show how digital games moved from the video game's screen to the urban space. In this way, we are going to discuss concepts such as Ubiquitous Computing (Weiser, 1991), City of Bits (Mitchell, 1995), Everywhere (Greenfield, 2005), Sencient City

(Sheppard, 2011), among others. Our intention is highlight the role of pervasive computers in the urban space, which supporting the locative gaming.

Locative games, space and music: here we'll discuss the experience available in GPS Musical Crosswords Puzzle according the concepts of magic circle (Huizinga, 1950; Salen & Zimmerman, 2003), acoustic space (McLuhan, 1977), soundscape (Schaffer, 2011) sound space (Rodriguez, 2006), and resonant and sensory environment (Machado, 2011).

We'll conclude that the experience available in GPS Musical Crosswords Puzzle occurs by the production of a special place, a magic circle, which articulates all the concepts described in the paper. The streets in Petrolina used as a board game in this locative games creates the magic circle's boundaries; the sound space is composed by the typical noise (cars, buses, people etc.) of the location used in the game; the acoustic space is created by the reverberation of this noise with another kind of sound which is out the magic circle's boundaries; the soundscape is mixes all these kind of space and attaches it to the place, in other words, the locative game's magic circle.

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Influence of visual style of educational games on learning outcomes: a pilot study

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Digital game-based learning is usually considered to be one of the educational tools of the future. However, evidence on which game elements (e.g. competition, narrative or graphics) and in which contexts enhance learning is thin. In this regard, for older audiences, recent meta-analyses (e.g. Clark, Tanner-Smith, & Killingsworth, 2016; Wouters, van Nimwegen, van Oostendorp, & van der Spek, 2013) demonstrated a mixed picture and there is very limited evidence as concerns younger age groups. Therefore, in collaboration with the children channel of the Czech Television, we have initiated a 3-year-long project (2017-2019), that aims at investigating which elements of educational games enhance learning by improving intrinsic motivation of children 9-11 years of age. To tap the relationship between intrinsic motivation and learning outcomes, we use the Cognitive-Affective Theory of Learning with Media (Moreno, 2005). This theory proposes that intrinsic motivation engendered during learning enhance learning through increased active participation, provided the learning experience is not accompanied by a distraction (e.g. due to a poor game design). The project plan includes five comparative, value-added studies with experimental, between-subject design (planned $N \sim 40 + 40$ per study), focusing on whether graphical styles, animation styles, and the narrative level of detail increase learners' intrinsic motivation and thereby improve learning outcomes.

The first study focuses on graphical styles. During spring 2017, three pilots have been conducted (total $N = 30$), in which we have been fine-tuning the research method. Meanwhile, we have been developing a research

intervention for the whole project: a simulation game in which the player grows a plant and learns about plant water transport and photosynthesis.

The final of these pilots (n = 8) focused directly on visual attractiveness of different graphical styles (used in the game) for our target audience. Our key goal was to investigate whether we can use self-report measures to measure visual attractiveness. Each participant was individually exposed to three visual styles – supposed high aesthetic value style in color and supposed low aesthetic value style either in color or black-and-white version. Aesthetic levels were defined based on theoretical aesthetical qualities such as unity and complexity (Kulka, 2000). The content of the tested pictures consisted of three different game situations (i.e. 3 x 3 pictures). The versions differed in color palettes and overall visual consistency, but not in composition of features.

Results showed a large variability in preferences with respect to the aesthetic factor; though the supposed high aesthetic versions tended to be rated higher. The black-and-white versions were generally rated lower, but one participant favoured the black-and-white version in the case of a rainy situation (because this style was fitting for the overall picture's mood). This suggests that the context can be a confounding variable.

Overall, the pilots indicated that we can use self-report measures for our target audience, but large contrasts between what is supposed to be „highly” motivating and „not much” motivating would be needed to obtain clear-cut results. As concerns visual styles, the next step is to manipulate color saturation and art technique in the pictures, which we think can increase the difference in ratings between high vs. low aesthetic value versions. However, one of the concerns is that our age group may not be able to distinguish between aesthetical judgement and emotional impressions yet (e.g. content of the scene is more important than actual visual style).

The plant growing game will be developed during this summer. Additional pilots are also planned for the summer. All additional findings and the game will be presented at CEEGS. The project's overall findings could help, for instance, educational game developers deciding on how to invest limited budget for the game development.

