

DIGRA **aa**
 *Australia*

2014

WHAT IS GAME STUDIES
IN AUSTRALIA?

Conference
Proceedings

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As has been the case for most game studies scholars around the world, Australian academic work on games and play has been conducted within a wide variety of disciplines and from an even broader number of conceptual and analytical approaches. Even within universities, academics engaged in game studies are dispersed, reflecting lost opportunities for constructive criticisms, collaborations and communication. DiGRA Australia is thus delighted to welcome you to the inaugural event of this local chapter, a one-day symposium aimed at bringing together those interested in the study of digital (and non-digital) games in Australia to discuss current and future work.

We organise such an event acknowledging that ‘game studies’ is not an exclusively academic endeavour – exciting and ground-breaking work is occurring in a wide variety of commercial, professional and amateur contexts. Consequently, we have encouraged non-academic game researchers, critics, designers, developers and artists to attend and contribute to the event. It is our hope that DiGRA Australia will continue to grow as a friendly and nourishing community for dialogue between these two audiences.

The theme for this Symposium, ‘What is Game Studies in Australia’, is (optimistically) self-fulfilling; the submissions included in these proceedings¹ reflect the variety of what Game Studies is in Australia. We hope that this event will foster further discussion and critical reflection on what, if anything, differentiates Australian Game Studies from international work and how awareness of these differences can improve the future of Game Studies in Australia.

- Marcus Carter

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

The following volunteers have been essential for the successful organisation of the DiGRA 2014 Symposium.

Thomas Apperley, Marcus Carter, Laura Crawford, John Downs, Martin Gibbs, Daniel Golding, Alexander Kan, Brendan Keogh, Alexander Muscat, Bjorn Nansen, Amani Naseem, Benjamin Nicoll, Melissa Rogerson, Adam Ruch, Chad Toprak & Darryl Woodford.

We also note the support of the DiGRA Australia board and in turn, the board of the international Digital Games Research Association.

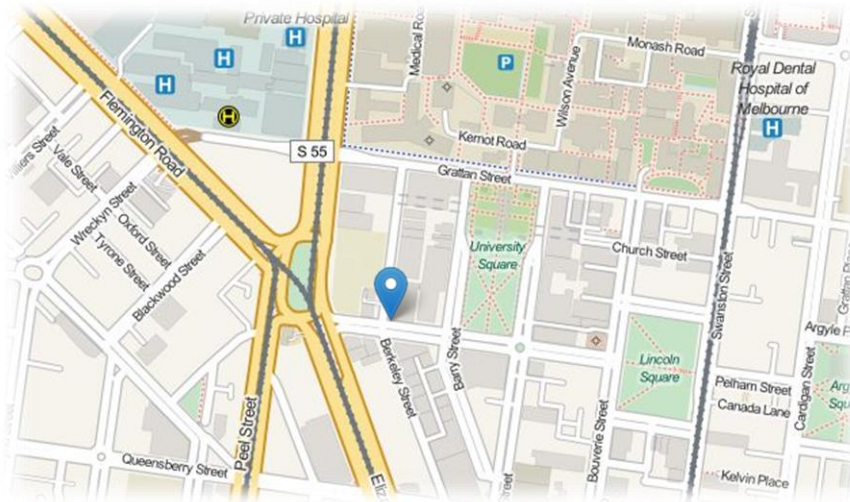
1 - The submissions included in this proceeding respond to a CFP for 400-800 word abstracts, and have each been reviewed by at least two researchers. Selected authors from the symposium will be invited to submit their papers to a special issue of the Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association journal. These proceedings have been edited by Marcus Carter, Alexander Muscat and Benjamin Nicoll.

SYMPOSIUM DETAILS

The conference will be held in Theatre 1 of 'The Spot' building (pictured below) at The University of Melbourne.

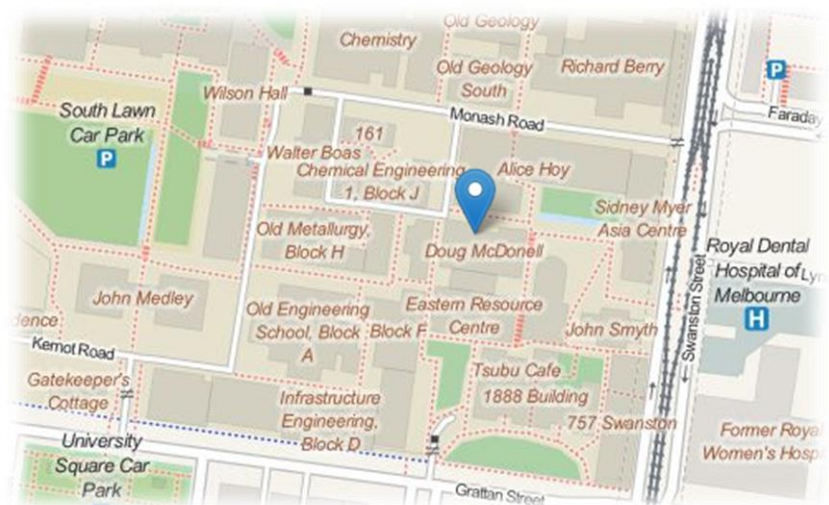
The street address for this building is - **198 Berkeley St, Parkville**

Registration will open at 8:45 am, with talks commencing at 9:00 am. Morning and Afternoon tea will be provided, but attendees will have to arrange their own lunch. A cafe is located in the building.



SOCIAL EVENT DETAILS

A social event following the DiGRAA 2014 Symposium will be held from 7:30pm onwards on **Level 8 of the Doug McDonnell Building**. The event includes a limited amount of food and drinks, and a wide selection of games to play.



