

Fourth International
Video Game Studies Conference
(SVI 2025):
Game Design Studies

Bydgoszcz, Poland: December 1st-2nd



VIDEO GAME STUDIES
STUDIJE VIDEO IGARA

Abstract Book

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Emotional Architectures of Play: From Game Design Patterns to Player Tactics

This study examines the communicative and spatial dimensions of player experience, focusing on digital games as emotional environments co-produced by designers and players. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of socially produced space and Michel de Certeau's concept of tactical everyday practice, digital play is framed as a space of *micro-resistance* where players tactically navigate and reinterpret structured environments to construct personal and affective meaning. This perspective aligns with Bernard Suits' utopian view of play as a rejection of the dominant utilitarian logic of modern life in favor of lusory, voluntary engagement.

To explore how emotional experiences emerge through design, the study employs the MDA (Mechanics–Dynamics–Aesthetics) framework, positioning players as interpreters of game mechanics the rules and systems that structure interaction. Players transform these designed systems into emotionally resonant spaces through aesthetic engagement: how they perceive, feel, and respond to gameplay. Emotional meaning arises not solely from narrative design, but through the creative ways players subvert, linger within, or reroute systems evoking nostalgia, reading metatexts, or generating parallel personal stories while playing.

Empirical data were gathered through a longitudinal diary study involving 35 participants from various genres (RPG, simulation, adventure, and strategy). Thematic analysis revealed recurring affective patterns: immersion, nostalgia, agency, self expression, and reflective detours from narrative goals. By combining spatial theory, design analysis, and qualitative data, the paper advances a practice based understanding of game space arguing that players tactically engage with design patterns to produce emotionally meaningful play.

Keywords

game design, spatial theory, player agency, emotional engagement, tactical play

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An Endless Game of Life and Death

Abstract

Using a formal and textual design analysis of the 1987 Japanese board game *Tamba* as a central case study, this paper will introduce the concept of *intracultural mechanics* — play mechanisms that deliberately interweave in-game rules with external cultural norms to encourage playfully transgressive interactions within their intermixture.

Billed as a “reversible game of birth, death, and rebirth,” *Tamba* is a parodic take on games like Milton Bradley’s *LIFE*, but played on a double-sided board. On the first side, “Life,” players evolve from lowly sea creatures to human beings as they proceed clockwise along a series of concentric rings, each representing an individual lifespan. Once players reach the center and fully evolve, they flip the board to its opposing “Afterlife” side. There they ascend, Snakes and Ladders style, through multiple, richly illustrated layers of hell and the spirit world in hopes of reaching the final “Realm of the Gods,” where they are meant to achieve godhood. But unlike in *LIFE*, completion of one’s journey provides no monetary or spiritual respite. Instead, in a subversive turnabout, players are instructed to flip the board and begin anew, transforming the game from a simple race into an endless game of life and death.

Dense with intertextual humor, allusion, parody, and cultural critique, *Tamba* bridges a compelling divide between traditional board game and conceptual art piece. I argue that, by subverting normative expectations of board game design through familiar formal models (e.g., traditional Japanese *sugoroku*), *Tamba* designer Akiko Takahashi foregrounds a layer of *intracultural mechanics* that license players to experiment freely with both the game’s rules and Japanese cultural norms. It is in this sense that *Tamba* is, paradoxically, a game designed to be played forever or never but always together.

Keywords

intracultural mechanics, game design, board games, Japanese games

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Designing for Engagement: Applying Calleja's Player Involvement Model to Escape Room Design

Abstract

The proposed paper examines how Gordon Calleja's (2011) model of player involvement can be adapted to the design of escape rooms—games that, despite their growing popularity, remain underexplored from a design and player experience perspective. Existing research tends to approach escape rooms from a pragmatic standpoint, focusing on their educational, touristic, or integrative uses rather than on their design logic and the ways they structure user engagement. Consequently, little is known about how specific design strategies produce particular forms of involvement and immersion. The paper argues that analytical tools from game studies can offer valuable frameworks for understanding and designing these location-based experiences.

Building on Calleja's (2011) six dimensions of involvement—kinesthetic, spatial, shared, narrative, affective, and ludic—the paper proposes their adaptation to embodied, physically grounded gameplay. While Calleja's model was originally conceived for digital environments, its transmedial reinterpretation (Ryan 2001; Fuchs & Thoss 2019) in the context of escape rooms foregrounds the specificity of physical immersion as distinct from digital forms. In this environment, players themselves occupy the avatar's role, navigating and manipulating tangible objects and spaces. Such redefinition of kinesthetic and spatial involvement reveals the heuristic potential of Calleja's framework for analyzing non-digital gamespaces.

The study draws on an autoethnographic analysis of ten Polish escape rooms recognized in the global TERPECA ranking. Combining participant observation with publicly available player reviews, it examines how design elements—such as puzzle-world coherence, diegetic hint systems, or performative non-player roles—activate specific involvement dimensions (Calleja 2011; Aarseth 1997; Kenderdine 2015).

Ultimately, the paper positions escape rooms as a fertile site for examining embodied play and proposes a methodological bridge between digital and physical game studies. The adapted model enables a more precise theoretical articulation of how immersion operates across media (Thon 2016; Wolf 2013; Ryan 2013; Remacha Sidro 2021).

Keywords

escape rooms, player involvement model, diegesis, immersion

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Interactive Trauma: How Games Mediate the Holocaust**Abstract**

What will happen to Holocaust memory when the last witnesses are gone? Long reliant on survivor testimonies, Holocaust remembrance is now at a critical turning point. In an era where facts are diluted with disinformation, and as xenophobia and antisemitism rise globally, preserving complex memory has become more urgent than ever. Some professionals urge that this is a call to rethink Holocaust remembrance through user engagement with future generations in mind (Hogervorst, 2020).

At the same time, video games continue to grow in popularity and influence. With their immersive mechanics, high user engagement, and player agency, games offer more than narratives - they afford lived experiences. By utilizing unique poetic mechanisms embedded in their interactivity (Chew and Mitchell, 2020), games can depict what other media cannot, making the unimaginable and perplexing – tangible. This makes video games a powerful medium for cultivating critical thinking and fostering empathy, possibly generating what Landsberg (2003) calls “prosthetic memory.”

This research focuses on three case studies: *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (2014), *My Memory of Us* (2019), and *The Light in the Darkness* (2023). They differ in historical accuracy, levels of agency, and genre. Unlike many previous studies, this research is using mixed methods – content analysis and interviews with game designers, exploring video games as a new frontier for Holocaust remembrance. It examines their potential as tools for education and the transmission of cultural memory in a post-witness world.

Keywords

Comparative studies of games; Game analysis methodologies; Media studies; Games as objects of memory and cultural or technological heritage; Cultural memory

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Playing National Identity: Elifoot, Football and the Early Portuguese 1980s industry

Abstract

Football in Portugal has long served as a marker of collective identity, intertwining passion, politics, and social meaning in the 20th century (Coelho, 2000; Adão, Tomaz, 2017). Reflecting this, the history of Portuguese football extends beyond the pitch, finding expression in early digital media such as video games. This article examines Elifoot (ZX Spectrum, 1987), one of the earliest Portuguese football management games, as a cultural artefact that mirrors national sporting identity and broader social transformations in late 20th-century Portugal. The study asks: How does Elifoot reflect Portuguese national identity, social practices, and technological conditions in the context of 1980s local game production?

Drawing on Microhistory (Ginzburg, 1993; Levi, 1991) and Media Archaeology (Parikka, 2012; Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011), the article situates Elifoot not merely as entertainment software but as an early digital multimedia object shaped by the technological, social, and cultural conditions of the early Portuguese game development scene.

By placing Elifoot within the context of emerging IT technologies, such as the microcomputer, this microhistorical analysis demonstrates how early digital multimedia functioned as historically situated narratives, embedding national identities, values, and aspirations into code and play. Its minimalist interface, numerical systems, and competitive design illustrate technological limitations and the broader cultural discourse surrounding early digital media. The study contributes to understanding early digital multimedia's cultural, technological, and social dimensions and its role in shaping local media histories.

Keywords

Game Studies, Elifoot, Football Manager, Microhistory, Media Archaeology

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From Simulation, through Inspiration, to Counterfactual Narrative: Historical Board Games as a Tool for Historians

Abstract

With the developing board game market, there is a growing awareness of their perception as a complex structure, comprised of many different, complementary mechanics. Adopting this perspective, a board game can also be understood as a simulation model, capable of imitating reality – present or past. In other words, board games can be "treated as transmedial narrative systems" [Brenskott 2020]. This conclusion may be useful for historians who, following the lead of methodologists such as Hayden White, also perceive the reconstructed past as a simulation model.

Philip Sabin has demonstrated that board games can serve as models for testing out research hypotheses [Sabin 2012], but his research were concentrated on military history. My PhD project attempts to expand on this research by focusing on historical board games related to social, economic, and cultural history. Previous research in this area has confirmed the usefulness of board games in areas such as mental mapping or understanding historical time. Such historians as Sabin, Makaffey [2016], Nakamura [2016] or Stachura [2013] shares validity of using board games as a possible tool in historical research.

The purpose of my presentation will be to present the results of my still ongoing PhD project research. Viewing board games as a simulation model, I consider the areas in which this model might be useful for historians. The chosen research method – action research – assumes the active involvement of representatives of the historical community, enabling research to be conducted in a participatory and iterative manner through a recurring cycle composed of four steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection. My presentation focuses on the empirical portion of PhD project research – I will share my reflections from meetings with the research sample and the use of the critical play method to selected board games (case studies) like *Age of Steam*, *Clash of Cultures* or *Agricola*.

Keywords

historical board games, simulation model, historical method, action research

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Value Extraction in Free-to-Play Games: Player and Industry Perspectives on Platform Capitalism**Abstract**

This empirical study examines the value extraction mechanisms in free-to-play (F2P) games through ten semi-structured interviews with players of Candy Crush, Clash Royale, and Fortnite (n=7), and industry professionals, including game system designers and a UX researcher (n=3). For the study, seven interviews were conducted with players of the games Candy Crush, Clash Royale, and Fortnite, as well as two interviews with game system designers and one with a UX researcher, in an effort to understand where these games are situated within the scope of platform capitalistic frameworks. Thematic analysis reveals a significant gap between player awareness and actual industry practices.

