2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF VIDEO GAME STUDIES

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF VIDEO GAME STUDIES — SVI 2022

VIDEO GAMES AS A CHALLENGE TO ACADEMIA • 50 YEARS OF THE GAMING INDUSTRY

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Beyond narratology, towards interpretation:
What can humanities teach us about understanding video games?

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine what humanities can and should contribute to the study of video games. Broadly speaking, both ludology (Juul, Frasca) and transmedial narratology (Ryan, Thon) have concentrated on understanding the various functional aspects of video games—analysing their mechanics, rules, play, structure, and storyworlds. This focus, however, has left the central question—that of meaning—largely untouched. We will, therefore, try to draw attention to some of the ways in which traditional humaniora (e.g. philosophy and literary criticism, aesthetics and art theory), social sciences (e.g. sociology, anthropology) and other, more recent humanistic subdisciplines (science fiction studies, queer studies, spatiality studies, studies of the sublime), can contribute to interpreting video games. Our aim will be to show how these disciplines, focusing as they do on the undercurrents of video game discourse, can raise awareness of critical issues explored by games, such as imperialism, gender, queerness, the self, history, and more. By making an effort to study *actual* video games and create a new framework for interpreting video games as cultural artefacts, these disciplines can significantly contribute to the formation of video game criticism as a discipline in its own right.

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Development of a gaming business model through multi-industry ecosystems: Links with sport, fashion and other industries

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate if there are considerable business relations between ecosystems and business models in various other industries and the gaming industry. Our primary motivation is the dynamic change and growth in the industry. Since its beginning in 1972, with the mass production of the Odyssey console, it has progressed through at least three transformations, and currently, it is among the fastest-growing industries in the world. Methods for our research are literature review and a multiple case analysis. Data is gathered from secondary sources. Major part of the analysis will be dedicated to the business dynamics and models of e-sport. Further analysis will include a review of the industries that can incorporate into the gaming industry-induced business ecosystems and describe relations with the food and beverage, fashion, IT, beauty and cosmetics, healthcare and pharmaceutical industries. Companies outside the IT and gaming industry scope, but still engaged into the gaming industry business models, such as Pizza Hut, BMW, NYX, Ralph Lauren will illustrate these examples. Further, this article will analyse the role of non-gaming celebrities engaged in the gaming context. Prominent examples are presented in the business model canvas by Osterwalder and Pigneur. Key partnerships, activities and resources, specific value propositions, customer relations, channels and customer segments, as well as the main costs and revenues, will be described. We conclude that an industry which has suddenly surpassed gross income from the movie and music industry has several niches worth exploring and that business models need to be explored, developed and adapted to the specific needs of the related non-gaming industries.

KEYWORDS: gaming industry, business models, business ecosystems

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The early game review as a system of media critique

ABSTRACT

This examination of 1980s UK gaming magazine reviews asks what their function, form, and core set of discourses was. It empirically examines, via content analysis and discourse analysis, the review's evaluative conventions, and questions how these relate to wider socio-historical developments within gaming. The sample includes 184 reviews from various gaming magazines between 1984 and 1993, building on the work of such scholars as Leslie Haddon (1988), Mia Consalvo (2007), and Graeme Kirkpatrick (2015).

My research has produced a template for understanding games reviews as a system of critique. I have termed this a tri-partite system. The tri-partite structure of the review can be formulated sequentially into three stages, which are i) Context; ii) Content; and iii) Critique. The structuring of the review into three syntagms is a process then mirrored within the final stage of 'Critique', where the procession of these syntagms branches off into three paradigms of evaluation: the Construct/Experience/Commodity. Numerous examples of this structure are presented in my research, and it is argued that the broad unanimity of the convention suggests an inherent correlation between this structure and the central functions of the review. Also, that this review structure can be regarded as a metonym of the wider gaming press. Here structure acts as a division of discursive labours; where the review is designed to interpellate, inform, and instruct the gamers tastes.

Furthermore, this formation of a highly standardised review structure in the early gaming press connects to the emerging cultural capital of the magazines and their youthful review staff. The cohesive review structure acting as a means of framing (or restricting) critical variety, whilst instilling authority into a media form with little established credence or social capital. This research seeks to illuminate the relationship between shifting critical conventions and emerging cultural practices, whilst deepening our understanding of the reviewer as a stratified cultural intermediary.

KEYWORDS: media critique, UK gaming magazines, game reviews, commodity culture, cultural intermediaries

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The role of sensation fidelity in the gaming experience during the academic study of video game heritage

ABSTRACT

The academic study of video game heritage implies, among other things, being able to play old video games again. The techniques for this are multiple: access to old hardware, more recent versions of games, emulation, etc. Emulation is generally quite easy to set up, but it raises several issues such as legality, emulation quality, and authenticity of the reproduced gaming experience. Thus, beyond the characteristics of the emulators, it is important to consider the fidelity of the sensations.

It is therefore appropriate to ask what constitutes this gaming experience in terms of sensations. We can be interested in the sensations linked to the output peripherals (notably the screen and the speakers), the sensations linked to the input peripherals (notably the joysticks), the appearance of the system, and the context of the gaming activity (notably the atmosphere in which the gaming experience took place).

Some examples in particular help to illustrate the importance of this consideration with regard to the authenticity of the gaming experience: Mario's appearance with and without scan lines, the black and white video signal of the original version of Space Invaders, the role of the appearance of a handheld console such as the Game Boy, the physical relationship with the Shinobi arcade cabinet and its handling, the specificities of a 1980s arcade or a 1990s teenager's bedroom, the many ports of Another World, and the durability of servers for online games.

These examples also allow us to consider our problematic according to different dimensions: aesthetic dimension, interactive dimension, ludic dimension, and narrative dimension. And these considerations can lead us to identify precautions to be taken in the academic study of video game heritage, in particular by combining different study approaches, according to the nature of the game to be studied.