Symposium Program

Time Begin	Time End	Title
9:00	9:05	Introductions
9:05	9:50	Digital Gaming in Australia's Asian Century <i>Thomas Apperley</i>
9:50	10:00	Coffee Break
10:00	10:20	Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side: Enacting Femininity to avoid dying alone <i>Tina Niomi Richards – Griffith University</i>
10:20	10:40	"Daily Daka": Everyday rhythms of body and space in a Chinese Internet Café <i>Zhang Ge – Hong Kong Polytechnic University</i>
10:40	11:00	Rhythmic Experience and Gameplay <i>Brigid Costello – University of New South Wales</i>
11:00	11:20	Varieties of Vernacular Experience <i>Darshana Jayemanne & Christian McCrea – Independent Scholar & RMIT University</i>
11:20	11:40	Morning Tea
11:40	12:00	Paratext: A More Interactive Movement <i>Daniel Dunne – Swinburne University of Technology</i>
12:00	12:20	Affect, Responsibility, and how Modes of Engagement Shape the Experience of Fiction <i>Kevin Veale – Massey University</i>
12:20	12:40	"Blackout!": Unpacking the 'Black Box' of Game <i>Steven Conway & Andrew Trevillian – Swinburne University of Technology</i>
12:40	1:00	Towards a Unified Theory of Play: A Case Study of Minecraft <i>James Hooper & Penny de Byl – Bond University</i>
1:00	2:00	Lunch
2:00	2:20	Literacy in the Digital World of the Twenty First Century: Students, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Games and Play - <i>Catherine Beavis, Clare Bradford, Joanne O'Mara, Christopher Walsh, Thomas Apperley & Amanda Gutierrez</i>
2:20	2:40	Theorising Film-to-Game Adaptation <i>Scott Knight – Bond University</i>
2:40	3:00	The Adventures of 'Mad Jack': An Experiment in Documentary Game Design <i>Rebecca Wolgast & Debra Polson – Queensland University of Technology</i>
3:00	3:20	Videogame Visions of Post-Climate Change Futures <i>Ben Abraham – University of Western Sydney</i>
3:20	3:40	Afternoon Tea
3:40	4:00	Remembering & Exhibiting Games Past: the Popular Memory Archive <i>Helen Stuckey, Melanie Swalwell, Angela Ndalians & Denise de Vries</i>
4:00	4:20	Software Migration Applied to Commodore BASIC Video Games <i>Craig Harrington & Denise de Vries – Flinders University</i>
4:20	4:40	Game Design Inspiration in Global Game Jam <i>Xavier Ho, Martin Tomitsch & Tomasz Bednarz – University of Sydney</i>
4:40	5:00	Ten Years of Pushing Buttons: The Role of Freeplay in Australian Games Discourse <i>Hugh Davies – La Trobe University</i>
5:00	5:30	Game Studies' Australian Fringe: Communities, Critics and Conversation Round Table <i>Chair – Dan Golding</i>

DiGRA 2014 Keynote

Digital Gaming in Australia's Asian Century

This talk considers the growth of a transnational gaming public in Australia, and the potential for this public to contribute to an expanded sense of citizenship. This expanded citizenship is informed by digital play with people from other cultures within the Asia-Pacific region. Australia is a notable producer of digital games and has a particularly high rate of digital game use. Australia's neighbours in the Asia-Pacific such as South Korea and Japan are world leaders in the production of digital games. In rapidly growing economies like China and Indonesia, digital gaming is a popular form of entertainment. In the last decade gaming infrastructures across the Asia-Pacific have become more standardized, and have focused on providing a networked and social experience of digital play. As a consequence, Australians have increasingly been able to play digital games with and among their neighbours over transnational gaming networks. This realignment of local, regional and global connections has significant potential for reshaping notions of citizenship and cultural identity within the region.

Biography: Tom Apperley, Ph.D. is an ethnographer that specializes in researching digital media technologies. His previous writing has covered broadband policy, digital games, digital literacies and pedagogies, mobile media, and social inclusion. Tom is a Senior Lecturer at UNSW Australia. He is the co-editor of the open-access peer-reviewed journal, *Digital Culture & Education*, his open-access print-on-demand book *Gaming Rhythms: Play and Counterplay from the Situated to the Global*, was published by The Institute of Network Cultures in 2010.



Round Table Discussion

Game Studies' Australian Fringe: Communities, Critics and Conversation

Game Studies in Australia has always gone beyond the academy. Whether through popular or literary games criticism, advocacy groups, or grassroots events and festivals, Australian Games Studies has frequently found itself within a shared context of personnel, locale, and the aims of a non-academic community. There is a rich history of Australian game scholars organising public-facing events, advocating for cultural and policy change, and engaging with a global critical community of reviewers, journalists, and essayists. In this panel, we speak with some of the key people in Australia's games community that sit at the important junction between scholarly research and non-scholarly, community networks. In this local and national sense, what context does the newly-founded DiGRA Australia find itself in, and what kind of a relationship can Australia's games scholars have with their local community of game critics, organisations, and events? How can Australia's games researchers enrich their work through such fertile pre-existing communities, and how can such communities draw on Australia's scholarly researchers in return?

Featuring: Daniel Golding (Chair), Leena van Deventer (WiDGET), Maize Wallin (Glitchmark), Hugh Davies (Freeplay), Brendan Keogh (critic, Press Select) & Ben Abraham (Critical Distance).

Symposium Proceedings

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Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side: Enacting femininity to avoid dying alone.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Japanese dating simulator video game, Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side, the first female protagonist version in the Tokimeki Memorial series. Analysis of the game mechanics, characterisations, player options and their results demonstrate that the game assumes and reinforces a range of cultural norms and social expectations in relations to female and gender performativity, courting and dating, relationships and intimacy. I discuss how the gameplay actively produces particular heteronormative perspectives on how girls and young women should enact femininity if they are to avoid being alone at the end of the game, and, for that matter, in life.

Keywords

Dating Sim, Tokimeki Memorial, Otome, Gender, Techno-intimacy, video games.

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-growing globalised market for video games, those produced for particular cultures and language groups are increasingly finding international audiences as Internet sales and greater opportunities to travel provide access to games initially conceived and promoted as regionally exclusive. We may need to pay more attention to how games can become popular regardless of apparent limitations of language and culture. For example, with roughly 19% of the population considered bilingual (Griffith, 2014) and over 1.4 million students undertaking second language learning (Lo Bianco, 2009), a considerable proportion of Australians can readily consume cultural product from non-Anglo sources. Widespread familiarity with genre conventions among gamers means that players who do not share a game's language can nevertheless engage in an enjoyable level of play. Further, in the context of globalised fandom, an appetite for Japanese popular culture means that video games popular in Japan are attractive to Australian players, even when untranslated. It seems important for Australian game studies to pay attention to the impacts and implications of games not available in English yet increasingly popular among Australian players.

This paper examines the Japanese dating simulator video game, Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side, the first female protagonist version in the popular Tokimeki Memorial series. Like many dating simulators, the game remains officially unavailable in languages other

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than Japanese (although fan translations exist). Widely consumed by Japanese men and women, dating simulators are a single-player game requiring the player to be the protagonist, either a male or female character chosen from those offered by the game, whose purpose is to court one of a considerable number of possible suitors, also provided. In order to court a suitor, the player must make both conversational choices and decisive actions, each of which are allocated points. Choices, depending on their positive or negative connotations within the situation, can have points awarded or subtracted from previously attained scores. Dating simulators usually have a set time frame at the end of which the points received will determine the outcome of the game.

In this paper I focus on the choices and consequences that revolve around the date event, which is made up of 5 specific major game mechanics. The experience of a Tokimeki Memorial Girl's side date from the player's point of view consists of the following sequential elements: your selection of an outfit and accessories; your date's reaction to your clothing choices; the completion of the main date component, i.e. the meal or movie; a question regarding your impression of the date; and your date's response to your answer to that question. I have conducted an analysis of how these particular game mechanics surrounding the typical date scenario and their consequences in Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side assume and reinforce a range of cultural norms and social expectations in relation to female and gender performativity, courting and dating, relationships and intimacy. Explaining through examples, I discuss how the gameplay actively produces particular heteronormative perspectives regarding how girls and young women should enact femininity if they are to avoid being alone at the end of the game, and, for that matter, in life.