Player interviews identified three primary extraction mechanisms: temporal engagement through daily login rewards and habit formation, monetization tactics targeting emotional vulnerability, and extensive background data collection. Players reported F2P games as "work-like," with social obligations and progression systems creating feelings of duty rather than leisure. While younger participants demonstrated awareness of surveillance tactics, describing data collection as "expected" on digital platforms, older players remained largely unaware, with one confidently stating "they don't collect information about me." Notably, no players understood their value as productive labor within data-driven economies.

Industry professional interviews exposed deliberate psychological engineering behind these experiences. Professionals explicitly confirmed designing "around friction" to create "emotional investment" before introducing monetization triggers, collecting "absolutely everything" including behavioral patterns, and generating revenue primarily through data sales rather than in-game purchases. They acknowledged following only "legal bare minimum" privacy standards while designing consent forms "to be technically compliant while maximizing data collection."

This research demonstrates systematic information asymmetry enabling platform capitalistic exploitation. While players recognize surface-level manipulation, they remain unaware of comprehensive behavioral profiling, algorithmic difficulty adjustments based on spending patterns, and the economic value of their gameplay data. The findings of this study suggest the need for regulatory intervention and transparency requirements in digital entertainment platforms.

Keywords

Free-to-play games, Platform capitalism, Data monetization, Digital surveillance

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Creating Gender: Classifying gender systems in video game character creators**Abstract**

Countless critical analyses of video game character creators over the past twenty years have demonstrated a range of the limitations in what identities the industry has historically chosen to reflect/ignore as well as the growth the industry has had in pushing against its bigoted foundations. Early conversations centered the objectified portrayal of cis-women; then the recurring lack of customization options reflecting the global majority; and, more recently, restrictions on gender presentation. Across all these discussions, the designed (and necessary) limitation of choice dictates which identities are uncreatable.

One of the most overly simplified choices that game creators have historically given to their players is a cis-binary choice of gender: man or woman. This one simplified choice would determine your pronouns, body type, animation style, facial features, hairstyles and apparel options to align only as a masculine cis-man or a feminine cis-woman. Over recent years, more game developers have opened up the restrictions of this simplified choice, allowing players to choose from a wider range of provided options rather than sectioning off choices behind gendered walls. So many games have begun to consider character creation without a cis-binary gender foundation, but the wide variety in their implementations to do so gives scholars a muddy playing-field to sift through.

This media analysis aims to define classifications for the variety of gender systems commonly found in character creators to aid in facilitating further discussion of these systems. From an analysis of character creators ranging from AAA to indie-developed video games, four classifications have been defined to distinguish between their treatment of gender: cis-binary, trans-binary, trans-non-binary, and agender.

Keywords

avatar, character customization, gender, identity

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Faction themes – from Romero to Ariño: a study in using music to convey information about faction identity, tropes and mechanics

Abstract

This paper investigates the use of music, especially faction themes, in selected turn-based strategy videogames, combining musical analysis with cultural studies. The study explores how faction themes may be used to convey information about faction identity, tropes and game mechanisms, influencing how the faction will be perceived by the player and hinting at possible gameplay strategies.

The paper is structured into three parts. The first part provides insights into the methods of musical analysis and outlines the history of faction themes in games. The second parts present three case studies of faction themes from turn-based strategy games (*Necropolis* theme from *Heroes of Might and Magic III*, composed by Paul Romero, *A Search for Forgiveness* from *Endless Legend*, composed by Arnaud Roy, *Decay* from *Hero's Hour*, composed by Lautario Ariño) focusing on three key aspects: the ways of reflecting the identity of the factions in the themes, the correlation between musical tropes and literary tropes, and the link between musical elements and game mechanisms; building on the previous studies in the field of ludomusicology (K. Collins, B. Kluska, R. Moseley, J. Pigulak and others). Finally, the paper provides a summary of the reviewed material, highlighting the possible practical applications of presented information.

Ultimately, the study shows the importance of faction themes in game design and how the conscious use of music may enhance the player's sensation and lead to an overall better gameplay experience.

Keywords

ludomusicology, game design, music, strategy games, videogames

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Building Fuller Worlds: Applying Architectural Scale Theory to Systematic Game Design**Abstract**

World-building in games is often approached through references, narrative, or experiential design, yet many creative projects feel empty or lacking despite ambitious intentions. This practice-based research argues that systematic thinking about asset packs across scales—rather than vague holistic approaches—creates richer, more contextualized game worlds.

Drawing on my experience as an architect-turned-game-designer, concept artist, and educator teaching game design in architecture programs, I apply Rem Koolhaas's S,M,L,XL framework to analyze level construction in Kirby and the Forgotten Land. Informed by world-building methodologies learned from Liam Young, I examine 3-5 levels through detailed diagramming to reveal how thinking systematically about asset packs at each scale (Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large) and their strategic placement creates spatial richness through logic, not just abundance—even in handcrafted environments.

The paper demonstrates that modular asset pack design, when approached with architectural spatial thinking, enables both speed and quality simultaneously, challenging the assumption that efficiency sacrifices design richness. My experience across both studio MMO development and indie game production, combined with designing asset packs before scene composition, informs this analysis, showing how systematic asset thinking transforms the design process from overwhelming to manageable.

This research offers practical frameworks for architects entering game design and game designers seeking more systematic approaches to world-building, demonstrating how merging architectural scale theory with asset pack methodology creates fuller, more contextually rich game worlds without compromising production efficiency.

Keywords

Asset packs, Modular design, S,M,L,XL, Level design, World-building

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Decoding Religion in Open-World Video Games: Example of Cyberpunk 2077**Abstract**

This talk introduces an integrative analytical tool designed to examine the presence and function of religious motifs in open-world role-playing games (RPGs), with a particular emphasis on how these motifs are integrated into procedural narrative structures. Drawing from game studies, cultural theory, and religious studies, the proposed framework seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which digital games encode, simulate, and communicate religious meaning, symbolism, and ethical complexity.

The methodological proposition consists of five interrelated dimensions: (1) the narrative architecture (Jenkins, 2012) within which a given questline operates (from a game design perspective); (2) the hierarchical level of the quest (main, locational, side quest, or embedded minigame – Pavlina, 2008); (3) the procedural inertia between player choice and environmental response under indeterministic conditions; (4) the quest's impact on game progression and the agency of the player-character; and (5) the representation of consequences – mechanical, aesthetic, and symbolic – through which the game system conveys religious or metaphysical implications. The framework is exemplified through a case study of the Sinnerman questline in *Cyberpunk 2077* (CD Projekt RED, 2020), a sequence that explicitly invokes Christian iconography, themes of redemption and suffering, and procedural moral ambiguity.

Keywords

video games, RPG, religion, game studies, analysis, quest design, cyberpunk

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A Real Corpus-Based Study on the Real Reception of Irrealia – Simon Copet (Belgium) & Alice Ray (France)**Abstract**

The translation of content specific to a fictional universe—what Loponen (2009) terms *irrealia*—represents a particularly challenging task in the context of video game localization (Copet, 2025). These elements have given rise to several classifications, both in terms of their nature (Loponen, 2009; Pettini, 2022) and of the translation strategies applied to them (Pettini, 2022). However, the corpora used to develop such typologies are relatively limited, whether in size or in terms of the range of video game genres, due to the inherent difficulty of compiling them. Consequently, existing typologies have proven insufficient when applied to other games. For this reason, within the framework of an initial study (Copet & Ray, forthcoming), we proposed a new typology of *irrealia* (and their translation from a morphosyntactic and semantic perspective), established on the basis of a corpus of 18 games spanning various narrative genres (science fiction and fantasy) as well as different gameplay types, namely role-playing, strategy, and action-adventure games. The findings of this study highlighted that the treatment of *irrealia* in translation varies according to gameplay type. At the same time, the study also revealed that, from a methodological standpoint, the exclusive focus on morphosyntax and semantics is highly restrictive. This constitutes the very point of departure for the present research, which seeks to examine the linguistic reception of *irrealia* in the target language, following Pettini's typology (2022) and Venuti's spectrum (1995).

Keywords

irrealia, localization, reception, translation studies, genres

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Video Games as a Response to Socio-Political Processes and Events in Serbia

Abstract

The socio-political landscape in Serbia has been marked by a series of crises, protests, and turbulent events in recent years. In such an environment, video games have increasingly emerged as a form of response to current developments, creating digital spaces for the expression of social critique, irony, resistance and civic participation.

The paper analyzes video games developed in Serbia between 2022 and 2025 that engage with socio-political events and processes, addressing issues such as corruption, protests, elections, clientelism, and other aspects of political and social life. These games include titles such as: *Ćaci spašava Ćacilend 1 and 2* (2025), *Informed* (2025), *KrozNjegoveOci* (2025), *Muzičačke fotelje* (2025), *Wonders of Ćacilend* (2025), *Dobar, loš, korumpiran* (2024), and *Jedi sendvič* (2023).

The aim of the research is to examine how these games thematize contemporary events, what messages they convey, which strategies they use, and what potential they have for broader social impact. More precisely, the paper seeks to investigate how video games in Serbia represent and comment on current socio-political events and processes, how their creators employ procedural rhetoric, satire, irony, and humor to articulate social critique or political positions, and to what extent such games can contribute to political activism, civic participation or education.

The theoretical framework encompasses the concepts of newsgames, persuasive games, games for change, current event games, and activist games, as well as approaches to media representation, procedural rhetoric, and digital activism.

Methodologically, the study is based on qualitative content analysis of video games, focusing on their narratives, mechanics, visual elements, symbolism, and the socio-political contexts of their production. It also includes in-depth, semi-structured interviews with game creators and organizers of game jams in which some of these titles were developed, in order to better understand the motives and strategies behind creating such forms of socially engaged digital expression.

Keywords

newsgames, Serbia, politics, digital activism

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The Construction of Fiction-Games**Abstract**

This paper analyzes media that appropriate games' dynamic visual language to create non-interactive *fiction-games*—works that signify the interactive logic of games without realizing them in playable form. Visual works like LootBNDT's *prepare yourself* (2023) evoke not only the aesthetics of digital games but also their interactive logics. A textbox hovers at the upper right corner of the frame, displaying the text 'DESCEND..?', prompting for player intervention. Similar non-interactive media like Yang's *Material World Knight Game* (2020) and Cheslik's *Hundreds of Beavers* (2022) also borrow the visual language of traditional role-playing video games—text menus, camera placement, user-interface elements—to evoke playability with no avenue, mechanical or systematic, to fulfill it.