KEYWORDS: feeling, authenticity, video game heritage, emulation, game studies

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The position of a producer in the video game industry — between hard and soft skills

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a research draft, the results of which should answer the questions of what knowledge and skills are required for the position of producer in the video game industry, and if there is a need to create a study program for production in the gaming sector. The motive for this research is the rapid development of the video game industry, which also requires the development of supporting activities, and one of the most important is the training of personnel for various jobs in this sector. Over the last few years, the education system in Serbia has been somewhat improved by implementing new courses, but the vast majority of programs are related to the acquisition of technical knowledge and skills (i.e. "hard skills", such as animation, video game design or digital transformation). However, the latest researches indicate that in the game industry, not only in Serbia but also in Europe, there is a growing need for personnel in the positions of producers, marketing experts and, in general, people with managerial skills—with an emphasis on "soft skills". The initial report of the European Video Games Society's pilot project, launched by the European Parliament in early 2022, highlights the high demand for staff with business and marketing skills. The analysis of the Serbian "ecosystem" of the video game industry in the latest SGA report from 2021 indicates that producers are in the first place among the professionals that are most difficult to recruit. The subject of our research is the position of producer in the video game industry and the aim is to define the knowledge and skills needed for professional and efficient performance of this job. We start from the assumption that future personnel in those positions need higher education. The research will be conducted by surveying studios that produce video games, as well as interviewing employees in producer positions. With this study, we would like to draw attention to the need for further scientific research in this area.

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The desperate fight in China: An introduction to the dilemmas of the Chinese gaming industry and the considerable influence of the Chinese government

ABSTRACT

Academic research has made profound efforts on elaborating the essential nature of video games and their effects on gamers, ultimately allowing people to have a deeper understanding of what video games could present. However, do these efforts shed light on Chinese developers when they need solutions to manage the challenges made by the Chinese government? The answer is uncertain. The Chinese gaming industry is facing a severe test in its market. While the Chinese government have implemented high-pressure regulations and policies to the industry, such as frequently freezing new video game license issuing, forcing digital distribution platforms to remove any unlicensed games or limiting children's gaming time to three hours per week, all in the name of protecting local minors, and as censorship of video games is stricter day by day on various topics, they contribute to the fact that difficulties of Chinese developers are more serious than ever in terms of developing video games for the Chinese market or maintaining their daily business. Under these circumstances, having a better understanding of video games through academic research has gradually become unrealistic to Chinese developers, as censorship and various regulations have seriously limited the choice of content in video games and creative talents of local developers, while license is prime for them to release their games in China. As a result, this research will focus on elaborating the current difficulties of the Chinese gaming industry and introducing the solutions that Chinese developers have identified for addressing such difficulties—such as cheating on censorship or abandoning the Chinese market—by interviewing game agents who are in charge of issuing licenses in China, designers whose works and interests are damaged by regulations and censorship, and local press who have experience in these regulations. Through this research, people should gain a better understanding of the current development of the Chinese gaming industry, how developers address these difficulties, and what kind of research is needed by Chinese developers to develop better solutions for handling the challenges made by the government. As the attention on these developers is limited in current academic research, it might provide hints about potential directions of future research on the Chinese gaming industry and market as well. After all, video games are not only a kind of medium; they are also a form of entertainment products in the market which would be affected by various matters.

KEYWORDS: regulations, censorship, Chinese gaming industry, console games, mobile games

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#Playseriously: A case study on an interplay within academia, art and video game industry

ABSTRACT

Videogames can be considered as one of the most dominant "signifying practices" of contemporary society. This paper discusses both its reflective and engaging reading and especially its collaborative, psychology based research potential with further pedagogical implications. This paper presents a case study based on an international and interdisciplinary contest, realized to match the views coming from at least three disciplines (game design, game art, and psychology). Starting from the assumption that video games are developed within socio-cultural spaces, in the first place, the contest is provided in the form of a hackathon titled #playseriously where the goal is to develop a videogame for five- to seven-year-old children with one main target: to screen predictors of dyslexia. The project, funded by the CEI initiative, has involved six higher education institutions of Southeastern European countries, with different backgrounds. There are several external partners coming from the video game industry, or related areas, interested in observing the outcomes and the creative process, and eventually supporting the real development of the creative idea.

In this way, the project would be considered the perfect match within academic skills and perspective, creative practices and industrial interests and goals.

The conference will be an opportunity to share this experience of matching and meeting of academia and video game industry, starting from the projects that will be proposed during the hackathon. More specifically, the presentation will be focused on describing the creative process: how professionals with different backgrounds can cooperate to reach the main goal (developing a concept for an applied game); how games languages can dialogue with other disciplines (psychology, pedagogy, science of education); which steps can be considered strategic to develop the ideas for a winning project.

Finally, the paper will present the main results of the questionnaire we will share with all the participants in order to gather the evaluation of the experience.

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Never Alone when it comes to the fight for cultural heritage

ABSTRACT

Even though gamification has become a big part of everyday lives worldwide, still as a concept (in South Eastern Europe) it lives in the shadow of traditional methods when it comes to creating narratives about cultural heritage in museums and other serious/ respectable cultural, scientific and cultural heritage institutions.

An atmospheric puzzle platformer developed in collaboration with the Iñupiat, an Alaska native people, drawn from a traditional story that has been shared across the generations is the gem we have chosen to shed light on. Through a case study of *Never Alone* (Kisima Ingitchuna), we want to address the importance of conscious communities and their use of video games as a means of long-term treasuring method of preserving their heritage (both tangible and intangible). Elements, such as oral traditions, that are constantly on the verge of dying (out) because of overall globalization, in this way get a chance to be both preserved and popularized in a way that is available, approachable and FUN for those who want to learn about them and treasure them.

Apart from that, we want to use this case study to discuss further a strategic approach for communities (like ours) that lack consciousness about cultural heritage and to explore how the connection between academic heritage circles and the gaming industry could benefit our perception and consciousness about cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS: Never Alone, cultural heritage preservation, academic heritage discourse, gaming industry

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Revisiting the Frontier: Teaching the American West with *Red Dead Redemption II*

ABSTRACT

Few historical settings have inspired the imagination of artists and audiences as vividly as has the American West of the nineteenth century. Ever since Frederick Jackson Turner attributed crucial significance to it in his 1893 Frontier Thesis, the mythical borderline has featured prominently in the United States' political discourse and popular culture. *Red Dead Redemption II* (RDR2), a creation of the New York-based gaming studio Rockstar Games, represents a twenty-first-century medium for historians to examine reconstructions of the past and analyze the American West with students.