I undertook this project as an insider/outsider participant researcher – I speak Japanese, have lived and studied in Japan and I am a long-standing player of Japanese dating simulator games. The observational research involved both textual analysis and consideration of the effects/affects of how play proceeds. My conceptual frameworks draw on cultural theory, especially in relation to gender and language. I am particularly indebted to Judith Butler's work on gender performativity, and her understandings about how girls and women come to perform their gender in particular ways in relation to the dominant culture; Laura Mulvey's work on the male gaze, particularly her recognition that many women may never escape the patriarchal culture in which they exist, so that their identities remain determined by how they are viewed by men; and Anne Allison's concept of techno-intimacy, which has become central to my work, enabling me to achieve an enriched grasp of how people develop intense, affective relations with real and virtual technological objects. In exploring the Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side dating simulator, I have identified a range of actual consequences that could arise for women when the play evokes "real" emotions and strongly felt connections with the gameplay and its characters.

Discussing the cultural implications of particular game elements from both Japanese and Western cultural perspectives, I argue that Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side is decidedly problematic in how it constructs Japanese femininity, gender relations and the extent of agency assumed to be available to girls and women.

BIO

Tina Niomi Richards is a PhD candidate in the School of Humanities at Griffith University. With a first degree in Japanese, and having completed Honours in game studies and cultural studies, her research interests include Japanese and western popular culture. She currently teaches contemporary Japanese popular culture focusing on video games and anime. Her PhD project is examining cultural differences and similarities in day one release titles for PlayStation 4 in Australia and Japan. Other gaming studies interests include dating simulators, visual novels and point and click adventure games.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My research is made possible thanks to the Australian Post Graduate Award.

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Konami 2002, Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side, Playstation 2 software, Tokyo Japan.

“Daily Daka”: everyday rhythms of body and space in a Chinese Internet Café

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I aim to present a preliminary result of my anthropological fieldwork at a Chinese Internet café. The presence of Internet cafés in China is declining in general along its past ‘glories’ and controversies. This study captures the present of one particular Internet café: its daily rhythms and its quality as a living place. This detailed accounts includes materiality of the space (its objects, interfaces, disciplinary practices and maintenance) and dwelling bodies (physical exhaustion, bodily techniques and consumption of food). Through ethnographic descriptions, I hope the example of one Internet café can inform the importance of the quotidian in the studies of gamers.

Keywords

Chinese Internet cafe, ruins of modernisation, rhythm-analysis, anthropology of everyday life, gaming space, gaming body.

INTRODUCTION

Internet cafés in the most developed countries are not commonly seen and not necessarily associated with videogames in most contexts. Gaming arcades grew phenomenally along with Fordist industrialisation in the West in 70s- early 90s and declined to the state of debris at the present as new forms of gaming entertainment became dominant. Internet cafés played a similar role as main facilitator of Internet connection, which then popularised online gaming in the past 20 years or so. The material conditions (rarity and high cost of personal Internet connection and computer) for the ubiquitous existence of Internet café are gradually disappearing, as the owner of the Internet café in which I did my fieldwork said, ‘it is now the “sunset” time for the whole Internet café business’. The industry underwent a transformation of not only its infrastructural facilities, but also invented a whole new set of meanings distancing itself from the former controversies and moral panics it involved. For many urban youngsters who used to make up the majority of patrons of Internet cafes in the past¹, Internet café represents somewhat different from the older generation who grew up with, entangled with and now sentimentalising Internet cafes. For some, it is simply a space (alternative to other spaces) to play games, while, for others, it constitutes a collective memory and nostalgia of the past.

One of the major inspirations from Benjamin’s *Arcade Project* (1999) is the particular choice of the subject, the Parisian arcade, not ‘in its heyday but as a “ruins” existing in a

¹ Only urban, where the research is based. It is not necessarily the case in county towns and rural areas where Internet cafes are still relatively prominent spaces with functioning Internet connection and basic hardware

time when it has been outmoded' (Highmore 2002, p.65). Internet cafes are in similar situation: they are no long fully-fledged spectacles and topical issues but still to be found in many relatively hidden and dilapidated places. It was both celebrated for its novelty and condemned for its 'detrimental' impact on moral values. However, they are transforming from popular low class space for 'vulnerable social groups' (Qiu 2005, p.262) to legitimate places for (gaming) entertainment that gradually receding from public attention. This project aims at recycling the present of Internet cafes in China.

The trends of studies on Chinese gamers has focused on larger narratives and broad view of social structure such as the role of the state and moral construction of 'Internet addiction' while little attention has been paid to micro-ethnographical studies of gaming spaces and gamers' everyday experiences. This study aims at an anthropological account of one Chinese Internet cafe at the present, in which participant observation is the core component. The focal point is to divulge the mundane and material aspects of the place in which people both incarnate alienation and facilitate the escape of it.

The everyday (as well as the non-everyday elements of it) embodies repetition and difference as well as interactions between the two. In my account, this is divided into two aspects: spatial rhythms and bodily rhythms. Spatial rhythms include materiality of the gameplay interfaces, gamers' patterns (as well as disruptions of such) of using the space, administrative disciplinary practices, the production and disposal of waste and a soundscape analysis of chaotic ambience and augmented noise due to confinement of the space. The body comes in close association with space: daily rhythms of play, food, defecation, and rest of regular patrons from early in the morning to late in the evening, physical exhaustion and strategies of surviving long gaming sessions, and mostly important bodily techniques of gaming as well as ways of dealing with interruptions. The rhythms I attempt to expose and theorise are not simply rigid patterns of bodily or spatial practices or a quantified time in general but more importantly fragmented and subjective experience of repetitions. Quality of this particular place comes into life when these spatial practices and bodily rhythms are put to the foreground.

For example, the Chinese phrase "daily daka (scan the card)" originally refers to a daily procedure of work, the begging of the disciplinary measure of work time. Now it is also used in the setting of the Internet cafe. Regular patron would greet each other by saying "Hey, you are here again to Daka". Everyone has to first scan their ID card (and pay) at the counter before settling down. The same procedure takes place in the conventional calculation of work time- workers touch on and off their IDs.

Through studying these rhythms, it is possible to take account of players' constant negotiations between leisure and work or 'serious' and directly instrumental activities, excessiveness and discipline/rational expenditure of energy, intentional 'loss' and wastage, boredom and disorders, not simply the setting of the Internet café, but their lives as an officeworker, a small businessman, a son, a husband, and finally a gamer.

BIO

Zhang Ge graduated from University of Melbourne in 2012 with a Bachelor of Arts (Media Studies and Asian Studies) before he started his postgraduate research in the Mphil (Anthropology) program in the Department of Social Sciences at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His main research interest is anthropological studies of gamers and urban space. He first encountered the field of game studies in Australia and he hope his own anthropological research can contribute to the gradual building of this field.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is part of my Master of Philosophy (Anthropology) degree funded by Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Special thanks to my informants and friends during my fieldwork in the Internet café, and Thomas Apperley for his kind support and suggestions for this paper.