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Digital + non-digital + intimately physical. „World of Darkness Berlin” as transmedia franchise entertainment

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World of Darkness Berlin (May 11-14, 2017) was an official event by Participation-Design-Agency for Paradox Interactive, who had recently (2015) acquired the White Wolf's copyright to the 25-year-old World of Darkness franchise. Starting in 1991 with Mark Rein-Hagen's *Vampire: the Masquerade* tabletop RPG, it rapidly grew to an RPG storyworld hosting several semi-independent games with revised editions and dozens of expansions. It was soon transported to live action role-playing (with the official Mind's Eye Theatre rulebook), inspired its own collectible card game *Vampire: the Eternal Struggle*, novel series, TV show *Kindred: The Embraced*, and several digital games (PC and console). Additionally, as discussed by Konzack (2015), the World of Darkness had a strong impact on popular culture far beyond its officially licensed media, including the gothic subculture, or film productions, e.g. the *Blade* and *Underworld* series. With its largest project – a MMORPG produced by CCP (publisher of *EVE Online*) – cancelled in 2014, the whole franchise was purchased in 2015 by the Swedish video game developer Paradox Interactive.

Now a Paradox subsidiary, White Wolf is developing a new edition of the transmedia storyworld. Previously, the road from the single-medium *Vampire* to its cross-media extensions had followed the „snowball effect” model (Ryan, 2014). Now, the new project follows the principles of genuine transmedia storytelling (as defined by Jenkins back in 2006): a single storyworld with one overarching storyline across multiple media. Digital games will now be in the center of attention, in agreement with the profile of Paradox Interactive. However, another major influence comes from the non-digital sector: live action role-playing, as the present-day White Wolf staff have a strong background in the Nordic larp scene, including the lead narrative designer Martin Eriksson. The convention held in Berlin in May 2017 was a major milestone, and its analysis may shed light on the future of transmedia narratives: one in which market-driven digital media entertainment meets the Nordic culture of collaborative larp design. The central element of WoD Berlin was an urban larp set in the present-day vampire

community of Berlin as described by White Wolf authors, who had designed the story up to the outbreak of a revolution and left the unfolding events in the hands of the players. The results of the one-night unscripted live action role-play by 250 participants shaped the fictional situation of Berlin for the official storyworld, as the narrative designers at White Wolf are going to include the larp events in the vision of Berlin in sourcebooks for all franchise media.

The paper reflects on the design and production of the World of Darkness Berlin cross-media experience in the context of the larger World of Darkness project, with special focus on the community-based collaborative design and the interplay of digital and non-digital media: film, board game, card game, tabletop RPG, writing, quizzes, smartphone apps, social network, larping and dancing. The case study is based on the analysis of the official media, interviews with authors and organisers, comments from participants, and author's own participant observation.

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Arcade culture survivalism: Copyright circumventions, gameplay modifications, and platform augmentations of classic coin- operated video games

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This paper posits that the practices of hacking, modification, and retrofitting of arcade video games, by bootleggers, the retro arcade preservation community, and game artists serve to preserve and extend the lifespans and functionality of classic arcade platforms. By ignoring intellectual property conditions and circumventing bespoke play-only computational media, retro communities and black market enterprises render classic arcade platforms as into editable, augmentable form, allowing hardware and software adjustments for modification of gameplay and continued operation. Parallel to these commercial and archival focussed activities, the repurposing of arcade platforms as editable canvasses allows experimentation by artists within the constraints of legacy arcade aesthetics.

Going beyond the reverse engineering of BIOS chips and duplication of ROM sets, the modified Bootleg editions of heavily pirated 1990s arcade titles such as *Mortal Kombat II: Challenger Hack* (2017) and *Street Fighter 2: Rainbow Edition* by Hung Hsi Enterprise Taiwan exist as combinations of fan service and black market entrepreneurship. These bootlegs proved popular to the extent that they directly influenced the development of *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* (Capcom, 1992) and subsequent editions. Gameplay innovations adapted by Capcom from the bootleg editions include the adding of a fireball attack to Chun-Li's fighting repertoire, and the ability to perform special moves in mid-air (Leone, 2014; Snape, 2014).

The retro arcade scene as represented by online communities such as JAMMA+ and UKVAC display constant innovation in their work collecting and maintaining classic arcade games. Enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds including engineers, machinists, graphic designers, assembly language programmers pool together to provide resources for the refurbishment and retrofitting of arcade platforms long abandoned by their original creators. The Donkey Kong Internet High Score Kit (2016) exemplifies the ingenuity of the retro preservation community, bringing 1981

hardware to the internet age, compensating for the disappearance of the arcades as communal gathering points by facilitating competitive tournament play across network space.

These survival techniques come at a price however to the perceived authenticity of classic videogaming platforms in the collectors market. This hierarchy is topped by the original hardware platforms, while software emulators such as MAME and RetroPie occupying the lower rungs of the value ladder, despite their close to identical functionality. The middle ground is occupied by bootleg arcade hardware, in particular modern FPGA (Field-Programmable Gate Array) based systems that simulate rather than emulate.

Although existing in separate strands of arcade culture, and motivated by different factors, the three parallels of piracy, preservation, and artistic experimentation serve as necessary augmentations of the commercially sealed, consumer level interface of the arcade platform, contributing to the continued archival, active play, and cultural exposure of retro arcade games, platforms, and aesthetics.

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