Elements that signify interaction are identified in that they facilitate player involvement, do so often, and do so in standardized ways. Like *prepare yourself*, *Super Mario 64* (1996), *Dark Souls* (2011), and *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) each position the camera just behind the player's avatar, reinforcing an association between those camera angles and a particular mode of interaction, an ability to move the avatar in three-dimensional space. These commonalities can be challenged, but exemplify a shorthand non-interactive media can adapt. It is the element of interaction, not an association with the aesthetic elements of games, that creates the fiction-game, though. Pixel art, though intertwined with game history, does not, in itself, indicate any specific mode of interaction. So, despite engaging with games' visual culture, Anrealage's 2011 Fall/Winter collection and Loewe's 2023 Spring/Summer collection do not construct fiction-games. Anchored in formal and comparative analysis, this paper highlights the influence of games in non-interactive media, identifies the language of interactivity in that influence, and argues that these influences blur relationships between their constituent media as they fold the identity of the artist into that of the game designer.

Keywords

adaptation, transmedia experiences, visual art, visual design

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Analyzing the Dimensions of the Player Experience for Video Game Design and Evaluation**Abstract**

Video games are particularly rich productions that combine fundamental elements such as game mechanics, story, aesthetics, and technology. These combinations yield a wide variety of genres, orientations (e.g., gameplay-oriented or story-oriented games), purposes (e.g., entertainment or learning), and interaction modalities (e.g., game controller or augmented reality).

Building on previous works on the nature of video games and user experience design, we propose an approach to express the internal logic of these combinations. This approach relies on the analysis of the player experience. This involves identifying the dimensions of this experience (such as the interactive, aesthetic, narrative, and ludic dimensions) and their orchestration (how the dimensions serve each other). There may be other dimensions (such as an educational dimension for a serious game) and their orchestration can vary greatly from one game to another (different internal logics).

This analysis can start with the interaction modalities, the design intentions, and the purpose of the game. Once the dimensions have been identified, we ask ourselves how each one serves the others (their orchestration). For example, in a gameplay-oriented game, the narrative dimension will generally serve the ludic dimension directly. Then, we can create a graphical representation showing these dimensions and their relations.

This analysis method can be used for design purposes, for example to check that the dimensions are effectively coordinated according to the analyzed relations. It can also be used for evaluation, for example to validate that the analyzed relations are indeed effective. We highlight the advantages of this approach, as well as the precautions to take and pitfalls to avoid. We also provide examples, both in terms of designing new games and evaluating existing or in-development games through playtests.

Keywords

game design methodologies, game analysis methodologies, design-centric game analysis, evaluation, user experience dimensions

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Nurturing or Conquering Nature: Could The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom Be An Ecogame?**Abstract**

This article argues that *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (2023), despite offering players the opportunity to engage with nature in its gameplay and plot, still falls short from truly advocating for environmentalism. However, it is an example to learn from for future ecogames. Ecogames, which raise awareness of the environment, are in a genre of video games called 'serious games', operating within education or the military as Flanagan explains. Video games could then potentially articulate ways to solve environmental concerns. Through my own playthroughs of the game, and further research, its gameplay mechanics, narrative symbolism and their interaction were analysed under the lens of ecocriticism and Möring and Schneider's schema for the analysis of in-game climate to exemplify this. By analysing *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*, this article will showcase how technological advances and creativity in games can bring understanding of the environment to players. Players must realise that nature and humanity have a reciprocal relationship and typical game mechanics that involve conquering and extracting from the environment must be challenged, especially in popular games. Möring and Schneider's schema has previously been used to analyse the ecogame, *Eco* (2018). This article will therefore apply it to a popular game instead, especially one that has an open-world and different types of weather and climate, to encourage players to think critically about mainstream games' rhetoric regarding the environment.

Keywords

Ludology, Narratology, Environmentalism, Textual Analysis

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Éric Chahi as a Game Auteur Beyond the Studio System**Abstract**

Ludic auteur theory assumes that a game auteur can express themselves through specific gameplay, narrative components, design and algorithmic persuasion, or by consistently drawing upon other cultural works (Jeong & Szaniawski, 2016; Staszenko, 2015; compare Jankowski, 2025). Recently, auteurism has been associated, rather unjustly, with authoritarian designers and directors such as David Cage and thus questioned as a harmful category (Oliva, 2021). Other studies emphasize that ludic auteur theory is more applicable to studios rather than to individuals (Lopes et al., 2018).

The reason for presenting this paper is to showcase the inverse auteur example: Éric Chahi. He is particularly known as a designer for his personal masterpiece *Another World* (1991); however, little is mentioned of his earlier and subsequent body of work (see Ichbiah, 2013). In this presentation, I apply ludic auteur theory to Chahi's case. His career is exceptional, as Chahi constantly moved from one studio to another, leaving a mark on companies such as Loricels, Chip Software, Delphine Software, and Ubisoft. I use six examples: *Infernal Runner* (1985, CPC version), *Le Pacte* (1986), *Another World*, *Heart of Darkness* (1998), *From Dust* (2011), and *Paper Beast* (2020). Thus, he avoided being attributed to a single development studio.

Chahi's ludonarrative output is characterized by minimalistic interfaces and high difficulty levels (players can easily die); a moderate amount of gore and horror; and surrealistic imagery inspired by a plethora of Orientalist works (including Zdzisław Beksiński, Michael Whelan, and Richard Corben, but also Polynesian culture). However, Chahi's works are also autobiographical; they include a self-referential allusion to his creative process (*Another World*) and a reflection on his complex national identity as a French-Kabyle designer.

The outcomes of analyses of Éric Chahi's games extend scientific knowledge of his oeuvre beyond *Another World* and introduce scholars to his more underrated works.

Keywords

Éric Chahi, auteur theory and digital games, *Another World*, French game history

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Elsinore: Postmodern, Feminist, and Transgressive Modes of Retelling William Shakespeare's Hamlet**Abstract**

Elsinore (2019) is a point-and-click adventure game created by the independent developer Golden Glitch Studios. Its narrative is based on William Shakespeare's Hamlet, with players assuming the role of the play's secondary character, Ophelia. Following Ophelia through a time loop that spans four days leading up to her death, players explore Elsinore, the castle that provides the setting for Shakespeare's play, and interact with characters from Hamlet and other Shakespearean works in an attempt to alter the tragic course of Ophelia's fate.

This paper analyzes different ludonarrative modes of retelling a classic work of the European literary canon in Elsinore. These modes include a variety of postmodern and feminist devices such as non-linear storytelling, creative intertextuality, gender- and ethnicity-swapping, and a deconstructive shift in focalization.

Keywords

Elsinore, Hamlet, retelling, postmodernism, feminism, intertextuality, deconstruction, non-linearity

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The Video Game as Myth: A Semiotic Deconstruction of Days Gone –**Abstract**

The study analyses the video game Days Gone through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Douglas Kellner's critique of media culture. The aim is to deconstruct cultural myths and ideological meanings within the game. Using a case study method, it explores how the protagonist, Deacon St. John, functions as a mythological figure and how his quest for his wife symbolizes universal themes of loss, redemption, and identity. Special focus is placed on signs such as the motorcycle, Freakers, and the post-apocalyptic world, which are interpreted as carriers of ideological messages about societal collapse and ethical renewal. Barthes' semiology enables the interpretation of signs, while Kellner's approach reveals how the game reproduces and shapes dominant ideological values. The analysis shows that Days Gone reproduces familiar narrative patterns and transforms them into contemporary myths that shape the player's perception of the world and self. The study contributes to the understanding of video games as complex media texts that actively participate in the construction of cultural meaning. It concludes that behind the mask of apocalypse, destruction, and death lies a message of love that is timeless above all. This means that video games are not only cultural artefacts but also pedagogical texts that educate.

Keywords

Days Gone, media culture, myth, semiotics, video game

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Using Actions and Activities in Games to Create Varied Gameplay**Abstract**

Actions in games play an important part in creating gameplay and also telling the story of a game. Choosing actions that build up interesting gameplay and express key aspects of the narrative theme is one part of the process of thematization in game design, creating opportunities of ludonarrative resonance, agency and varied gameplay. This research explores how actions can be used in different situations in games and also as parts of different gameplay activities, building variety into the gameplay. Games are analyzed with the formal analysis of gameplay method to identify examples of these, and also to discuss how the themes of the games affect what sort of actions and activities players can perform. It is found that while genre-specific actions and activities are central in the games analyzed, the themes can be one of the factors explaining different emphases on certain activities and actions, giving players theme-specific agency in the game worlds and varying situations to encounter. Different uses of the same actions turn out to be quite rare, even though some examples can be found. The data points at a certain level of difficulty of building new uses for actions and different activities but still shows it is a game design technique used, albeit sparingly.

Keywords

Actions, Activities, Thematization, Game Design, Narrative Design

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Broken edutainment – where possibilities meet expectations**Abstract**

In this article, I describe the difficulties in designing complex educational game systems. I focus on the conflict between the expectations of different groups: the end-users (students and teachers), raising the question of the real end-user of this software. I find that the source of this conflict lies in a misunderstanding of the needs of the involved parties: the users (students and teachers) versus the purchasers (parents and public institutions).

Current theories focus on commercial games used educationally (J.P. Gee, K. Squire) or focus on educational tools with fun and creativity elements (Y. Kafai). In contrast, I focus on the creation of attractive games with strong educational content, similar to S. Osterweil's concept but with a much stronger emphasis on the "fun layer". I treat education as a service function added to the game. Therefore, I prefer edutainment to educational games as a development direction.

I propose my original model of game design, which consists of various modules addressing attractiveness for students, utility for teachers, and long-term support for institutions. I argue that a non-aggressive monetisation model (e.g., "pay-to-look" as opposed to "pay-to-win") is crucial for collecting user engagement feedback and funding long-term support.

To test this model, I connect the principles of game design with educational software development, using a mathematical card game case study. I explain the workflow for this model – from the initial idea, through design and creation, to final implementation – demonstrating how it attempts to resolve the conflicting interests of these different end-user groups.

While the model is still evolving, partial studies conducted with student research groups have already provided strong validation. These studies show that a game properly implementing this model maintains educational effectiveness comparable to (or slightly better than) traditional methods, while achieving a significant increase in end-user engagement.