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Rhythmic Experience and Gameplay

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ABSTRACT

A thread running through recent writing suggests that, similar to music and dance, games are performed rhythms and provide a rhythmic experience. This provides a starting point for a deeper look at what this perspective might reveal about the experience of games. The perception of a rhythm involves patterns of attention that are formed through processes of entrainment and habituation. The body both opens to a rhythm and is bent by it. There are voluntary and involuntary aspects to these processes and this paper explores the possible dynamics of these within game experience. As something that can be performed and perceived, a rhythm also has expressive potential and this relies on the attentional measure formed during entrainment and habituation. Expressive potential is also dependent on the dynamism or agency of the relations between game form and player. These produce the vitality that, it is argued, is essential for the movement of play.

Keywords

games, gameplay, player experience, rhythm, rhythmic experience, entrainment, habituation, expressive potential

INTRODUCTION

This is a paper with an interest in rhythm and, in particular, with an interest in the rhythms of gameplay experience. This interest grew out of an observation from previous research that if play can be defined as “free movement within a more rigid structure”(Salen & Zimmerman 2004, p.304) then the quality of the rhythms of that movement lie at the heart of any playful interactive experience (Costello, 2009). There is already tangential support for this focus on rhythm within classic game design practice. For example, rhythm is involved when designers record the levels of tension throughout a game by creating a graph of its dramatic arc (Fullerton, 2008, p.104). Rhythm is also present when a designer charts rising and falling player interest (Schell, 2008, p.253) or fine-tunes the pace of game levels (Davies, 2009). Recently, there has been some more explicit support for a focus on rhythm from games writers who have suggested; that musical notation could be useful for describing game levels (Benson, 2012); that musical instruments and compositions are forms of games (Kanaga, 2012); and that the kinesthetic experience of game play is a kind of music that has its own distinct rhythm (Hamilton, 2011).

Support for a focus on rhythm can also be found in the work of computer game theorists. For example, Apperley has conducted an analysis of the rhythms of game play at cyber cafes (2010); Ash has developed a model of attention where gameplay rhythms are described as helping to create “optimal bandwidth” (2012); and Kirkpatrick has argued

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that gameplay is a form of dance choreographed by the “script” of the game (2011). All this suggests that it could be productive to take a more detailed look at rhythm and at what such a perspective might reveal about the gameplay experience. To speak of the rhythms of game experience is not to speak *only* of the genre of rhythm games or speak *only* of movement, sound and music within games. Rhythm can be found within every game genre and, as this paper will discuss, does not just involve ears and muscles. It involves all of our senses and can be perceived within all aspects of our being in the world (Lefebvre, 2004).

A rhythm is something that both *organizes* events within an experience and is *organized* by the events of that experience (Turetsky, 2004, p.143). It involves the grouping of events and also their distribution in time. In experiencing a rhythm there is an opening as we synchronize to it and a bending as we become habituated to it. The flow of a performed rhythm is also something that can be played with expressively. This paper will focus on these three processes of opening, bending and expressive playing within rhythmic experience and discuss their potential relationship to game experience. The separation out of these aspects of rhythm is only done to aid the investigation: for within the flow of rhythmic experience the three processes not only often operate simultaneously but also rely on each other for their operation. Separating these out, however, allows consideration of the rhythmic dynamics of the relations between game form and game player. It will allow us to ask, who is doing the opening and who is providing the rhythm that is being opened to? To ask, who is being bent and who is bending them? And to consider, who is able to play with the rhythm and where does the expressive potential for playing with a rhythm lie - in the game, in the player or in both of them.

Perhaps not surprisingly the movement of rhythm will allow us to see some fluidity within the available positions of the player and game form. The discussion will rely on metaphors as a way to think about rhythmic processes and provide space for imagination. These metaphors emphasize that rhythmic practice is performed across a continuum of voluntary and involuntary attention; that it can be a form of possession or contamination but also entrancement and enlargement; that it can involve manipulation and compulsion but also be a way of thinking or learning. Rhythmic experience, it will be argued, relies on the repetition of past habits but lives in the spontaneous difference of the moment of performance. Within the dynamism of rhythm lies the potential for the creative play of subversion and improvisation. Rhythm both has vitality and produces vitality. And that production of vitality is, I believe, key for the creation of interesting game experiences.

BIO

Dr. Brigid Costello lectures in media production in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney, Australia. Her research focuses on the experience of play and on practice-based strategies for designing for play. Her general research interests include interaction design, user experience, serious games, game design and play experiences within interactive art.

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Varieties of Vernacular Experience

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the elaboration of the term ‘vernacular’ in order to open new ways for game studies to think about the complex relations between production and consumption in videogames. Drawing on assemblage theory, cultural studies and Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘minor literature’, the paper will explore game concept art and the reception of From Software’s ‘Souls’ series as sets of vernacular productions.

Keywords

Vernacular experience, paratexts, assemblages, playcultures, production, consumption

VARIETIES OF VERNACULAR EXPERIENCE

Does game studies recognise sufficient varieties of vernacular experience and expression? How has the term ‘vernacular’ been used in academic attempts to understand videogames and ‘playcultures’ (Flanagan 2009)? Thinking about videogames in terms of everyday, lived experience is common enough in the social sciences that have captured so much of game studies’ intellectual direction. But ‘vernacular’ has a long and complex history across humanities theory that can help transfer and elucidate some of that work from the social sciences.

Recently, Daniel Joseph (2013) deployed DeLanda’s (2006) term ‘assemblage’ to help understand Toronto’s independent game development cliques and communities. Joseph proposes that, especially given the international and professional contexts of game development, the terms of reference for theory need to become labile and scalable to respond to the proposed objects of study. Our interest in the term ‘vernacular’ begins with a similar set of descriptive needs - what best describes daily, long-form game experiences of players? What best describes an ongoing creative fascination with videogames that shapes a lifelong artistic practice? What best describes the rapidly centering feedback loops between the ways that players articulate the intensities of gaming’s ludic structures and the way that these structures are produced?

Jean Burgess assembled the notion of ‘vernacular creativity’ partially to ‘describe and illuminate creative practices that emerge from non-elite social contexts’ (2006). Burgess used Chris Atton’s idea of ‘reducing cultural distance’ between forces of cultural production and the ways in which we live. This conception of the vernacular both forestalls a hasty critical rush to either valorisation or opprobrium; or to accusations of either voluntarism or fatalism. Analogous in a way to William James’ call to question

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totalising questions in the analysis of varieties of religious experience, Burgess asks: “what practices, modes of play, modes of design, modes of communication reduce cultural distance?” That is, what sort of practices can be said to work from that ‘non-elite’ position, or as is often the case, form broader patterns and consolidations of elite ownership.

In Australia, such an approach speaks to the retreat of large amounts of foreign capital and the concomitant rise of ‘indie’ production: recent history has seen a proliferation of vernaculars. However, developing concepts of the vernacular is a promising project for game studies writ large due to the potential mediations such discussions may offer between the contexts of production, situated play and wider culture. These mediations will be explored in this paper through two key examples: concept art, and fan discourses that seek to reconstruct the fragmented narratives of From Software's "Dark Souls" and "Demon's Souls".