This paper approaches RDR2 as a work of popular history. Embedding the game in the extensive historiography of the American West, it demonstrates how RDR2 intentionally plays on tensions between the historic and mythic West. It argues that design, narrative, and gameplay allow players to choose between competing reconstructions of the American West, thereby enabling them to effectively engage with historical discourses. The production's well-rounded characters and moral code of honor help students grasp the diversity and complexity of Frontier settings in challenging and meaningful ways. More than just a source of entertainment, RDR2 represents a useful means for teaching students about the rich history of the American West.

The paper addresses questions of authenticity and inclusivity with regard to RDR2's Frontier, interrogates how the game conveys Turner's idea of dominant individualism, and explores the ways in which gaming content can help students understand how history is constantly negotiated. In that context, it outlines how to use virtual popular culture as source material and advocates for integrating game studies into History courses.

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Level-up and no game over: The dialogic relationship between academia and the video game sector through the CICERONE project

ABSTRACT

Despite being the youngest of Europe's cultural and creative sectors, the video game sector has gained great popularity within the last decades and is constantly growing. The video game sector combines technology, art and business and overlaps with areas such as XR, AR or digital art. It is also full of interesting paradoxes: local versus global networks, independent versus major firms or even art versus economy. As gaming has evolved, it has entered into various other areas, and is now much more than a means of entertainment. Game producers develop apps for educational purposes, to improve health programmes, or to build future-oriented, creative think tanks.

Our proposal is based on the Horizon2020 project CICERONE (Creative Industries Cultural Economy Production Network; https://cicerone-project.eu/), an interdisciplinary project researching cultural and creative industries. Through a discussion of the project and its methodology, which is based on the Global Production Network Theory, and an overview of its findings, we showcase in what way academia can contribute to the study, understanding and development of games as a sector, but also how the video game sector challenges the boundaries of academic studies. We argue that this relationship between academia and games is a level-up, no game over one, and we call it that in the sense that it is getting more sophisticated with the development of the video game sector, and is constantly growing and expanding. It is dialogic as both parts are in a constant conversation with each other—although sometimes not explicitly. This relationship has benefits for both sectors, ranging from the understanding of pragmatic considerations and issues, to the development of theoretical concepts and frameworks. Among the topics included in our discussion are entrepreneurship and working conditions, local embeddedness, the interplays between local and global, power relations and intersectionality.

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Researching folklore and popular culture in the age of video games: The case of *Final Fantasy VII*

ABSTRACT

By taking popular culture studies and folklore studies as an analytical framework, this paper is focused on the folklore created by the players and communities of the critically acclaimed and popular JRPG video game *Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 1997). The formation of what we call *Final Fantasy VII* fan folklore is presented here as a concoction of transmediality of the game (with official Walkthroughs and Guidebooks, movie sequel, novels, and spin-off games) and the elements of the game that were made secret by the developers (as well as several false rumors) and carefully discovered and circulated by the players (fans) through oral tradition (offline and later online) that circulate to this day. This study presents the ways of articulating the relationship between the video game and the players and how their inextricably linked experiences and relationships are eventually monetized in the promotion of the new version of the game, *Final Fantasy VII* Remake (2020). We argue how through Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling" players became a vital part of the game's folklore as we analyze Square Enix's short movie (video commercial) as a part of the promotion of *Final Fantasy VII* Remake. By conducting the narrative analysis of the video and analyzing reactions of the fans to that video, we postulate the creation of *Final Fantasy VII* fan folklore as an important contemporary aspect of experiencing nostalgic turn in the gaming industry and how remakes and new additions of older popular products heavily rely on that specific new form of folklore that goes beyond one game.

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Domain Change: Gaming Perceptions Among Undergraduate Students in Thailand and China

ABSTRACT

Thailand's and China's internet penetration rates have rocketed over the past 15 years. Such increased access has led to scholarly interest in students' online gaming habits in both countries. However, there is little research available about how undergraduate students in both countries consider their own and their peers' gaming attitudes and habits, especially when these are sensitively aligned with "addiction." Lacking too is research about how they think gaming impacts learning and academic performance among students from different university disciplines. This research examines undergraduate students in Thailand and China from the field of humanities compared with those from other disciplines in respect to their attitudes to and awareness of gaming addiction. A sample of 181 students (136 female, 45 male) from international and private universities was surveyed. Participants' ages were not noted in the survey itself but ranged from 17- to 20-year old. An online survey containing 17 questions developed using Surveylab™ was employed with anonymous participation for ethical considerations. The students' interactions with leading games were analysed. A Likert scale was used alongside open-response questions and a mixed method (descriptive statistics, student t-test and discourse analysis) to interpret these results. With gaming at the helm of economic and entertainment fronts, it is unsurprising that Internet and gaming studies with an Asian locus are mounting. Since further work has been done to focus on heavy internet use amongst students and the impact it has on their health and academic performance, an account of the attitudes and habits of the participants in China and Thailand is lacking and this paper seeks to explore this critically neglected area. It is shown that students' field of study, whether they actively played games and how often they played games all impacted how they valued their own gaming and defined the concept of "addiction."

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Now the world is old: Cultural and historical entropy in fantasy video game settings

ABSTRACT

A common trope in modern fantasy literature—since the works of Tolkien and Moorcock—has been that of a cultural and historical entropy in fantasy settings. Such settings often suffer from long, inevitable, melancholic decline, be it in a cultural, material, immaterial, technological or demographical sense: most well known examples usually feature stories about decadent empires, disappearing magic or slow waning of fantastic beings (elves, monsters, etc.). The theme of cultural entropy is a reflection of both classic literary themes (such as the Golden Age myth) and modernistic examinations of cultural decline of the western civilization, and as such is present, in a way just described, in a number of contemporary video game settings. Furthermore, in contemporary trends, entropy is even the main plot trait of a given utilitarian setting in all categories of video game production (AAA, AA, indie), as seen in titles such as: Dark Souls (and other FromSoftware titles), Hollow Knight, Hyper Light Drifter, Children of Morta, Tunic, Loot Hero, Golf Club Wasteland and many more. Through hermeneutic, culturological and comparative interpretation we will examine the nature, origin and broader symbolism of cultural entropy in selected contemporary video game settings.