Keywords

Gamification, Education, Edutainment, Design, Cultural HCI

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Divine Playfulness. The Design of Goddess Amaterasu in Ōkami**Abstract**

Ōkami is a Japanese video game originally published by Capcom in 2006. It offers a rich portrayal of Japanese folklore and Shinto mythology. The player assumes the role of goddess Amaterasu, who takes the form of a white wolf, embarking on a quest to save the world from various villains from Japanese myths.

Although the game was not very popular upon its initial release, throughout the years it gained a large cult following and is sometimes claimed to be one of the best games ever made. One of the key elements in *Ōkami* is the design of its protagonist, aforementioned Amaterasu. In this presentation, her image is examined from various perspectives, using analysis based on a general semiotic framework, including both classical and game studies approaches (e.g., Barthes 1986, Frasca 2003). Additionally, the multimodal perspective (Hawreliak 2019) is applied to the visual, textual, and procedural layers of *Ōkami*, focusing on symbolism and meaning that they produce in reference to the character of Amaterasu.

The study argues that Amaterasu's identity is formed by the interplay between her many different aspects: canine form, divine status, maternal role, playfulness, heroic agency, and connection to nature. A particularly significant aspect is the combination of two core elements of her design – Amaterasu being both the supreme goddess and a wolf, often exhibiting dog-like behaviours in a humorous way. These seemingly contradictory traits appear both in the narrative and the gameplay, yet they harmonize effectively to create a compelling and cohesive character image. The analysis contributes to the existing literature on *Ōkami* and on the relationship between mythological motifs and game design, examining how the game constructs its complex protagonist.

Keywords

okami, japanese mythology, character design, shinto, semiotics

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Tidy-Up Games: Deconstructing Game Mechanics, Psychology, and Narrative**Abstract**

Tidy-up and organizing games represent a successful emerging genre rooted in the psychological need for order and immediate gratification. This study deconstructs the genre's mechanics and analyzes its deep therapeutic appeal.

The success of these games—ranging from Pure Organization (Unpacking) to Cleaning Simulation (Powerwash Simulator)—is attributed to a refined Chaos-to-Order Core Loop. This loop maximizes instant Viscerality and the satisfaction derived from spatial puzzle resolution, where items must be logically constrained by Affordances. Psychologically, this process functions as a mechanism for Cognitive Load Reduction: in-game order relieves the cognitive strain induced by real-world visual clutter, promoting Stress Relief and a Zen state.

Furthermore, titles like Unpacking elevate the genre by leveraging Environmental Storytelling. By engaging players in organizing possessions across life stages, the game transforms mechanical action into a high-level Emotional Connection, fostering empathy for the protagonist's changing identity. Ultimately, the genre's appeal lies in offering players a controllable, rewarding environment to achieve symbolic and psychological mastery over complexity.

Keywords

Game study, Game Mechanism Design, Digital Psychology, Therapeutic Gaming, Cognitive Science

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The Indispensable Supplement: The Development of Realism in Role-playing Games**Abstract**

It is impossible to overstate the importance of *Dungeons & Dragons*; its influence is felt throughout the games industry, both digital and tabletop, as well as in publishing and mass media. To much of the world, the culture of gaming is near-synonymous with *D&D*. To understand this legacy, how this niche hobby has exploded into an international phenomenon, requires a rigorous genealogy. This paper charts the development of *Dungeons & Dragons* and its digital successors by examining its origins both in the fiction and philology of Tolkien and the *kriegsspiel* of 19th century Europe. From the wish to inhabit literature and produce plausible histories emerged an unlikely blend of strategic simulation and potentially boundless narrative possibility that converted the realm of myth and folklore into a space of reconfigurable realisms.

By analyzing the formal properties of *The Lord of the Rings'* storytelling and the mechanical innovations of Reisz, Totten and Vernois' wargames, this paper demonstrates how appendetical detail and taxonomic formalization combined with the flexibility of dialogic interaction give birth to an industry-defining genre. It explains how key aspects of both literature and games were extracted and alchemized into a powerful new mode of play which has only grown in importance and influence. Further, it explores and explains an understanding of ludic subjectivity which has implications both social and political; the tension between the constantly expanding agency of a subjectively singular conquering 'hero' and the recognition of a plurality of identity intrinsic to the frame-switching activity of roleplaying gives insight into the creation and conception of contemporary identity.

Keywords

narrative, world-building, role-playing, realism, subjectivity

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Couch Co-Op: Wrestling with the Second Self in *Freud's Bones***Abstract**

Despite their maturity as a medium, videogames are still seldom biographical in their aspirations. In 2012, Kill Screen have asked: “When will we see a great biographical game?” (Millard), and there have been scant evidence of any emerging ever since. Whereas literary biographies and biopics enjoy cultural prestige, only a handful of videogames have ventured to tell autobiographical tales (Guillermo 2018), such as *That Dragon, Cancer* (Numinous Games 2016), *Dys4ia* (Anthropy 2012), or *Depression Quest* (The Quinnsspiracy 2013). Beyond that, *bona fide* biographical games – featuring historical figures and focusing on the life story of an individual, told with the benefit of historical hindsight after the subject’s death – are virtually non-existent.

One candidate for a deep character study in the mold of literary biographies is the recent indie work *Freud's Bones* (Katabasi Studio 2022). Created by Fortuna Imperatore, it puts the player into the shoes of Sigmund Freud, exploring his work of treating patients while being haunted by demons of his own, including his addictions and self-doubt. The visual novel genre makes the heart of the psychoanalytical process, conversation, the dominant mode of interaction through which the game interrogates not just the process of psychoanalysis, but the player’s role as the agential “second self” (Turkle 2005 [1984]) to the videogame character they guide through a narrative.

I argue that *Freud's Bones* is remarkable for the way it mechanises psychotherapy and uses conversation as an opportunity for collaboration between the player and Freud’s character, a critical examination of Freud’s life in interactive form. Relying on both the hagiographical tradition of life-writing by the likes of Ernest Jones (1953-57, 1961) and Peter Gay (1988), as well as the critical school of Freud studies (Crews 2017, Dufresne 2003/2006, Webster 2005), I explore the consequences of putting the father of psychoanalysis on the virtual couch.

Keywords

interactive digital narrative, visual novel, dialogue choices, psychological approaches to games, biographical criticism

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Para Bellum*: making an e-sport out of your grand strategy game*Abstract**

For a long time many people held a view that some types of games are fit to be played competitively or as an e-sport, and some types of games, for various reasons, are not (Funk et al., Formosa et al.). One such type of games, considered to be ill-suited to be played competitively or as an e-sport, is grand strategy games. Even though grand strategy games are not generally considered by most people involved with e-sport as e-sport, Paradox Interactive—in collaboration with popular *Europa Universalis 4* content creators—nonetheless organized e-sport events for that particular game.

This presentation is a case study that analyzes *Para Bellum*: a competition for best players in a grand strategy game *Europa Universalis 4*. This observation-based research demonstrates how rules and formal aspects of an e-sport event can be modified to accommodate the mechanics and gameplay of a game characterized by specific complex game systems and the inherent difficulty to apply necessary fair-play rules for the players. The research presents specific mechanics and game systems within both formal and ludic context (Fernandez-Vara) and the way in which they influenced the structure and organization of *Para Bellum* for it to be recognizable as an e-sport event. The comparative analysis of the features of *Para Bellum* and those of typical e-sport events (Pu) clearly demonstrates that this particular event—despite its unorthodox character—meets the criteria of an e-sport event.

Keywords

e-sport, competitive gaming, grand strategy game, *Europa Universalis 4*

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Toward a Framework for Organising Game Mechanics: A Tool for Design Practice and Education

Abstract

Game mechanics are central to the design and experience of digital games, yet they are often approached in an ad hoc or intuitive manner in both professional practice and game design education. This proposal argues for the development of a framework that can organise a wide range of game mechanics at a specific level of description, describing concrete game rules, for instance, climbing actions or mechanics that inflict ongoing damage. The goal is not to create an exhaustive taxonomy, which would be unfeasible, but rather to offer a broad and representative collection of mechanics, accompanied by a clear system of categorisation.

Crucially, this framework would establish a connection between the mechanics themselves and the types of player experience they can help produce. By structuring the relationship between mechanics and experiential outcomes, the framework aims to support designers in making more intentional choices that align with their creative goals. It would also serve as a pedagogical tool, helping students and educators analyse and reflect on the role of mechanics within the broader context of gameplay experience.

The proposed framework will draw on two primary sources: an original catalogue of mechanics developed by undergraduate students over four years, and the extensive work on gameplay patterns from *Patterns in Game Design* by Staffan Björk and Jussi Holopainen (2005). These sources provide a foundation for organising mechanics in a way that is both theoretically grounded and practically useful. The framework is designed to be open and extensible, allowing new mechanics to be located within it and promoting its use in both professional and educational settings.

Keywords

game design, game mechanics, digital games, gameplay

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Spatial Metaphors and Re-Constructed Gothic Tradition in Slay the Princess – The Pristine Cut (2024) by Black Tabby Games**Abstract**

Slay the Princess – The Pristine Cut (2024) by Black Tabby Games is a digital visual novel (Bunting, 2023; Øygarðslia, Weitze, and Shin, 2020; Pratama, Wardani, and Akbar, 2018) in which the eponymous Princess is locked in a cottage that – from the outside – looks much like the epitome of the American agrarian myth, the little house on the prairie. The horrors presented in Slay the Princess are both ontological and epistemological, the gameworld consisting of a multitude of universes, their status hardly explained. In that manner the spatial design of the gameworld is crucial for decoding the reading of the game as a work of art. Therefore, my textual analysis, ludonarratological discussion is going to approach the game from the position of cognitive poetics (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Stockwell, 2009) as concerned with spatial metaphors and embodied cognition. I am going to focus on the narrative architecture (Ash, 1009; Jenkins, 2004) and the metaphorical reading of the gamespace (such as changing depictions of the cottage’s interior or the Princess’s prison cell). It could be said that Slay the Princess reconstructs the American Gothic tradition, also heavily indebted to the metaphorical understanding of spatial relationships. In what could be called dark play (Mortensen et al, 2018; Schechner and Brady, 2013), the game induces defamiliarization (Grodén and Kreiswirth, 1994; Kuligowski, 2016; Margolin, 2011; Spiegel, 2008) by juxtaposing contradictory strategies with the help of its spatial design and space-related gameplay affordances, as it: 1. allows the player to make emotionally engaging, consequential choices within a branching and looping architectural narrative that results in multiple endings, yet also drastically restricts the player’s agency, (eg. Stang, 2019, Johnson, 2015; Seiwald, 2023), and 2. both implements and deconstructs a selection of narrative tropes, disrupting the player’s horizon of expectations (Jauss, 1997).