As videogames culture undergoes the rapid change that comes with a vast number of new independent developers, more and more concept art attached to games is in the public sphere - but it is also increasingly clear that concept art is by no means a universal practice in games. Concept art, in some cases, exists in and around the game's community and underwrites something else entirely - the value of the game to its creative players, which produces new social power for the game and its developers. We might generate productive analyses from understanding concept art as a "videogame vernacular", one that is rooted of course in imaginative capacity of the viewer, but which gives us way to view and understand the work of many thousands of young artists globally, intent on developing artwork intended for the videogame production system, videogame fan culture, or - and this is crucial - a now quite unique ideation-focused game videogame concept art culture.

Vernacular production also characterises the reception of From Software's "Souls" series. Across the various titles, players have produced distinctive responses to both the narrative and the game-mechanical complexities of the series. Exchanging information and speculation through forums, chat rooms, YouTube and Twitch.tv channels - as well as by use of the games' own idiosyncratic blood stains and gnomic inscriptions - players of the "Souls" series have created vernacular modes and cultures of play. The official guide to the latest "Souls" game involved the contributions of several of the most well-known players within the community, raising questions about the co-option of such vernacular practices by established interests.

Comparing these two cases of vernacular videogame production, this paper seeks to open a discussion on the relations between production and consumption of game texts. Game studies has been content in many cases to develop an idea of fan and player art as 'paratextual' (ie, Mia Consalvo's (2007) expansion of the concept); however, as the examples of concept art and Dark Souls fandom show, videogame vernaculars can have effects on production that exceed this characterisation. Through engagement with the assemblage theory and cultural studies approaches mentioned above as well as Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a ‘minor literature’, an elaborated notion of the vernacular can provide a conceptual tool for exploring gaming's complex interrelations of bodies and apparatuses.

BIO

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Paratext: a more interactive movement

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines paratext as an active element of video games. Through a brief exploration of paratext's history in both literature and games, this paper will reveal a need for closer analysis in video game studies. Focusing on In-game, In-system and In-world types of paratexts this paper will attempt to formalise the under-addressed issue of paratext in video games.

Keywords

paratext, meta-narrative, Genette

INTRODUCTION

Paratext can be defined as the features that surround a text, yet are not recognised as part of it. Gérard Genette formalises this concept by defining paratext as that which presents the text or “make[s] present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world...” (Genette, 1991). These features can include font, imagery, publisher information, blurbs, and additional academic tools (such as an index or footnotes), as long as it originates from the writer or publisher. Genette (1997) separates paratext into two sections: peritext, that which pertains to and of the text itself, and epitext that which is external to the text but still originating from a writer or publisher (interviews or marketing). Any aspect of production which cannot be considered part of the main text but which shapes the reader’s perception of what the text is considered to be paratext. This concept of paratext extends beyond literature, and can also be seen in videogames.

Video game paratext occurs much the same way as paratext does in literature, except to a much more complex degree due to its multimedia representation (making use of sound, in-game graphics, and physical appearance, as well as in the code level of a game). One example of this is in the installation of a PC game – this mechanical step is often required to play a video game but is not part of it and as such is considered to be paratext. Traditionally this step is perceived as simply a preparation for the playing of a game, and only minutely seen as influencing player perception of the game. However video games such as Red Alert 2 and Crimson Skies, use these paratextual elements to provide players with backstory to the game. Another example is loading screens in-game, which are used to convey reminders to players, while preparing a level. Both Spec Ops: The Line and FarCry 3, uses this to point out player-avatar relationships, driving at a greater moral

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theme. Although these paratextual elements are not directly part of the game (in a traditional diegetic sense), they still affect its presentation.

These sorts of video game paratexts are rarely mentioned or even recognised as such in games scholarship. Papers such as the discussion of agency in *Bioshock* with its incorporation of objectives (Tulloch), or Jordan Mercher discussing the narrative choices of *Sands of Time* (Harrigan) only hint at the potential for peritext based paratext, and never directly discuss it. Mia Consalvo's "Cheating: Gaining advantage in videogames," introduces the idea of paratext within game studies but does so by purely focusing on the epitext aspect of paratext and furthermore conflates it with Genette's idea of intertextuality. Consalvo uses any external text that refers to a central text (those not of the author or publisher's intent), as an explanation of Genette's paratext. Since many of these external texts aren't dependent, or rather independent enough, to be read by themselves, this falls into a different category of relational texts, intertextuality. Intertextuality, from Genette's "Palimpsests," is the relationship between two or more texts, evidenced by the referencing of one text in another. This makes paratext, if at all present, mostly an abstraction of an epitext focused approach – pushing paratext from that which exists on the fringes of the text towards the call and response of critics, reviews, franchising and audience interaction (an idea akin to Henry Jenkin's idea of convergence).

David Jara, in "A Closer Look at the (Rule-) Books: Framing and Paratexts in Tabletop Role-playing Games," offers a rare example of an interaction with Genette's notion of paratext, and address Consalvo's oversight through Werner Wolf's framing techniques. This places the idea of paratext back to a peritext approach. Unfortunately this interpretation of paratext seems to be the exception, instead of the rule within game studies.

After establishing some of the history and failures of previous investigation of video game paratext, this presentation will attempt to formalise the different incorporations of paratext from in-game, in-system, and in-world perspectives. It will show examples of the different types of paratext for each. With in-game paratext the focus is on the surrounding support for a game (menus, system mechanics, videos, commentaries, loading bars), which are not direct elements of gameplay (core to player control). With in-system paratext, the elements are considered to be those restricted to the process of accessing the game on a system (game files, installation). With in-world paratext the physical interaction with video games will be examined (disks, box, manual, figurines, and maps). Each of these categories relate to the main "text" in different ways but each are paratext, and influence in some way how players interact with games. As research into this area grows, the complexity of players' interaction with games will be seen as not just playing the game, but a player's entire interaction with the central text.

BIO

Daniel Dunne is a current research student at the Swinburne University of Technology, completing his PhD in "Narrative structures in Video Games." Previously he has completed a minor thesis on "Interactivity and Narrative: the role of a videogame writer," for his honours year at the University of Melbourne. He hopes that through his research new and alternative methods of creating narrative, specifically in video games, can be developed.

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Affect, Responsibility, and How Modes of Engagement Shape the Experience of Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The textual structures and modes of engagement that are common to videogames create a situation where it is possible to ‘feel responsible’ for fictional characters within the world of the game.

Keywords

Affect, cathexis, ergodic literature, modes of engagement, responsibility, structural incoherence, world-of-concern

INTRODUCTION

When considering the elements which shape our experience of fiction, the line distinguishing the text itself from the processes we go through in negotiating that text is easy to miss. Even something as simple as knowing roughly how far through a book we are as we read will influence our experience of the story.

Affect is the nebulous zone of potential emotions which makes fiction matter to us and have an impact that spills out into our lives (Kavka 2008 *x*, 30-31). Affect functions through a process of investment which is contextual and grounded in our situations and what we find individually relevant (Grossberg 1997 158, Nyre 2007 26). When we engage with fiction, we are invested in relating to the characters *as if* they were real. Affective investment is how we can feel so strongly for characters who we know are fictional.