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Do video games have a place in psychotherapy?

ABSTRACT

In the early phases, the psychological aspects of video game use were investigated from the pathological point of view. The negative aspects of their usage, such as addiction and encouraging aggressive behaviour, have been studied. With the development of the variety of video game genres and their expansion from the field of entertainment, the field of examining their usage has also expanded to study possible benefits. The positive effects of playing video games on reaction time, practising social skills and problem-solving abilities are determined. Serious video games are being developed for educational purposes and for training various professionals. In mental health care, video games have applications in coping with chronic diseases, pain management and cancer chemotherapy. Also, previous research shows that playing video games has a positive effect on emotional regulation and reduces PTSD symptoms. Gradually, video games are being included in the field of psychotherapy, especially with adolescents and children, where they can contribute to facilitating the establishment and strengthening of the therapeutic alliance. In parallel with the entry of video games into various areas of life, there is more and more research dealing with the use of video games in psychotherapy, and this article will present previous studies examining the relationship between video games and psychotherapy.

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Work hard, play hard—The concept of playbour in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*

ABSTRACT

Under the promise of complete creative expression, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (Nintendo, 2020), henceforth ACNH, has established one of the largest online communities— to date, more than 39 million copies have been sold—where players play to work and work to play within a visual and production ecosystem that influences the way the game is played and the customization choices. ACNH is based on a capitalist system: the environment can be exploited to obtain materials to create a variety of items; natural resources can be sold for bells (the main in-game currency) to buy and accumulate pieces of furniture; and, finally, players are strongly encouraged to go into financial debt to Tom Nook, the island manager, to create their dream island.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the sugar-coated representation of the contemporary capitalist system of ACNH by investigating how Nintendo has exacerbated the concept of playbour (Kücklich, 2005)—a hybrid form that disguises work as play and capitalizes on the commodification of recreational activities, implementing neoliberal and capitalist logics into the core mechanics of the game. In so doing, it invites players to engage in ludic activities that appropriate the principles of the gig economy and the platform economy (Jarrett, 2022) to persuade them to earn bells, purchase items, and get further into debt. Lastly, the paper will present a parallelism with the early simulation games, *Capitalism, Sim City, Railroad Corporation*, and *Tycoon*, which are explicitly classified as business management games, and the neoliberal dynamics of ACNH, cleverly disguised through a specific marketing campaign that positions the game among the so-called cozy games, that is to say, games in which the ludic action is synonymous with self-care. Beyond a kawaii design, are capitalist and neoliberal dynamics that normalize the fetishization of goods and the exploitation of natural resources for profit.

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Ideological diversion and propaganda in the horror game *Yuppie Psycho* (2019): Soundtrack, immersion and interpellation

ABSTRACT

Yuppie Psycho is an adventurous survival horror video game set in a dystopian society of the 1990s. This 16-bit pixel art game, laced with brutal violence, panic, depression, perversion and bizarre humour, follows unqualified yuppie Brian Pasternack on his first day of work at the mega-corporation Sintracorp. As players solve puzzling tasks in the role of Brian, they gradually discover the macabre past and dark secrets behind the success of this company. What makes the gaming experience even more intense is its immersive and interactive wide-ranging soundtrack, which is characterised by a sinister, soulless undertone. It consists of computer-generated lift music, jazz, city pop and suspenseful synthesised musical "bursts" with distorted sound effects. These experimental, harrowing and strangely catchy hybrid tunes, along with a gritty retro visual aesthetic, are integral to the interactive storytelling. They reflect diametrically opposed atmospheres and mental images: from nightmarish videoludic horror to a much gentler, friendlier, but still strikingly toxic workplace. The aim of this presentation is to explore how this video game presumably addresses the current global problem of class and social antagonism. Particular attention is paid to music as a sonifying agency that conceptually generates, mimics and conveys knowledge about economic, social and human inequality. The perceptual, cognitive, immersive and interpellant potential of these polyvalent sounds is used in conjunction with the visual features of the narrative to deepen the mechanisms of power aimed at brutally controlling and disciplining the indoctrinated bodies of the working class. Ultimately understood as a socio-political and ideological allegory, *Yuppie Psycho* satirically reflects the terrifying capitalist reality whose ubiquity and seductive profitability permanently engulfs the moral landscape of contemporary humanity.

KEYWORDS: Yuppie Psycho, video game soundtrack, immersion, corporate capitalism, propaganda

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Is marriage the grave/purpose of life?
Catherine: Full Body Autoethnography

ABSTRACT

Viewing gaming as an essential cultural practice provides a critical insight into the operational structure of contemporary culture. As multiple issues are raised into public view, and the gaming world becomes more complex, video games are making various ways to represent these social perspectives. Important questions are raised and need to be answered: What does the gamification of cultural realities and social dynamics mean? How do games represent contemporary culture notions? Is participating in a romance game merely a form of entertainment or are there inevitable cultural implications?

This article analyzes the Japanese romance game *Catherine: Full Body* (2019) through an autoethnographic approach, aiming to argue that video games do not merely flirt with cultural norms but provide a space for social- and self-reflection. By deconstructing and reproducing young adults' performance of collective anxieties about social norms related to marriage and heterosexuality in the whole new worldview of Mesopotamian mythology, this game relies on its rich audiovisual media and the immersive experience through players' virtual participation to facilitate individual players' self-reflection on making choices about marital behavior in the real world. The game, therefore, plays the role of a subversion of the dominant social norms of heterosexuality and monogamy, challenging the long-established ethical myths and revealing the contradictory and absurd realities faced by contemporary young adults, which were hidden by a constructed history. Such exposure is made more potent with the immersive character of the gameplay. In the social tension between reality and the virtual world, video game, as a medium form, perhaps gives a new meaning to the reconstruction of gender politics—that perceptions of social possibilities are not only unrealized assumptions but also undiscovered realities.