Keywords

games as art, American Gothic, spatial metaphors, dark play, gamespace

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From Historical Problem-Spaces to Memory Twins: When Game Design Meets Virtual Heritage

Abstract

This talk explores a rising convergence between two fields - historical video games and digitised heritage. The professionalisation of the field is taking place at the intersection of game design, historical research, and curated heritage practices. Referring to the concepts of historiographical games, digital twins and memory twins, I explain how this methodological mix aims to create games that offer meaningful heritage experiences while maintaining a historiographical value.

We begin with the principles of *historical game design* – increasingly reframed as *historiographical game design* – where the goal extends beyond representing the past to actively engaging with historical argumentation and interpretation. Drawing on works by J. McCall (2026, 2023), T. Kynn (2022, 2025), M. Suckling (2025), and J. Bazile (2021, 2022), we explore how games function as analytical tools that invite players to think historically through systems, mechanics, and play.

The second part of the talk turns to the *technological and legal dimensions* of using 3D assets in heritage games – assets increasingly developed as *digital twins* of historical artefacts, buildings, and landscapes. The expanding availability of high-quality digital reconstructions (Negri et al., 2017; Münster et al., 2024; Bozorgi & Lischer-Katz, 2020; Savorra & La Placa, 2025; Banfi, 2025) has made it possible to merge authenticity with interactivity, raising new questions about intellectual property, interpretative transparency, and narrative ownership. Finally, we move from digital twins to *memory twins* – 3D heritage assets enriched with narrative layers that embed social and memorial contexts within digital reconstructions. Following recent work by Cassar, Baker, & Ioannides (2025), Ioannides et al. (2025), and Eide (2026), this emerging paradigm shifts attention from mere accuracy of representation to the *experiential design* of collective memory.

In conclusion, we return full circle to design – but this time through the lens of *experience design*, where heritage games act as mediators of cultural meaning – rather than (or in addition to) as simulations of the past. Drawing on Wong (2025), Champion (2011, 2016, 2024), Hiriart (2024) and Mochocki (2021, 2022), we will examine how the convergence of historical game design and digital heritage practices can combine historical learning with meaningful heritage experiences.

Keywords

digital heritage, historical games, memory twin, virtual heritage, game design

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Putting numbers to feelings: interpretative resources in *Changeling: the Dreaming* and *Wraith: The Oblivion* – Leonid Moyzhes (Czech Republic)**Abstract**

Tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) present a complicated relationship with other RPGs, like live-action and digital ones, with all of them sharing a lot of game design conventions as well as numerous specific mechanics (Deterding and Zagal 2018). This presentation, however, highlights one of the more distinctive traits of TRPGs: their ability to utilise acts of interpretation and dialogue needed for establishing a shared understanding of specific ideas (Bowman 2018) as a core part of the gameplay. I connect those with actual game design practice by narrowing this broad idea to one particular example – a type of in-game resource I propose to call interpretative, with two World of Darkness TRPGs, *Wraith: The Oblivion* (WtO) and *Changeling: The Dreaming* (CtD), serving as a case studies.

I define resources as a type of numerical trait of an in-game character, with the changes in its value serving as a primary means of interacting with this trait, as opposed to skills or attributes (Kirk 2009). Resources have been an important part of TRPGs' mechanical arsenal since the emergence of this type of game as a separate field (Peterson 2012). Still, as part of their wargaming heritage, most early TRPGs employed resources as clearly defined in terms of rules for gaining and losing them, leaving little space for interpretation.

However, both CtD and WtO present numerous resources, like Glamour and Pathos, awarded or subtracted on the basis of interpreting an in-game situation in a certain way, with rules serving as a guide for it – for example, by claiming that the player character experiences certain emotions. Thus, resources provide a framework for different interpretations within the gameplay itself, reflecting the broader shift of 90s TRPG toward narrative (Appelcline 2014). This ability of TRPGs deserves a specific study from both game studies and game design perspectives.

Keywords

World of Darkness, Resources, Tabletop RPGs, Shared Imagined Space

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VHS consoles and those who remember them

Abstract

VHS consoles are one of least explored tangents of video game histories. From almost a decade starting in the mid 80s, several companies released gaming devices that used VHS videos as their main component: Connor Video Smarts (1986), Action MAX (Worlds of Wonder, 1987), Video Challenger (Takara, 1987), Captain Power (Mattel, 1987), Family Driver (Sega, 1988), Terebikko (Bandai, 1988), View-Master Interactive Vision (1989), and Battlevision (Tiger Electronics, 1994). In this presentation, we first analyse them as platforms that tried to bridge the gap between the cinema and game industries, culturally and technologically, and then focus on how they are remembered and preserved today.

These devices were minor platforms (Nicoll, 2019) that were often created by toy companies, with an educational framing, or connected to toys and TV shows. They used VHS because it was an already established home video format, but given the limited interactivity of the format, they had to work around platform limitations to come up with suitable forms of gameplay. Most of these were based around score systems, with quizzes and shooting as frequent mechanics.

As unexceptional consoles (Custodio and Iantorno, 2023) they show an off-shot of LaserDisc-based games and a precursor of CD-ROM and interactive movies (Majewski and Knight, 2025), that naturalised cutscenes and the use of pre-recorded footage or FMV.

Nowadays, they are remembered as failures, with game players and collectors remembering in their own “museums of failure” (Navarro-Remesal, 2017). Many of their videos are preserved in sites such as Archive.org and their histories are told in YouTube essays.

We argue that even if these devices failed as commercial products and as a branch of technology, they contributed to the use of videos in video games and the informal fan memories and archives can contribute to a more inclusive history of that particular space.

Keywords

VHS, consoles, platform studies, interactive cinema, failures

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Time and Narrative in Video Games: a Proposal on Ludonarrative Cycles and Temporal Patterns in Digital Games

Abstract

This presentation explores how narrative rhythm in digital games can be analyzed through the articulation of ludonarrative cycles and temporal constraints (TCs). Drawing from a semiotic-functional perspective, it examines how alternating phases of tension and release—marked by different types of TCs—form repeatable structural patterns that shape the player's experience of time, challenge, and narrative progression.

The first part revisits ludonarratology as a conceptual framework that bridges narrative theory and game design. While ludonarrative perspectives have often been sidelined in favor of systemic or procedural approaches, this work contends that narrative structure remains a key dimension in shaping player engagement and pacing. Within this structure, TCs—such as time-limited missions, cutscenes, or restricted interactions—act as rhythm markers that regulate pacing and player attention. These constraints not only structure the gameplay temporally but also have a measurable effect on player engagement.

The second part proposes ludonarrative cycles as emergent units composed of exploration, constraint, and resolution phases. Based on visual models developed in previous research, these cycles are shown to correspond with specific configurations of TCs distributed across gameplay time. The concept of an intertemporal space—neither purely ludic nor purely narrative—serves as a connective tissue between cycles, allowing for shifts in tempo and tone. This analytical lens enables a more precise reading of how games structure their narrative experience not just through story, but through the rhythm of play itself.

By re-centering the ludonarrative perspective on time and structure, this work offers conceptual tools that speak directly to the challenges of designing narrative games, reaffirming the relevance of ludonarrative thinking in contemporary game development.

Keywords

Game Structure, Narrative Rhythm, Temporal Constraints, Ludonarratology, Player Engagement

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The Invisible Script: a Critical Review of Ideological Frameworks and Lyotard's Concept of Metanarratives in Game Studies

Abstract

This conceptual paper offers a critical review of how ideology and narrative have been examined in game-studies literature, identifying a major theoretical gap: the near omission of Lyotard's notion of metanarrative as a critical framework for analyzing how ideology legitimizes values, knowledge, and social order. While Lyotard associated the decline of metanarratives with postmodern society, this paper follows the concept's established adaptation from sociology to fiction, where it remains an essential analytical tool for examining how stories construct and contest systems of meaning. Constrained by authored design, video games inevitably rely on metanarrative structures that shape identity, morality, and ideological orientation within their worlds.

Our purpose is not only to identify this absence but also to explain why it is meaningful within game studies. Entertainment games, unlike serious ones, reach vast audiences and therefore wield considerable cultural influence. Their immersive and emotionally oriented design allows them to reproduce or subvert dominant ideologies through play, making them a uniquely powerful medium for social discourse and critical awareness. Understanding how metanarratives operate in such games is essential to grasp how interactive media participate in the negotiation of cultural and political values. The paper synthesizes research from philosophy, cultural theory, and game studies to outline how metanarratives differ from narrative and theme, operating as systems that encode ideology within mechanics, story structures, and player experience. It concludes by proposing a tripartite framework distinguishing theme, narrative, and metanarrative as analytical layers for studying ideological critique in interactive media.

By consolidating existing theoretical work and situating metanarratives as a conceptual bridge between game studies and postmodern cultural theory, this critical review establishes a foundation for future empirical research on how entertainment games act as cultural texts capable of disseminating ideological critique and fostering social reflection across the medium.

Keywords

Metanarratives, Game Studies, Ideology, Cultural Theory, Critical Review

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Embedding Iranian Cultural Elements in Casual Mobile Game Design

Abstract

Casual games, known for their simple mechanics and user-friendly interfaces, have become a universal form of digital entertainment. In Iran, more than ninety percent of players play on mobile platforms, and among female gamers, over half choose mobile as their primary gaming medium. Mobile platforms and casual games are the most successful model of game production for Iranian gamers.

The aim of this paper is to identify and analyze Iranian local and national cultural elements within casual mobile games. This paper analyzes a selection of casual mobile games (Ex. *Golmorad*) to identify and examine the presence of local and national cultural elements. Approximately ten representative titles were studied, focusing on their visual design, narrative elements, interface language, and monetization strategies.

These games generally follow international trends in structure, mechanics, and user experience. However, local Iranian features can be observed in the form of character designs, environmental settings, linguistic tone, dialogues, and embedded micro-narratives. Iranian game artists and developers have attempted to integrate native and national components into these globally structured products, thereby crafting a sense of cultural familiarity for their local audiences. This blending of global and local layers in game design reflects an effort to create hybrid experiences that maintain both international accessibility and national identity, offering valuable insight into the cultural adaptation of global game formats within the Iranian context.