The textual structures and modes of engagement that are common to videogames create a situation where it is possible to ‘feel responsible’ for fictional characters within the world of the game, together with feeling responsible for the decisions you make in that context. This is part of what makes the experience of engaging with videogames so distinctive: even if the narrative is completely linear and unchanging, the player can experience it as if it were an outgrowth of their own decisions (Veale, 2012b).

The immediacy and intensity of our responses to games is grounded in this lack of affective mediation, meaning that because we are responsible for events and decisions within the game, they are happening as much to *us* as to our characters on an experiential level (Veale, 2011).¹ The revelation in *Bioshock* means that the person playing has been

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betrayed and manipulated, casting their decisions and actions in a different light. *Bastion* and *Shadow of the Colossus* can have us doubting whether we are doing the right thing, for the right reasons. *Kentucky Route Zero* makes us keenly aware of our responsibilities by highlighting that what we *don't* choose matters as much as what we select, and makes each decision keenly felt. *Gone Home* explicitly places the player in the same context as the young woman who is the protagonist: exploring an unfamiliar building during a storm and trying to figure out exactly what happened here. *Portal 2* can make us feel guilty for dooming the protagonist to an untimely death despite the fact it will occur off-screen and outside the boundaries of the game itself.

Games are not 'better,' 'more immersive' or 'more immediate' than traditional modes of storytelling, like cinema, prose, or comics. However, the modes of engagement common to videogames do produce distinctive experiences when compared other forms of mediated storytelling. Understanding how different modes of engagement shape our experiences of fiction will be helpful not just for the analysis of videogames and new media storytelling, but for understanding how we have already been telling stories for a very long time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Dr. Misha Kavka, Dr. Luke Goode and Mark Stewart of the University of Auckland for providing feedback on versions of this paper, and extra thanks for Mark Stewart's help in procuring sources.

ENDNOTES

1. Affective responsibility is relevant to game experiences beyond the fictional: it is a fundamental element of how and why players respond so strongly (and frequently, *badly*) to losing within online multiplayer games (Tassi, 2014). When a player knows that they played as well as they possibly could but lost decisively despite this, their affective frustration is grounded in helplessness. This is made worse if the loss is seen to be caused by mistakes made by team-mates, or glitches in the game, but players are still likely to lash out or carry their tension from the game out into the rest of their lives even if it was simply that they were outplayed by more-practiced opposition.

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Bio

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“Blackout!”: Unpacking the ‘Black Box’ of Game

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ABSTRACT

“When many elements are made to act as one, this is what I will now call a black box”.
(Latour 1988: 131)

In this paper we propose an ontology for games, negotiating both Latourian Actor-Network Theory and Erving Goffman's frame analysis. In doing so we hope to offer a robust, minimal and flexible framework for the analyst (and perhaps designer), that clearly illustrates the network of objects within the 'black box' of game and how each object (from player to memory card to sunlight) may move between three levels of the game event: ‘social world’, ‘configured world’ and ‘game world’.

Keywords

Ontology, Frame Analysis, Actor-Network Theory, Object-Oriented Ontology

GAME STUDIES’ EXISTENTIAL CRISIS: FRAMING ANTS

“Blackout!” announces psychic villain Psycho Mantis; the user’s television screen turns black with green text, ‘HIDEO’, glowing in the upper-right. This is a boss-battle taking place within *Metal Gear Solid*. Under the pretext of Psycho Mantis’ psychic powers, all sorts of objects (the PlayStation 1 memory card, the DualShock controller’s vibration motors, the television) are brought into the game world.

The encounter is noted as a famous example of how the digital game medium can break the fourth wall: an opaque acknowledgment of the often transparent network of objects that come together in generating the black box we frequently summarise as simply ‘video game’.

In this moment the television becomes an alien object, suddenly obtrusive, filling the user’s intentionality. Similarly *Metal Gear Solid*’s creator, Hideo Kojima, demands

Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play.

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deference as the network's ultimate owner. Yet, is this really disrupting the user's immersion in the fiction of the game world? Is it actually breaking the frame, the suspension of disbelief, as when the actor on stage 'breaks character' and speaks directly to the audience?

We argue that instead the opposite occurs: through conspicuous manipulation of the network of objects within the video game black box, the world of *Metal Gear Solid* becomes more encompassing, more persuasive to the user. Indeed, we argue it is characteristic of the medium of games to be conspicuous in adjusting, reorienting, or as we borrow from Goffman (1986), *keying* the network of objects that act as one when coming together as 'game'.

To this end we propose a new ontology for games, designed to be flexible, robust and concise. Drawing on Latour's (1988) Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and its explicit advocacy of a flat ontology, we present a framework which allows a specific level of agency to any object (material or ideal) that generates difference in the game frame: *Solid Snake*, water, screen resolution, RAM, sunlight, chalk, onlookers, user skill, a football, a couch. All are granted reality if agency can be attributed, though of course the level of agency may vary between moments in the game event.

To account for this we define three layers of existence that may be present within the moment of play, from most to least fundamental: the 'social world', the 'configured world', and the 'game world'. As we are ultimately concerned in this analysis with the relationship between (human) player and the network of (non-human) objects that generates game, we divide these three layers between two sides, the player side and the world side.

Thus we position the 'social-actor' within the social world, the 'player-operator' within the configured world, and the 'player-character' within the game world. Leveraging Goffman's concept of *upkeying* and *downkeying*, any object, human or non-human, may potentially move between these worlds at any time.

In the opening example, the television, previously existing on the level of the social world, is upkeyed by Psycho Mantis into the game world. During this famous boss-battle Psycho Mantis will also upkey the DualShock controller, the memory card, and even the controller ports (the user will have to switch from controller port 1 to port 2 so that Psycho Mantis cannot 'read the mind' of the user and dodge all attacks).