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Criticism of a critical game – *Golf Club: Wasteland*

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to offer criticism of a game which can itself be considered a part of critical discourse. The game in question is *Golf Club: Wasteland* (2021), made by Demagog Studio (Serbia). Being a post-apocalyptic golfing simulator at the forefront, *Golf Club: Wasteland* unveils subversive narrative layers which tackle capitalism and consumerism, and point to a possible future state in which our planet suffers an ecological catastrophe. This "anti-escapist entertainment", as Igor Simić, one of its authors, calls it, fundamentally achieves a ludonarrative dissonance. The simplistic game mechanics fall short when juxtaposed to the multilayered storytelling that places the game in the genre of "serious games". Even though it is not fully accomplished as a game in the ludic sense, *Golf Club: Wasteland* manages to question what a video game is supposed to be and how far it can come in playing with criticism. This hermeneutic reading tends to decode meanings from semantic signs contained within the game's narrative, visual and musical elements, as well as game mechanics, covering the most important aspects of the video game medium, which is why the paper could be recognized as an example of video game criticism, a discipline arguably still in its infancy. This analysis is both textual and contextual, enveloping the form and content of *Golf Club: Wasteland* as an indivisible unity.

KEYWORDS: Golf Club: Wasteland, video game criticism, critical play, serious games, ludonarrative dissonance

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Understanding individuals' in-game purchase motivation: First steps of initial analysis for in-game purchase scale.

ABSTRACT

The in-game purchase consists of purchases of different types and different objectives within the virtual world of a video game. Over the last twenty years, this phenomenon has expanded and involved an increasing number of players. Previous studies have investigated motivations for in-game purchases, but without developing an adequate instrument to measure them in each type of video game. In this study, we have developed and validated a scale to investigate in-game purchase motivations based on four main factors, namely Utility, Enjoyment, Reputation, and Investment. Data on 573 people that did in-game purchases in the previous month were used for assessing internal validity through exploratory factor analysis. The analysis confirmed the existence of the 4 mostly independent factors (with the Reputation factor as the only one that entertained statistically significant relationships with the other 3 factors). For external validity, we chose two recent and popular games that allow people to potentially achieve a reputation through in-game purchases, namely *League of Legends* (171 participants) and *Genshin Impact* (209 participants). As expected, in these games, Reputation had the highest correlation among the 4 factors with the amount of money spent. The relationships emerging between the factors of the model and the psychological variables considered present for gamers were also evaluated and discussed.

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Less power to the player? The problem of agency and perspective in historical video games

ABSTRACT

History has been a source of inspiration for video games since their inception. Whether parachuted into historical events in a first- or third-person perspective or given a bird's eye view of entire continents, players have engaged with history on various layers and methods. However, the ensuing, emergent procedural rhetoric often implies ahistorical or outdated views of history, which overemphasize the power of kings, generals, and gods. While similar issues could be found in other popular forms of historical entertainment, gaming's reliance on player action makes avoiding this problem more difficult.

In this paper, I intend to delve into the conflict between the agency given to the player to reshape the game-world and the current ways in which history is perceived and analyzed by historians. By focusing on the player as a historian shaping reality "in real time", I emphasize the historiographical implications of gameplay mechanics, themes, and genres. My goal is to present how an analysis of this conflict can lead to a better understanding of the use of history by video game developers and players alike, as well as cement video games as a medium historians can examine in search of the uses of history in current, modern-day popular culture.

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Gaming Eastern Europe: A regional perspective on game development

ABSTRACT

The industry that produces computer games is a multibillion dollar business with potential global revenue from online sale as well as the players' in-game purchases. This necessarily attracts attention of politicians and neoliberal economists, who advocate for the creation of an adjusted infrastructure in the hope of landing the next set of 'unicorn' businesses to their region or country. Computer game companies are central to this development, demanding a steady flow of highly skilled workers, limited interference of labour unions and low-tax policies on revenues—all features which defy localisation. Since computer games are a global commodity that potentially can generate players from all corners of the world, representatives of the industry are at times quick to gloss over regional and national differences that might interfere with the global reach of their product. Regardless of production location, we still find, or feel through gameplay, certain Eastern Europeanness in certain games such as *Papers, Please* (2013) or *The Witcher* (2001-2018), which suggests a perceived communality that needs to be untangled in terms of aesthetics, representation and localisation. This paper will focus on the publication of a special issue in Studies of Eastern European Cinema on computer games, which deals with this topic. The main point of the paper is to reveal the findings of the articles, but also to probe common features of Eastern European game development. Is it useful to consider EE computer games within national and regional frameworks? One finding is the focus on history and in particular the transition period from communism to postcommunism in games, which lead to addressing issues of game localization, as well as problems of gamification of history.

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Spoiler alert: An empirical case study of diversity and representation in mobile game characters for experiential learning

ABSTRACT

This article explores an empirical content analysis of *Identity V*, an asymmetrical multiplayer survival-horror adventure digital game developed by NetEase—a digital game company based in Guangzhou, China. The content of this empirical study extracted the scopes of diversity, representation and the need for inclusion within game art and narrative of Survivor and Hunter character development in *Identity V* whilst referencing to Representation Theory (Hall, 2017). This study extracted the importance of cultural representations that are beyond stereotypes in new media, specifically digital game characters, as experiential learning tool. This study is derived from the researcher's critical observation as a consumer/researcher while playing the game in the Asia Server from Season 2 (2018) to Season 15 (February 2021).

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Video games and adaptation: An introduction

ABSTRACT

The main idea of the paper is to analyze the relation of video games and adaptation both synchronically and diachronically. The synchronic aspect of the paper builds on contemporary academic insights while the diachronic one is founded in the gaming industry itself, which is why the paper ultimately points to the similarities and discrepancies between the theory and the practice of video game adaptation. In the first part of the paper, we outline a theoretical framework which is mainly derived from Linda Hutcheon's idea of adaptation as remediation between three modes of engagement: the telling, showing and participatory mode. Her insights are then compounded with contemporary video game studies in order to shed light on the unique features of video games as a medium (e.g. video game mechanics) and how other media are transcoded into and from the semiotic sign system constituted in these features. In the second part of the paper, we analyze examples of adaptation from all crutial periods of video game history. These examples include the early electronic games, the infamous E.T., influential video game series such as *Warcraft*, *The Witcher* and *Halo*, as well as more recent titles, such as *Cyberpunk 2077*. By looking into concrete examples that chart all possible relations the participatory mode has with those of showing and telling, we hope to open up case-study examinations into the field of video game adaptation. The goal of the paper is, therefore, not to offer a comprehensive guide to the theory or history of video game adaptation, but rather an overview meant to direct researchers toward possible and higly required further work in the field.