Keywords

Casual games, Mobile gaming, Iranian Elements, localization, globalization.

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Avatar as Us in the Experience of Role-Playing Games (Case Study: Children of Morta)**Abstract**

The intersection of art and technology represents a discourse that emerged in the late twentieth century alongside the rise of digital media. Within this framework, new media arts, particularly interactive art forms, invite audiences to actively participate in the creation and evolution of the artwork. Video games, as a significant branch of interactive art, employ avatars to mediate and transform the player's experiential engagement.

This paper investigates how the relationship between player and avatar is articulated and what experiential themes arise from this connection. Drawing on a case study and auto-ethnographic methodology, the research includes more than 100 hours of personal gameplay and over 400 hours of virtual observation, centered on the role-playing game Children of Morta. A phenomenological approach is used to highlight the role of the body and embodiment in shaping the player's experience. In this context, avatars function as proxies or extensions of the player's body, allowing a deep sense of telepresence and immersion within the game world.

Through the act of embodying multiple members of a single family, players in Children of Morta participate in a collective narrative experience that transcends individual identity. This shared embodiment produces a unique sense of unity and belonging, in which the player perceives themselves not only as an individual agent but as part of a larger "we." The study thus demonstrates how role-playing games can construct complex experiential layers, merging artistic expression, technology, and embodied participation.

Keywords

Video Game, Phenomenology, Avatar, Auto-Ethnography, Role-Playing Game, Children of Morta

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Beyond The Screenshot: Designing Systems, Not Just Generations in Dreamless Kingdom

Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of AI integration in Dreamless Kingdom's development, examining both successful applications and creative compromises that emerged from human-AI collaboration. By documenting specific workflows, failed experiments, and unexpected discoveries, this study provides practical insights for developers considering AI tools while acknowledging their current limitations and ethical implications.

Dreamless Kingdom served as a testing ground for various AI applications across its two-year development cycle. The paper analyzes quantitative and qualitative data from AI-assisted processes: 3,000+ image generations yielding 47 usable concept directions, 200+ narrative prompt sessions producing 12 integrated story elements, and automated texture generation saving 100+ hours while creating consistency challenges. This data reveals AI's paradoxical role as both accelerator and complicator of indie game development.

The research identifies critical friction points in AI collaboration. Atmospheric consistency proved difficult when combining AI-generated assets with handcrafted elements, requiring extensive post-processing to maintain visual coherence. Narrative AI excelled at generating lore fragments but struggled with the environmental storytelling central to the game's design philosophy. Most significantly, the team discovered that AI tools worked best when their outputs were treated as provocations rather than solutions, requiring human interpretation to transform statistical patterns into meaningful design decisions.

Through comparative analysis of AI-assisted versus traditional development phases, the paper establishes guidelines for ethical and effective AI integration. These include maintaining transparent attribution, using AI for exploration rather than final output, and developing "prompt literacy" as a core design skill. The study concludes that successful AI collaboration requires accepting these tools as flawed but fascinating creative partners whose value lies not in replacing human creativity but in making it productively stranger.

Keywords

AI ethics, game development, creative tools, design methodology, human-AI collaboration

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From Gamification to Co-Creation: Rethinking Museum and Game Industry Partnerships**Abstract**

This presentation explores the emerging collaborations between museums and the video game industry, asking whether such partnerships genuinely foster innovation, inclusion, and learning, or risk reinforcing commercial hierarchies in the digital cultural economy.

Drawing on empirical research with museums in Estonia and Europe, the presentation discusses the expectations, challenges, and power dynamics shaping the adoption of game-based solutions in museums

While video games offer significant potential for education, empathy, and visitor participation, museums often face barriers of funding, digital competence, and long-term sustainability of digital games. The lack of coherent strategies and long-term maintenance models limits the transformative potential of games as meaningful cultural tools. At the same time, game developers tend to privilege entertainment and standardised formats, which may conflict with curatorial or educational goals.

The presentation argues for a shift from gamification as a technological add-on towards co-creation and shared authorship, where museums, communities, and developers collaboratively shape both content and ethics of digital design. These partnerships, when grounded in accessibility, openness, and mutual learning, have the potential not only to transform museums but also to influence the game industry itself.

Keywords

Museums, Video games, Cross-sector collaboration, Co-creation, Gamification, Digital heritage, Science communication

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Identity, Power, and Social Norms in Persistent Virtual Worlds: Ethnographic Insights from a Minecraft anarchy server

Abstract

Unmoderated persistent virtual worlds are expansive, computer-simulated environments that operate without centralized governance. As such, they become fertile grounds for studying player social behaviours and unique social norms in settings where traditional rules and authority are absent. This qualitative study advances understanding of how identity, legacy, social norms, and power are negotiated in virtual spaces like *2b2t*, Minecraft's longest-running anarchy server since 2010, which is characterized by minimal moderation. Eight weeks of immersive digital ethnography was conducted, using in-game observation, reflexive field notes, and systematic collection of public data from Reddit, Discord, and YouTube. Data were thematically analyzed using iterative coding and constant comparison to identify patterns and themes. Results show that players engage in performative acts (building, griefing, storytelling) that influence the development of both individual identity and group legacies. Social norms emerge gradually through ongoing player interactions and evolve alongside the server's changing social and cultural landscape. For instance, changes in the *Minecraft* game version, the launch of a new hack client, or an influx of new players often trigger shifts in player behavior, strategies, and group dynamics. Power dynamics in the server come from players' control over valuable resources, mastery of game mechanics, strategic alliances, and the ability to influence reputation through both cooperation and disruption. These processes contribute to the creation of a distinctive digital culture that is fluid, layered, and subject to ongoing revision. These findings have important implications for understanding how decentralized communities self-organize, maintain social order, and construct collective memory. They can guide the development of virtual platforms that support organic community growth, enhance player engagement, and inform moderation practices that respect emergent social dynamics.

Keywords

performative identity, collective memory, power dynamics, digital culture, anarchy

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From Arcades to Heritage and Back: A Qualitative Study on the Reappropriation and Bottom-Up Platformisation of Arcade Games in Italy

Abstract

The presentation analyses the reappropriation of arcade video games in Italy, examining how players, collectors, and arcade enthusiasts have reactivated and re-signified these technologies following their social, technological, and industrial obsolescence. These practices have transformed obsolete arcade systems into new sites of cultural and social engagement beyond their original commercial contexts. Drawing on perspectives from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Game Studies, the presentation explores how users actively reshape the design and meaning of these obsolete technologies throughout the reappropriation process, contributing to their material and symbolic renewal.

Empirically, the research is based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 members of Italian arcade communities who played a central role in the reappropriation of arcade video games. Conducted between July 2022 and October 2023, the interviews focused on participants' trajectories as arcade enthusiasts, exploring their early experiences with arcade play, their later involvement in reappropriation practices, and their activities of acquisition, repair, modification, and circulation of arcade technologies. The analysis identifies three main dynamics that unfold through successive phases: (1) software adaptation through emulation and open-source preservation; (2) material reconfiguration of arcade cabinets and interfaces; and (3) reconstruction of arcades as social and community spaces.

By conceptualising these practices as forms of "platformisation from below", the presentation examines the performative dimension of the social and cultural memory of past gaming technologies. The Italian case illustrates a movement from arcades to heritage and back, in which users not only preserve arcade games as heritage but also repurpose them through experimentation and communal reactivation. This bottom-up engagement shows how grassroots initiatives sustain and reinvent gaming's technological past, contributing to broader processes of cultural and socio-technical renewal.

Keywords

arcade video games; user innovation; reappropriation; platformisation; retrogaming

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The Key to a Career in Game Development: Determination Among Future and Current Game Developers

Abstract

Research indicates that a passion for games, which combines enthusiasm, a love for the medium, and a desire for self-realization, drives many aspiring and active professionals in the video game industry (Bulut, 2020). Within the neo-liberal labor regime, this passion becomes both a productive resource and a form of affective control (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013; Prescott & Bogg, 2011). It manifests as determination, defined as the need to create games professionally and the willingness to make personal sacrifices, that legitimizes acceptance for precarious work marked by sustained long working hours and poor work–life balance, often resulting in burnout and health issues (Weststar, 2015; O’Donnell, 2014), while the industry’s structural problems are often denied by the employees (Wimmer & Sitnikova, 2012).

This study examines the determination of professionals (N = 94) and students (N = 91) to work in the GameDev industry and its changes in the latter group after attending the lecture "The Process of Video Game Development", outlining the realities and complexities of the industry. The determination was assessed using a questionnaire that contained three statements: perceived attractiveness of the industry, desire to work in it, and willingness to choose it over more favorable offers.

Students are significantly less determined than professionals ($p = 0.0014$), and their attitude did not change after listening to the lecture ($p = 0.62$). This is in contrast to naivety, which is defined as naive and idealized perceptions of game development and is measured based on four statements relating to conceptions that demonstrate an unrealistic attitude, as significantly reduced by the lecture (Sikorski & Matulewski, 2025). Additionally, high determination correlates strongly with the desire to realize one's own game idea ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$) and with aspirations to lead a development team ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), which were measured using two single questions.

The professionals demonstrated particularly high motivation. Since the lecture did not significantly affect the students’ determination, this suggests that it is a relatively stable trait among participants. Therefore, we hypothesize that the difference in determination between professionals and aspiring developers stems primarily from the selection of highly motivated individuals, rather than from changes in motivation over time.

In the context of the theoretical approaches presented above, the observation that presenting the realities of game production reduces only naivety, but not determination, empirically confirms the pattern of affective engagement in work described in the literature, characteristic of creative industries and the passion economy.

Keywords

game developers' determination, game development, game development education, video game industry, realities of GameDev work

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Between Enthusiasm and Anxiety: How Experience Shapes Attitudes Toward Generative AI in Game Development

Abstract

This study explores the influence of professional experience on attitudes toward generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) among current and future professionals in the video game industry. GenAI is increasingly impacting all stages of game development (GDC, 2024), including key creative domains that directly support the design process (Begemann & Hutson, 2024).

The research was conducted using a cross-sectional, survey-based quantitative approach ($N = 175$). Data was collected in Poland from students representing diverse academic fields, and from professionals across various specializations, including programmers, graphic designers, game designers, managers, and others. The survey included three questions addressing the perceived usefulness of GenAI, acceptance of its use, and its impact on professional roles. The level of professional experience was determined based on the number of years participants had worked in the game development industry, ranging from individuals at the very beginning of their careers to highly experienced experts.