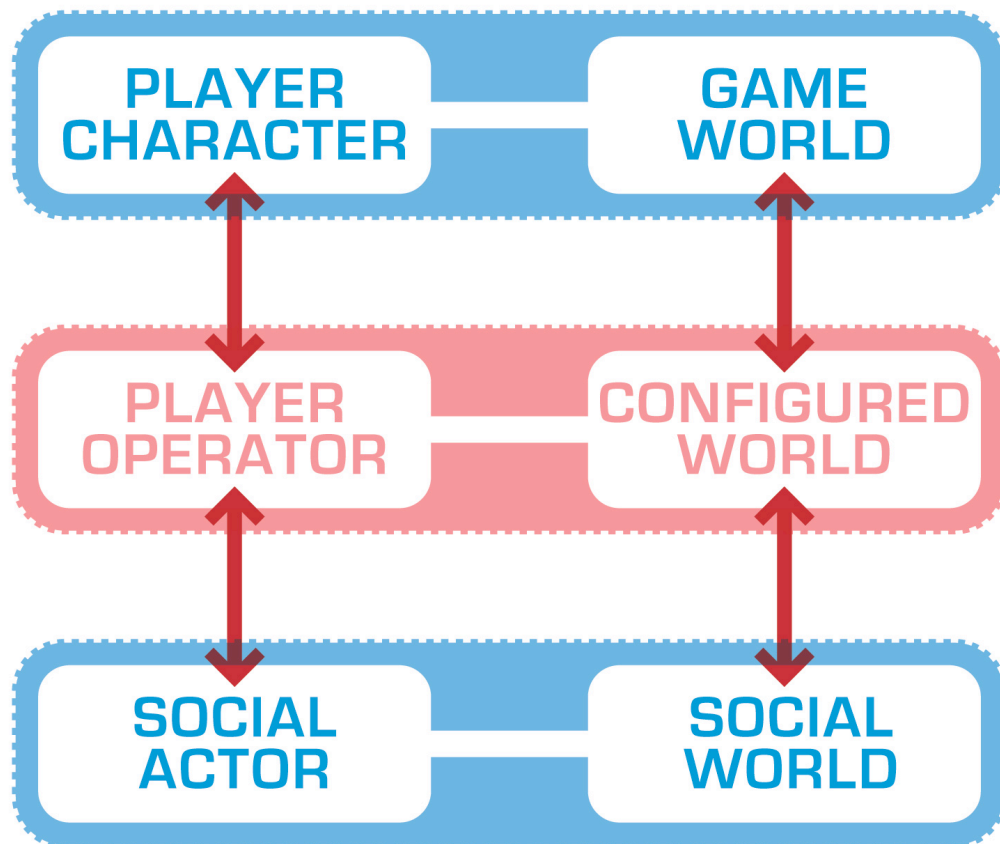
As mentioned, we combine this approach with Erving Goffman's (1986) Frame Analysis, building upon previous applications, such as Mia Consalvo's (2009), Sebastian Deterding's (2009), Gary Alan Fine's (1983), Mike Skolnik's (2014) and Sarah Wanenchak's (2010). Whilst these authors highlight the intrusion of the everyday into the game, and rightly call for an understanding of the game event as more nuanced, complex and dynamic, the non-human is still relegated to the status of passive equipment, 'in-order-to' in the Heideggerian sense.

By adding Latour's ANT to Goffman's frames, we account for the substantive agency the non-human often has within spaces of play, from tennis shoes to chirping birds to one's knowledge of *Indiana Jones*. In doing so we grant the non-human a palpable existence ignored by Goffman, and describe how this reality is defined within the game event.

Examples illustrating downkeying abound: when the referee in sport sanctions a player (e.g. with a red card, a timeout), that person is downkeyed from player-operator (or in certain games, player-character) to social-actor. The same is true of a battery dying in a game controller, a video game crashing, or indeed a literal blackout occurring in one's neighbourhood.

In the other direction, a child may upkey a plastic bottle from social world to configured world when she decides it is now the football in a schoolyard game of soccer. The same is true when a group plays 'the floor is lava', and the concrete pavement of the social world is upkeyed as the lava of the game world.

One of our central points, evident in such examples, is this: the human is not the sole agent in deciding where and how he or she exists in a game, but that this is constantly negotiated and translated in relation to the network of objects that constitute the game black box. Furthermore, that these non-human objects do not exist solely on the level of the social or technical, but also may be visibly upkeyed to exist within the fiction of the game world.



BIOS

Dr Steven Conway is co-convenor of the Games and Interactivity course at Swinburne University of Technology. His research interests focus upon the philosophy and aesthetics of modern digital game design. Recently Steven's work has focused upon the socio-cultural implications of consumer-oriented models of commercial video game

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Andrew Trevillian is a lecturer in Games and Interactivity and PhD candidate at Swinburne University of Technology. His research is focused on the neurological and psychological functions of metaphor in player experience. Andrew was a Game Designer and Level Design Lead at Bluetongue Entertainment where he worked on award winning console titles including *deBlob* (THQ! 2008) and *deBlob2* (THQ! 2011).

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Towards a Unified Theory of Play: A Case Study of Minecraft

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ABSTRACT

Researchers in the fields of game design, childhood development, learning, and movement studies discuss the concept of play. However, the term has been frequently redefined resulting in a divergent understanding of the concept. This paper presents a Unified Theory of Play that aims to provide a holistic examination of the domain that will enhance understanding of play by delivering a tripartite framework for critical analysis of a variety of computer games. Minecraft is presented herein as a case study analysis using the proposed framework.

Keywords

Play, Theory, Unified, Game, Minecraft.

INTRODUCTION

This research examines key theories of play including Lehmann & Witty (1927), Parten (1932), Huizinga (1949), Piaget (1951), Caillois (1961), Czikszenmihalyi (1975), Vygotsky (1978), Nachmanovitch (1990), Bartle (1996), Sutton-Smith (1997) and Brown & Vaughan (2009) to the end of producing a Unified Theory of Play that will enhance critical analysis of play in computer games by providing a holistic examination of the domain. This Unified Theory of Play consists of three logical divisions. The triad was developed from an analysis of the broad discussion of play in the literature. These divisions are cognitive, activity and attitude. Cognitive-based theories of play have the common themes of education, learning and development. For example, Parten's six types of social play that includes *unoccupied*, *onlooker*, *solitary*, *parallel*, *associative* and *cooperative play* (Parten, 1932). Activity-based theories extract characteristics from discussions on the act of play itself. For example, Huizinga's first definition of play describes it as a non-serious, free activity that "quite consciously" involves scenarios not present in "ordinary life" (Huizinga, 1949). Finally, attitude-based theories include the nature of play behaviours and play styles. For example, Bartle presents four player types that describe player behavior. These are *socializers*, *explorers*, *achievers* and *killers* (Bartle 1996).

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The Unified Theory of Play attempts to progress the current understanding of play, moving towards a robust definition that satisfies the ideology of Lehmann and Witty (1927), in which “[the] whole truth regarding play cannot be known until the whole truth regarding life itself is known”. Since the times of Plato and Aristotle in Ancient Greece, scholars have explored the notion of play, a concept that is driven by instinct in animals as a means for learning, experimentation and imagination. From infancy, play offers opportunities to understand social rules, constructs and boundaries, as well as roles and responsibilities in a safe, non-impactful environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Play offers an outlet for imagination and experimentation. It is often a driving force behind inquisition and many of the discoveries that impact and improve our lives today (D’Angour, 2013). Multiple definitions for play have been presented, however to date no unified definition has been offered. The three logical divisions within the Unified Theory of Play represent subsets of 27 analogous characteristics from the literature. The coherence among these subdivisions reveals possible logical relationships that exist leading towards a methodical definition of play.