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Erasing the boundaries between different sectors: An application of digital games in education

ABSTRACT

The application of digital games in education can be approached in a number of ways. Given the relative novelty within our academic community, this topic is approached analytically and critically, pointing out the inevitability of these phenomena as well as potential challenges. The aim of the paper is to analyze the application of digital games in education from the point of view of the contemporary relationship between education, science, economy and technology. This goal is realized through a theoretical analysis within the following tasks: (a) research on the impact of industrial revolutions on the education process, with special reference to Industry 4.0 and the implications for education 4.0, within which the importance of the application of technology in the education process is increasingly prominent; (b) highlighting the importance of a critical approach in the framework of the growing interpenetration between science, technology, education and the market (economy) in order to avoid the subordination of educational tasks to the short-term demands of the market (economic profitability) and the appearance that the goals of technology (usefulness) become superior to the goals of science (true); (c) analytical approach to the study of the application of digital games in education from the point of view of the permeation of science, technology and economy in the education process. As the conclusion of the work, the inevitability of increasing cooperation and the penetration of different sectors is emphasized, as well as the necessity of understanding the differences in their primary goals. In this context, given that it is an integral part of modern life, the application of technology is inevitable in education as well, but it is necessary and significant to achieve the goal that the application of digital games in education serves humanization, emancipation and more interactive learning instead of individuals becoming subordinate to technology (goal usefulness) and economy (goal profit).

KEYWORDS: education, technology, market, science, digital games

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What about the "video" of "video games"?—The visual aesthetic of digital games

ABSTRACT

Video games, as the name implies, are meant to be played. But what about the video? This paper aims to explore the study of the visual aesthetic component of digital games, and the interest players have in it.

Since the inception of game studies, emphasis has been placed on the interactive component of digital games to establish them as an autonomous medium, worthy of its own analyses and independent from contiguous media such as film. This has led academic endeavours to be concentrated on the aspects that make digital games "games", at the expense of the "video" aspect of games.

Dating back to the old ludologist versus narratologist debate, analyses privileging mechanics over images and narration take the risk of excluding important aspects of digital games (Anable 2018, 2). Despite this not being their only aspect, nor the main one, digital games remain a predominantly visual medium (Carbone 2005, 2; Tavinor 2009, 61). Indeed, artists usually amount for the largest part of development costs after programmers (Ars Technica 2017; Leafy Games 2013; Reimer 2006)—an indication that the visual aspect is regarded as paramount. To the question of why Final Fantasy was so popular, Hironobu Sakaguchi, answered: 'The game itself is fun to play, but its strongest characteristic is the visual entertainment the game provides' (Sakaguchi 2000). Indeed, empirical studies conclude that players have interest in games that go beyond the act of playing or winning, including aesthetic interest (Fortes Tondello et al. 2018), and scholars affirm that players have an aesthetic interest in digital games similar to other visual arts (Tavinor 2009, 174; Bateman 2014; Upton 2015).

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Playing with ludonarrative transpositions in indie games

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we will analyse the ways of creating original playing experience and provide new meanings and interpretations of (pop) culture texts, genres, game mechanics, etc. in videogames, especially those from the independent production. We focus on transformations of ludic and narrative elements in gameworlds and deviations from narrative and conventions—in the story field and the playing field. The study is primarily directed towards indie games due to their prolific playground for comical, subversive, absurd or shocking gameplay experiences, stories and visual expressions. We will use the term transposition for the thematic and semantic transformations we analysed, initially relying (without limitation) to the "classical" Gerard Genette study of "second-degree literature" (1982)—by postmodern linking of old texts with new meanings. From the field of video game study, we call upon the studies of transgression in video games (Mortensen, Jorgensen 2020). Finally, this study will attempt to establish continuity with theoretical considerations presented at the last year's SVI conference (Conference of Video Game Studies 2021) by contextualizing (and differentiating) our study with regard to the ludonarrative dissonance concepts (Hocking 2007, Jocić 2022), as well as the storyplaying (Domsch 2013) and narrative competence in gaming (Alidini & Dušanić 2022).

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Interactive in-game advertising for open-world games — based on user preferences

ABSTRACT

According to Finances Online, there are more than 2.5 billion video game players worldwide (Gilbert, 2022). Gamers from a multitude of cultures, ages, and lifestyles play electronic games using consoles, PCs and online communities, handhelds, and mobile phones. There are over 10 million game developers, including indie game developers working in the game development industry according to the Statistica (*ibid.*). The game development industry is a collaborative digital working platform and development stakeholders can be identified as programmers, creative artists, 3D-2D designers, engineers, writers, and non-technical support providers.

In-game advertisements like pop-up ads are the main revenue generation method for most video games. Although it is the most preferred method of revenue generation for video games, the gameplay needs to be interrupted by the player in order to go through an advertisement. That can be identified as the main problem domain in in-game advertising (Abbasi et al., 2021). Thus the research study is designed to address that main problem by designing a system with an asset plugin for the Unity game engine after studying the problem domain from the perspective of the developer and player, to create a more interactive and customizable in-game advertising environment.

Advertising by considering user preferences has a high impact on displaying suitable content for players and can gain high attraction for the advertisements as well (*ibid.*).

The research study is carried out by designing and developing an open-world game prototype with a customizable advertising platform. Inside the game, the billboards are dynamically configurable by using the system dashboard to publish live advertisements. A sample of professional game players participated to evaluate the prototype. The system dashboard collects data to identify user preferences. The study was completed after analyzing the user data and identified that the advertisements which were displayed according to user preferences are more effective.