We compared groups of participants with varying levels of experience, professionals and students (the latter treated as the least experienced), using a non-parametric analysis of variance (the Kruskal–Wallis test) followed by post-hoc comparisons. These analyses revealed significant differences between the groups. The significant effect was observed for all three statements used to assess attitudes toward GenAI ($p \leq 0.013$). The results revealed an unexpected pattern: professionals with the least experience demonstrated the most negative attitudes toward GenAI, even more so than students who had not yet entered the industry. Although this latter difference did not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$), the mean values were clearly lower. A positive shift in attitudes emerges within the first five years of professional experience (two of the three items showed significance levels of $p = 0.007$ and $p = 0.043$) and remains stable throughout later stages of career development ($p \geq 0.980$).

This finding challenges the common opinion found in existing literature that younger individuals are more open to innovation (Gillespie et al., 2021). Moreover, the study reveals an ambivalent stance toward GenAI: on one hand, concerns about job market competition and threats to creative autonomy; on the other, a recognition of GenAI's usefulness and

support in everyday professional tasks (Vimpari et al., 2023). These highlight a rapidly evolving sense of professional identity in the face of technological transformation.

Keywords

game development, video game industry, generative AI, attitudes toward generative AI

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Designing Against Radicalization: Political Appropriation of Gaming Communities in Poland and Implications for Game Design Studies**Abstract**

The intersection of gaming culture and political radicalization has recently gained increasing attention, with research highlighting the role of gaming platforms and communities in the diffusion of extremist ideologies. While most studies focus on transnational far-right networks or extremist groups, this paper shifts the lens to a national context, examining how Polish political actors—parties, politicians, and affiliated movements—have strategically engaged with gaming communities to advance their agendas. Drawing on a case studies methodology, the analysis identifies several recent instances in which gaming spaces, esports events, or online gamer networks were appropriated for political messaging, mobilization, or the normalization of radical discourses.

Theoretically, the paper situates these dynamics within scholarship on the gamification of extremism and the socio-cultural vulnerabilities of gamer communities, including processes of normalization, affective bonding, and symbolic appropriation. Empirically, the Polish case offers insights into how mainstream political forces, rather than only extremist actors, increasingly view gamers as a valuable resource to be mobilized through tailored rhetoric and participation in digital culture.

In addition, the paper reflects on the responsibilities and opportunities for developers, publishers, and designers in mitigating the risks of political radicalization in gaming spaces. Drawing on emerging debates around ethical game design and the industry's role in safeguarding communities, the paper explores strategies that could mitigate appropriation, such as fostering inclusive design or developing collaborative partnerships between researchers, policymakers, and studios.

By connecting the study of political radicalization in Poland with the broader field of game design studies, this paper contributes to both extremism research and practical discussions on how games can be designed, governed, and sustained as spaces resilient to political manipulation.

Keywords

gaming communities, political radicalization, Poland, game design, extremism.

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Mapping Spatial Narratives: Towards Structural Understanding of Environmental Storytelling in Open-World Games

Abstract

Open-world digital games rely heavily on their environments to convey narrative information alongside other modes of narration. This paper explores environmental storytelling in open-world digital games, focusing on embedded narratives and the composition of spatial elements, examining how these structures communicate stories to players. Jenkins' (2004) typology of environmental storytelling provides a conceptual foundation for examining how stories are communicated through game spaces. Further sources include Aarseth's (2001) work on spatial representation, Nitsche's (2008) analysis of game space and its structure, Fernández-Vara's (2011) indexical approach to environmental stories, and Ryan's (2002, 2010) explorations of narrativity in interactive media. Drawing on these, my research proposes a structural approach to analyzing meaningful spatial compositions in game worlds. Through repeated play, researchers can identify recurring spatial elements to infer the ambience of each locale. These ambient elements function as a backdrop, shaping player expectations without carrying individual narrative meaning. By contrast, elements that deviate from these expectations can be described as significant by their gameplay function, narrative function, or both. When grouped into proximal clusters, these elements can form semiotic structures that either point to past narrative events or contribute to worldbuilding. Case studies including *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Grand Theft Auto V*, and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* reveal recurring spatial strategies, such as the dual design of ambient versus significant elements and the clustering of objects into meaningful structures. Beyond narratology, the proposed model offers practical insights by revealing compositional strategies that designers use to shape player experience. By bridging structural theory with applied analysis, this research provides a replicable framework that enriches both academic inquiry and game design practice.

Keywords

digital game narratives, environmental storytelling, open-world games, narrative analysis

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Dark Patterns in Video Games: Legal Challenges in the European and Polish Context

Abstract

This paper investigates the legal dimensions of dark (or deceptive) patterns in video games within the framework of European and Polish law. Dark patterns—design strategies that manipulate users into making decisions contrary to their interests—have become deeply embedded in the monetization models of modern digital games. From deceptive interface design to the structuring of loot boxes, premium currencies, and time-limited offers, such practices raise fundamental questions about fairness, transparency, and consumer autonomy in the digital market.

In the European Union, the growing recognition of manipulative design has led to a fragmented but increasingly coherent regulatory approach. The Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) explicitly prohibit certain forms of deceptive or coercive interface design, while the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD) and the Consumer Rights Directive provide the legal basis for sanctioning misleading digital practices. Moreover, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) introduces constraints on manipulative consent mechanisms, relevant wherever player data is processed for behavioral profiling or monetization purposes.

In the Polish context, these EU standards are implemented through the Act on Counteracting Unfair Market Practices and the Consumer Rights Act, both of which may serve as legal tools for addressing exploitative game design. However, practical enforcement remains limited, and dark patterns in gaming—particularly those involving behavioral nudging, pseudo-random reward systems, and *gambification* (the convergence of gaming and gambling elements)—continue to operate in a legal grey zone that exposes the vagueness of current regulatory definitions.

To illustrate these challenges, the paper draws on examples such as *CS:GO*'s loot box mechanics, which blur the line between entertainment and gambling-like monetization practices, testing both the scope of consumer protection law and the limits of regulatory interpretation.

While the U.S. Federal Trade Commission's *Bringing Dark Patterns to Light* report has accelerated transatlantic dialogue, the European legal framework offers a more normative approach grounded in human dignity and informed consent. The paper concludes that effective regulation of dark patterns in games requires not only doctrinal clarity but also the establishment of institutional mechanisms for interdisciplinary cooperation—particularly

between legal scholars, UX designers, and behavioral scientists—to translate ethical design principles into enforceable legal standards.

Keywords

dark patterns, deceptive patterns, video games, consumer protection, gamblification, Digital Services Act, Polish law, unfair practices

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Orientalism and Evolving Representation in *Assassin's Creed***Abstract**

This essay is an analysis of the evolution of Orientalist representations in the *Assassin's Creed* series through a comparative textual and visual analysis of *Assassin's Creed* (2007) and *Assassin's Creed Mirage* (2023). Drawing on postcolonial theory - namely, Edward Said's conception of Orientalism - as well as game studies methodologies, it examines how Ubisoft situates Middle Eastern locations, characters, and narratives in Western terms. The study investigates semiotics of environmental design, character representation, and narrative to determine the degree to which these factors contribute towards or dismantle stereotypical representation.

The 2007 *Assassin's Creed* draws on conventional Orientalist tropes: the Holy Land is exoticized, threatening, and spiritually volatile. Design elements such as architectural style, coloring, and enemy form evoke a Western-designed past, whereas protagonist Altair, while locally born, upholds Western ideals of reason and order. This is the result of early-2000s industry culture, in which Western audience expectations were put ahead of cultural sensitivity and historical authenticity.

Assassin's Creed Mirage is notable for its shift toward cultural veracity. In ninth-century Baghdad, *Mirage* attempts to portray a historically accurate, living urban environment. Input from historians and regional experts informs architectural specificity and social nuance at the developer level, reducing monolithic representations of the Middle East. But traces of Orientalist aesthetics still linger: stylized cityscapes retain a residue of exoticism commensurate with Western spectatorship, and some gameplay features continue to retain elements of mysticism, a persistent Western conception of the East.

The sixteen-year gap also shows the broader cultural movements in digital media: the industry has evolved from limited critical consciousness of culture and race to increased attention to diversity, inclusion, and decolonizing narratives. The comparative analysis demonstrates the franchise's gradual movement toward greater ethical representation and highlights the continued strength of Orientalist imagination. By examining visual and textual modes in historical and social context, the paper joins the debate on how digital media constructs cultural perception and collective memory.

Keywords

Orientalism; *Assassin's Creed*; Postcolonial theory; Cultural representation; Visual semiotics

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From Dice to Data: Generative AI's Transformative Touch on Table-top Play in the Western Balkans

Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is no longer confined to digital games; its text-, image-, and rule-generation models are rapidly permeating analogue play. This paper investigates how hobbyists and professionals in the Western Balkans—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, and North Macedonia—employ GenAI as a design and content creation tool for board-games and Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) campaigns. While on-the-fly translation during gameplay sessions exists as a practical use case, the primary focus of this study is the design labor: how GenAI transforms the creative processes of rulebook authoring, campaign development, character design, and world-building in resource-constrained settings.

Methodologically, the study blends (1) ten to thirty semi-structured interviews with game designers, store owners, and dungeon masters; (2) a multilingual online survey of 100 active players; and (3) discourse analysis of region-specific Reddit, Discord, and Facebook groups collected between July and September 2025. Drawing on participatory-culture theory and critical algorithm studies, it asks: What design labor do Balkan creators outsource to GenAI? How does linguistic and cultural specificity shape prompt engineering and output evaluation during the design process? And what tensions emerge between algorithmic convenience and the artisanal ethos of handcrafted analogue gaming materials?

Preliminary findings reveal a “craftsmanship”; in design practices. GenAI tools lower entry barriers for producing localised rulebooks, non-player-character portraits, and battle-maps, enabling small communities to bypass costly translation and art pipelines when creating original content. Yet the same models replicate Western fantasy tropes and Balkanist exoticism, prompting concerns over authenticity, historical representation, and algorithmic bias in the creative outputs. Respondents celebrate productivity gains in content creation—“a tavern layout in five minutes”—while voicing anxiety about diminished creative agency and the erosion of hand-made aesthetics that anchor table-top nostalgia. The study demonstrates how GenAI primarily functions as a design accelerator rather than a play facilitator, reshaping the production workflows of campaign creation, game component design, and narrative development.

The paper concludes by proposing a “situated AI literacy”; framework tailored to minority-language table-top design cultures. By centring a peripheral European region often absent from Anglophone game-studies discourse, the study expands current debates on

GenAI beyond triple-A studios and offers an ethnographically grounded account of how dice and data now intersect in the creative design practices of the Balkan table-top community.

Keywords

Generative AI, Board-games, Dungeons & Dragons, Western Balkans, Participatory culture, Game design

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'Dies Irae' in the 'Heroes of Might and Magic' series: Gregorian sequence and Requiem motifs as an allegation**Abstract**

As it may be observed, 'Dies Irae' and the other Requiem motifs are present in the soundtrack throughout the 'Heroes of Might and Magic' series, and may be seen as an adaptation, intertextuality and allegation. In the series, 'Dies Irae' can be heard in an arrangement based on the most primal melody derived from a Gregorian chant. Firstly, the motif appeared in an instrumental version in the third release of the series, in Necropolis fraction. In the fifth release, it accompanies the user, in a choral-orchestral performance, in the main menu and in Haven fraction, the latter beginning from the 'Lacrimosa' stanza.

'Dies Irae' is a Latin sequence derived from a medieval Gregorian chant. This sequence is a part of Requiem, the music for the funeral masses, written by such composers as Mozart, Verdi and Berlioz. Usually performed in philharmonic halls, opera houses and churches around the world, 'Dies Irae' is also present in mass media and cinematography, accompanying action scenes intensified by the majestic choral-orchestral performance, or as an instrumental quotation in numerous classical pieces and movies.

Apart from the musical analysis, an inclusion of a Gregorian chant in a video game soundtrack creates a specific adaptation of medieval text and melody, consistent with an observation that adaptations "target different audiences through different media" (Hutcheon 2013, p. xxiii). Furthermore, 'Dies Irae' and other Requiem motifs arranged for the series' soundtrack may be seen as an allegation in a video game, a specific type of intertextuality and an allusion to the work of renewed authority (Mochocka 2021). The soundtrack to the series, especially Requiem motifs, were noticed and recreated by some musicians, especially Heroes Orchestra, who perform it in a philharmonic setting.

Keywords

video game soundtrack, music in video games, adaptation, allegation, Requiem

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Time-Image Meets Rule-Play: Reframing Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* through Ludological Analysis)

Abstract

Drawing from key concepts in ludification, the exploit of nonlinear game story elements in linear media, this paper examines the chess game in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* as a literal and metaphorical element that bridges the narrative's existential weight with the dynamics of gameplay.

Unlike traditional readings that interpret the game as a symbolic duel between humanity and mortality, this article highlights its structural role as a rhythmic motif punctuating the film. The recurring presence of the chessboard provides a temporal and spatial framework that organizes the narrative's episodic structure, setting the stage for dialogues, drama, and action.

Building on this, we treat the match as a ludological construct—mechanics, rules, and states—that installs a play world inside the diegesis and regulates space, time, and sociality. This reframes *The Seventh Seal* from allegory to system, distinguishing ludification from gamification, the latter being the “use of game design elements in non-game contexts.”

Our game-narratological analysis maps moves and pauses to narrative functions and focalization, showing how a rule-driven sequence coexists with Deleuze's time-image aesthetics of suspension and drift. Formally and stylistically, Bergman's framing of turns, shot/reverse-shot rituals, and episodic gating operate like “level design,” with the chessboard punctuating progression and distributing agency. Jof and Mia's escape exemplifies balancing mechanics: the Knight's tactical delay reallocates temporal advantage within the story system.

Comparative cases clarify these traits: where *Run Lola Run* rewinds through replay loops and variable outcomes, Bergman embeds game logic as an inner scaffold rather than overt reset. Methodologically, we adapt game analysis to film: model the immanent rule-system (“rules-fiction” distinctions), map game events to narrative functions, read time control (delays, reprieves) as mechanics, and stage comparative tests across gameful cinema. This yields a portable protocol for formal, thematic, and generic analysis of games-as-works-of-art within cinema, positioning *The Seventh Seal* as a prime instance of structural ludification rather than mere symbolic play.

Keywords

Ludification; *The Seventh Seal*; Game mechanics; Time-image; Narrative structure

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Core loops and Positive reinforcement: An Experiment**Abstract**

Core loop is a game industry concept concerning the cycle of the most repeated actions throughout a game and its ensuing effects. Regularly spouted in game development contexts, the most common configuration for the core loop has a player's actions being followed by in-game consequences that can be understood as rewards or punishments, which are reliant on the design. This configuration, nevertheless, has a distinguished similarity with the concept of positive reinforcement, which postulates that an voluntary behaviour (player's action), if followed by positive stimuli (positive in-game consequences), will have a greater likelihood of being repeated by the agent (player) in the future. This similarity has been pointed out previously in the literature, but never fully investigated.

To test this, we developed a decision-based game with 24 main situations, each one followed by two choices. Participants were randomly divided in two groups without their or the study monitor's knowledge. The experimental group (n = 55) received a version in which a classic core loop rewarded "correct" choices with mechanical and narrative rewards, while the control group (n = 54) experienced both mechanical and narrative punishments for the same "correct" choices. "Correct" choices were defined by a test between developers in which more than 70% of them (n = 10) agreed when one of the answers was "morally better" than the other. A total of 11 of the 24 main situations were deemed "correct" and changed for the control version, all others were kept the same on both.

After playing, participants answer a questionnaire about their experience with the game, which used a 7-points Likert scale. The results showed a significant difference between groups' experiences in certain dimensions, with an overall better experience being reported by the typical core loop group.

Keywords

core loop, positive reinforcement, operant conditioning, t-test

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Inspiration Games: a New Way to Define Socially Meaningful and Culturally Valuable Games**Abstract**

This study introduces a new way of defining socially meaningful and culturally valuable games, referred to as *Inspiration Games*. Over the past two decades, games have evolved from entertainment media into *life media* that address social issues and convey diverse cultural values. Game designers and indie creators have become increasingly motivated to share unique and authentic game experiences with players and communities. As video games have deeply permeated everyday life and players' needs have diversified toward more innovative and emotionally engaging forms of play. This study conducted written and face-to-face interviews focusing on 18 cases of socially meaningful and culturally valuable games to identify key characteristics of their production, funding, marketing, and dissemination processes. A literature review was then carried out to compare existing frameworks such as *serious games*, *gamification*, *game-based learning*, *transformational games*, *applied games*, *persuasive games*, *values at play*, and *social impact games*. Through this, the strengths and limitations of existing concepts were compared with the characteristics of selected games. The deeply engaging narrative, coupled with its connection to the real world, and the approach that transcends mainstream game mechanics offer players a wide range of human experiences including emotional charge, irony, satire, humor, relaxation, and comfort, demonstrating that the enjoyment of games can be broaden the experiential spectrum. Player act as active agents of change, experiencing a spontaneous elevation of consciousness on a cultural or communal level through epistemologically transcendent experiences. Such experiences are not simple acts of play but processes of self-evolution through game experiences, fostering new relationships with society. In conclusion, this study proposed *Inspiration Games* as a new concept that defines games through which players experience deep emotional engagement and inspiration, encouraging behavior change, and raising awareness of socio-cultural values.

Keywords

Inspiration Games, Game Design, Player Experience, Social and Cultural Values, Emotional Engagement

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Like mother, like burr: Making and playing for catharsis**Abstract**

Arising out of a need to document personal memory and narrative, this practice-based research paper investigates the cathartic affordances of game-making and game-playing through the creation of autofictional game sketches that center on the author's own mother-daughter relationship as a first-generation immigrant.

The practice uses Kara Stone's Reparative Game Design as both framework and methodology, through iterative making, self-play, affective analysis, and autoethnographic analysis. These methods form the foundation of Reparative Game Design - an approach that situates vulnerability, uncertainty and affect as design materials, positioning making itself as inquiry. Each game sketch functions as experiment and reflection, testing how game mechanics, aesthetics and memory re-enactment can evoke aesthetic catharsis for the designer. Aesthetic catharsis is incorporated as a personal yet traceable post-design metric of repair that can be identified and articulated across design iterations and play sessions. And the designer's dual positionality as maker and player forms the crux of the research process, in which the act of play and of creation reciprocally inform one another toward personal and artistic reconciliation.

While rooted in a singular autobiographical narrative, the research argues for these processes as a transferable approach for independent, self-expressive game-making. It reframes subjectivity not as a limitation, but as a model through which memory, care, and confession act as material for play, and through which personal histories can be transformed into creative agency and emotional knowledge. Through game sketches like *Like Mother, Like Burr*, the research demonstrates how games can operate as reparative gestures that bridge the personal and the procedural. Ultimately, this research proposes methods that a game-maker could partake in to truly make a game of one's own, seeing it as agency, as confession, as half-truth, as survival - accompanying one through the disquiets of the past and present, in fact and in fiction.

Keywords:

Autofictional/autobiographical game, reparative game design, aesthetic catharsis, memory, game sketching

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Gameplay and Map Design in Total War: Warhammer III – Miloš Živković (Serbia)**Abstract**

The Total War: Warhammer III (2022) offers three distinct campaigns: *The Lost God*, used as a tutorial, *The Realm of Chaos* – that continues the narrative arc of the trilogy and the *Immortal Empires* campaign. The latter is the culmination of the series; it contains one of the most ambitious cartographic projects in contemporary strategy gaming. The result is a vast map containing 554 settlements, designed to present a comprehensive geography of the Warhammer Fantasy setting.

The extensive map serves both narrative and worldbuilding functions while also operating as a central game-design mechanism that structures player agency and AI faction behavior. The geography of *Total War: Warhammer III* forms the foundation for its strategic gameplay. The arrangement and distribution of settlements and provinces is not arbitrary; instead, they establish the parameters within which players operate. Faction positioning further complicates the landscape, as the proximity and arrangement of different powers shape initial threats, alliances, and long-term strategic planning. Together, these geographic elements create an underlying rule system that governs how the game unfolds, setting the boundaries and possibilities for player decisions while also influencing the AI faction behavior. Our analysis will focus on the three campaigns mentioned, their spatial structure, and their impact on player experience. A separate part of the paper will address the modding community and their map modifications, faction repositioning, and settlement rebalancing that modify the player experience.

Keywords

Total War: Warhammer III, Immortal Empires, cartography, mods.