KEYWORDS: In-game advertisements, pop-up ads, game development

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How to repair a world in ruin:
Death Stranding and the art of the Anthropocene

ABSTRACT

The Anthropocene, our current geological era of mass environmental destruction, is a frequently engaged subject within the field of Contemporary Art. Images of devastated ecosystems, beached marine life, and petro-capitalist seas of oil are abundant. These artworks speak to ecological collapse in a myriad of forms, yet the overall imagery and the approaches to it are difficult for viewers to connect with emotionally and intellectually. The scale and scope of the climate crisis serves to limit the impact of traditional and conceptual art practices, in part due to their static nature or physicality. Digital media, through its interactivity, has the ability to disarm and empower its viewers/players regardless of their location, potentially overcoming resistance to imagery and narrative alone. *Death Stranding*, a 2019 video game by Kojima Productions, makes aesthetic and narrative choices similar to many artworks about the Anthropocene, but it also produces a new site of ecological examination through the use of interactive digital play. The game's messaging and mechanics encourage players to reconnect and repair a world in ruin, making them implicit in the beginning of its salvation. This study presents a survey of contemporary artworks compared and contrasted with *Death Stranding* in order to discern their narrative and aesthetic similarities and media-related differences.

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User experience of aesthetic knowledge production in citizen science gamification

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how we can theoretically conceptualize academic research for producing knowledge in virtual citizen science (VCS) when play and socialization with fictional and ludic visual communication of game aesthetics intervene in truth making. The generic acknowledgment of science connotates academic hierarchy, expert labor, professionalism, neutrality, analytical practice and systematic order, and ideally ethical conduct with altruistic drive. Gamification in citizen science seems to encompass a revealing aesthetic act of modern technology (Heidegger, 1977) for the use of science as well as the reconnection of interaction and participation with science (Habermas, 1971) via participatory sensing. Through the lens of critical theories of science and academic knowledge production, I question user experiences (UX) in the VCS projects and citizen scientists' status in mediatized game platforms as subjects of power in pursuing both play and truth. Indeed, gamification for citizen researcher engagement has likely been maintained with value-laden pleasure traits and competition-based mechanisms activated by game aesthetics rather than knowledge acquisition. Beyond the game elements such as progress points, badges, or leaderboards in VCS projects, game aesthetics also establish ludic design patterns of form/rhythm activating spatial continuum as part of UX. I examine the design of citizen science projects, their know-how methodologies in conjunction with the aesthetics of repetition (Ndalianis, 2004), and the virtuosity of video games to reconfigure science-making. For this, I survey trends of game elements and citizen science characteristics in the literature on gamification and VCS project reviews. This analysis aims to foster cooperation between the gaming industry and the academe to build shared interests. By that, the study enables critical thinking on scientific goals correlated with lifeworld and user-oriented approach through game aesthetics of VCS projects.

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The playful monster hunter: Pacifism and neoliberalism in *The Witcher* franchise

ABSTRACT

This paper will argue that *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* (2015, CD Projekt Red) and *The Witcher* (TV series, 2019—present) both exhibit culturally resonant temporal structures within the context of their respective media. The first season of the Netflix series is characterised by interwoven timelines, whose narratives dovetail during and between episodes, that can be seen to resist linear conceptions of time. Moreover, Hanson (2018) puts forward the understanding that the temporality of gameplay is complex and can be repeated, duplicated, paused and mastered. The depiction of complex non-linear temporalities in both media will be positioned as a means of opposing neoliberal (linear) time in line with Verhaeghe (2015) and Juul's (2016) reasonings.

Furthermore, Cremin's Deleuzean reading of the player's role in completing the player/ developer's 'collaborative portrait' (2016) will be evaluated in terms of exploitative narrative structures that arise in analysis. Specific attention is afforded to the hierarchical and transactional relationship to the environment that is privileged in Geralt's positioning as a Witcher in both the TV series and the video game. The resulting coexistence of non-linear temporalities, as a resistance to neoliberalism, and the depiction of hierarchical environment/individual alignments, as a naturalising force of environmental exploitation, will be evaluated.

The resulting logic will advocate 'pacifist/ethical challenge' playthroughs, whereby the player engages in as few acts of dominance over their environment as possible. In doing so, player agency is foregrounded beyond the limits and parameters the game sets out. The temporality of play is reclaimed from exploitative structures the game world cannot forget and is reconfigured as a meaningful resistance to neoliberal ideals.

KEYWORDS: non-linear temporalities, The Witcher, ecocriticism, neoliberalism, challenge playthroughs

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In the eye of the beholder: An eye tracking examination of the visual-procedural linkage

ABSTRACT

In the past 40 years eye-tracking technology has found ever increasing application in fields ranging from linguistics and psychology to marketing and industrial design, prompting an author to comment that it is difficult today to find a laboratory without an eye-tracker, providing researchers with a relatively cheap method of investigating online processing (Liversege, 2011). This paper aims to use eye-tracking research methodology in order to investigate how players track ontological characteristics of entities in video games, with the central hypothesis being that the visual design of entities is used to predict procedural characteristics such as "damage", "health", "armor" etc. Combining insights from Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Relevance Theory (RT), this paper proposes that players of all skill levels use differences in visual design to predict differences in ontological characteristics. The experimental set-up consisted of an online questionnaire which was used to measure the perceived threat of certain visual designs, while a modified *Warcraft III* map was used to create an experimental environment where designs were matched with unit statistics. Preliminary data suggests that players of all skills predict ontological characteristics based on visual design, while skilled players react more quickly to the cases of visual/procedural incongruity and act accordingly. The number of attempts and the level of player frustration were directly linked with the aptness of the visual design, suggesting that the application of eye tracking and CMT/RT can be used to predict the player's perception of and satisfaction with a specific scenario.

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Stages of visual creativity

ABSTRACT

Stages of Visual Creativity is an educational game for Art and Design students. I designed and developed a one-level online game for my students about creativity. This game is designed to demonstrate visual creativity strategies. I aim to introduce some creative techniques to the students. This is just an introductory game and technique for teaching creativity. I first focus on the semiotics and how we can read the visuals/images around us, and I target basic strategies for manipulating images to create unique art/design works. I emphasize Saussure's and Barthes's ideas on sign systems and denotative and connotative meanings of images. I know these concepts are structural ideas, but I believe that it is important to teach students these concepts before giving the details about the evolution of the image and language analyses. This analysis includes denotative and connotative meanings of an image. It begins with the Bending, Blending, and Breaking. These three visual manipulations improve making meaning of images. While students play the game, the voiceover explains how these techniques can be applied. I believe these techniques can be helpful for learning forms and properties of images and show how artists' and designers' ideas evolve during their artistic and design processes. Finally, I focus on the SCAMPER technique (redirected from Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to Another Use, Eliminate, and Reverse).

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Transient Titans: A literary approach to *Shadow of the Colossus* (2018)

ABSTRACT

The field of literary studies has broadened over the past few decades to include the mediums of film and television, and in recent years some have sought to include video games as well. Scholars in Media Studies have led the way in treating video games as literature but have emphasized their worthiness as a literary medium as opposed to actually executing a literary analysis of video games. Few games hold such aesthetic and narrative power as *Shadow of the Colossus*, whose frequency of remakes alone account for its popularity and influence. Its most recent release in 2018 revitalizes the classic and brings its aesthetics properly into the latest generation of consoles. It follows Wander, a young man who journeys to the Forbidden Lands in the hopes of reviving his fallen love (we presume it is romantic, though it might be otherwise). Promised by voices that resonate within the Shrine of Worship, he embarks on a quest to slay 16 colossi, after which Dormin (the voices) will resurrect his love. A literary analysis of *Shadow of the Colossus* demonstrates that it can, in fact, be read as a work of literature, particularly when interpreted through an exilic lens.

This paper will first qualify Shadow as a literary text by branching off Jonathan Culler's definition and will show how it expands current understandings of what literature means and what forms it can take. From there, it will also explore how the game can be read within exile studies, as the condition of exile is refracted both in the protagonist and the world around him—particularly its transience and metamorphosis. Finally, the paper will offer alternative approaches for interpretation of Shadow ranging from Faustian adaptation to Medievalism, ultimately demonstrating that video games deserve just as much literary attention as their silver screen siblings.

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Time through the eyes of individuals: Narrative innovations in video games and the material representation of the past

ABSTRACT

It is common in video games to depict history in a panoptic way, because perceiving the fluctuations of time requires us to take a step back. In order to depict the past, developers have designed "god games" and "city builders", where nations are the main characters, where the player can perceive the importance of an event by manipulating it, but where little room is left for individual agency or the materiality of history. And when people are staged, they tend to lose their identity. The tribesmen of *Dawn of Man* have names but no history; the leaders of *Civilization* only serve as embodiments for their culture. Conversely, the protagonists of *Assassin's Creed* do have personal stories but slowly become inhuman and godlike because of their status in the narrative. In this sense, videogames follow the evolution of historical science, where, to grasp the very nature of an event, one would have to abandon biography (Loriga S. (2010), Lepetit x, Paris, Seuil).

Yet video games can also offer narrative possibilities to combine individual and collective history. For designers can build their narratives and characters around contradictions and plotholes or give the player room for exploration, and thus offer a vision of history that is all but monolithic. By comparing recent examples devoted to different historical periods and using all sorts of gameplays, from *The Forgotten City* to *Battlefield One*, including *Crusaders Kings III* or even *Ghost of Tsushima*, we will consider how video games can introduce innovative ways of depicting facts through the very means of fiction, stage the materiality of history, its potentialities, and convey just how unfamiliar past can become through time. In this way, we hope to raise awareness of how video games can nourish academic reflection and play an effective role in knowledge transfer.

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Gamification in art: The Malevolent Droplets — Implementation of video game elements in works of art using the method of augmented reality

ABSTRACT

The Malevolent Droplets art project uses a gamification process in a classic painting process. As a process of turning something into a game, by adding one or more mechanics from video games, the goal was to create an interactive piece of art that would completely change the perspective of traditional artwork. Feedback from interacting with works that use some of the elements of video games is reflected in the form of achievements, competition or cooperation in a virtual environment. The goal of the art project The Malevolent Droplets is to involve the widest possible audience as active participants in new creative and imaginative spaces.

The interaction process takes place using the method of extended tangibility and by scanning the painted template with a smart device. After the mechanical launch, a specially created gamified digital space is launched on the smart device.

The approach to the artistic project The Malevolent Droplets is from the point of view of the aesthetics of video games from the eighties of the twentieth century, which belong to the so-called shoot 'em up genre. This genre highlights the aspect of perception, reflexes and speed in users, which are also implemented in the art project itself. The gameplay of the project, which consists of a combination of moving images, graphics and sound, takes place in the mediated space of augmented reality in which the action of the gamified space and interactive access of the user take place.

The project uses a *Space Invaders 1* video game as a reference. The goal is to destroy all incoming waves of foreign entities and score as many points as possible. Similar to video games from the 1980s, the visual appearance of animated drops was created from art templates.

KEYWORDS: augmented reality, art, gamification, digitalization, interactivity.

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The influence of music on player performance in video games: Does a rhythmic change in non-diegetic background music affect a player's performance in FPS video game mechanics?

ABSTRACT

Today, the most common use of music in digital games is for producing immersion. Music is perceived as a narrative artistic tool that conveys feelings and creates identification or alienation with characters, events, and various situations. Games use music composed specifically or available music that makes an "atmosphere". Few studies in music and games have tested different effects of music on expressions of behaviors, physical power supply, and cognitive capacity (e.g. Laura Levy's study published in 2015 on the effects of background music on player performance and behavior). In this study, we examined the relationship between the tempo parameter in music and observed its impact on player performance in a first-person shooter (FPS) game through a 3D FPS game that we had developed. We focused on the essential part of any piece of music—the rhythm (as a way to isolate parameters). We started by separating the tempo without changing other parameters such as harmony, scale, etc. Then we examined how non-diegetic music may help the player's performance in the game and support this with measurable parameters.

Finally, we found that there is no specific correlation between the rhythm and improvement in player performance, and that further experiments with different music related factors should be conducted.

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