Examining the value of such a unified theory, *Minecraft*, the voxel-based sandbox game, is offered as a case study. The game allows players to interact and shape a limitless world to their liking using a variety of block types and components. It has emerged as a popular outlet for play and creative expression offering multiple modes of play, including: ‘creative mode’ where players are made invincible and are given an unlimited inventory of blocks; and ‘adventure mode’ where players must survive a variety of enemy types, and must work to gather resources. Although the virtual world may be simple in nature, and void of strict rules or structure, it is the epitome of play in which players create, destroy, and re-create with godlike revelry alluded to by Nachmanovitch (1990). A critical analysis of *Minecraft*, using the Unified Theory of Play framework, provides a deeper understanding of the true nature of play afforded by the game. For example, *Minecraft* is diverse in its opportunities for play, beyond its creator’s original intention. This is evident in the multitude of avenues where the game has found application and success, including education (Brand, de Byl, Knight & Hooper, 2014), town planning (Brand & Kinash, 2013), and machinima (Lastowka, 2012).

Future studies will expand the Unified Theory of Play to include additional literature from the domain. This in turn will be applied to further ludological works, and will form the basis for future research into the nature of play, play characteristics and opportunities for play. Through a holistic analysis of the play potential within a game, further applications and uses can be extrapolated thus predicting further avenues for game success and player engagement.

BIO

James Hooper - James is a Scholar, Researcher and Academic in the field of video games and play. He is currently researching and exploring the concept of Limitless Play in video games; understanding the factors of play beyond the game. James is an experienced graphic designer, 3D artist and animator, game designer and software developer. He holds degrees in Multimedia and IT and is currently an Adjunct Teaching Fellow, Research Assistant and Research Student at Bond University.

Penny de Byl - Dr Penny de Byl is professor of interactive media and design at Bond University. Her research areas of expertise include games-based learning, gamification pedagogy and game development that have been published internationally in numerous journals and conference proceedings. She currently teaches 3D animation, procedural literacy and games design and development. Penny has published three books on game development including the acclaimed *Holistic Game Development with Unity*. Dr de Byl is co-owner of Aardbei Studios an indie mobile game development company focusing on the creation of educational games.

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Literacy in the digital world of the twenty first century: students, curriculum, pedagogy, games and play.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a three year Australian Research Council project in six Australian secondary schools: *Literacy in the Digital Age of the Twenty First Century: Learning from Computer Games*. The project had three foci: games as cultural artefacts, new forms of narrative and multimodal contemporary textual forms; young people's knowledge of, and engagement with, the world of digital games and what might be learnt from that to support the learning of new and traditional literacies; and teachers and curriculum change. Drawing on classroom case studies and other data, it presents an overview of key findings, outcomes, and recommendations.

Keywords

Digital Games, literacy, digital literacy, games-based learning.

INTRODUCTION

The capacity and potential of digital games to engage students, foster a range of multimodal literacy learning and literacy practices, create contexts for collaborative and problem solving approaches through the generation of affinity groups, and provide complex learning environments and deep learning, have been widely argued and recognised (Gee 2007, Schaffer Squire Halverson and Gee 2005, de Castell and Jensen 2003, Chee 2011). Internationally, research reviews have mapped a wide range of curriculum interventions organised around games, particularly in relation to learning in curriculum areas (Perrotta, Featherstone, Aston & Houghton, 2013; Young et al. 2012.) However, to date there has been little Australian research reported in this area. This paper reports on findings from a three year Australian Research Council project in Australian secondary schools on games-based learning, with a particular focus on literacy and learning: *Literacy in the Digital Age of the Twenty First Century: Learning from Computer Games*. The project had three foci: (i) video and other forms of digital games as cultural artefacts, new forms of narrative and multimodal contemporary textual forms; (ii) young people's knowledge of, and engagement with, the world of digital games and what might be learnt from that knowledge and engagement to support the learning of new and traditional literacies in school and (iii) teachers and curriculum change: the challenges and opportunities teachers faced in reconceptualising the curriculum subject English to encompass digital games, to support the learning of new and traditional literacies. The paper discusses key elements emerging from the study – shifting constructions of school subjects and subject boundaries brought about by the incorporation of games into the classroom, the value of paratexts in curriculum design, classroom pedagogy and students' out of school lives, the importance of gaming capital (Consalvo 2007), teachers' changing attitudes and practices consequent upon the introduction of games. Analysis of specific games produced insights into the ways in which digital games as cultural texts are imbued with ideologies which manifest in their design and in the story elements they incorporate, and the ways in which, as complex, evolving forms they invite analytic strategies which take account of the multifarious ways in which they produce meaning and create subject positions for players. The project developed a model for working with games in the classroom, and for the observation and analysis of play – the games-as-text/games-as-action model. Drawing on classroom case studies and other data, the paper presents an overview of key findings and outcomes, and the recommendations to arise.

BIO

Dr Catherine Beavis is a Professor of Education in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University. Her research investigates computer games and

young people's engagement with them, exploring the ways in which games work as new textual worlds for players, embodying and extending 'new' literate and multimodal literacies and stretching and changing expectations of and orientations towards literacy and learning. Current research includes the Australian Research Council project: *Serious Play: using digital games in school to promote literacy and learning* (Beavis, Dezuanni, O'Mara, Prestridge, Rowan, Zagami and Chee 2012-2014)

Dr Clare Bradford is Professor and head of Deakin University's Centre for Memory, Imagination and Invention (CMII) A fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, her innovative research examines the interplay between children's literature and social practices, and particularly representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures in children's books. In 2009 Professor Bradford was awarded the first \$225,000 Trudeau Visiting Fellow Prize from the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation. She has published widely on texts for children and their relationships to cultural contexts and practices.

Dr Joanne O'Mara is a Senior Lecturer at Deakin University. Her research investigates innovative pedagogy and practices and the spatial and temporal dimensions of teachers' work. She has a particular interest in the areas of new literacy studies and the arts and is passionate about her ongoing series of research projects in the areas of drama education pedagogy and practices, digital games, emergent literacies and new textual practices.

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Dr Tom Apperley is a Senior Lecturer in the School of the Arts and Media, UNSW Australia. His work focuses on gaming rhythms and the body of the gamer. Tom has written widely on these topics and is the author of *Gaming rhythms: Play and counterplay, from the situated to the global* and the co-editor of *Digital Culture & Education*.

Dr Amanda Gutierrez is an English and literacy lecturer at the Australian Catholic University. She worked as a research assistant on the computer games project whilst completing her PhD thesis. Her interests lie in the investigation of links between critical literacy, curriculum and teacher practice. In particular she is interested in the ways teachers hybridize their practices based on the environment they are in, including the voices, experiences and types of texts that they value. Contextualising approaches to critical literacies and critical pedagogies, new forms of texts and how these merge with social justice issues underpin her work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study on which this paper reports was funded by the Australian Research Council under the Linkage project scheme. Project LP0775072. Beavis, C., Bradford, C., O'Mara, J., Walsh, C.: *Literacy in the Digital World of the Twenty First Century: Learning from Computer Games*. Australian Research Council 2007-2009. Research Fellow: Thomas Apperley, Research Assistant: Amanda Gutierrez. Industry Partners: The Australian

Centre for the Moving Image, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria and the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English.

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Theorising Film-to-Game Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the intersection of ludic and cinematic forms and theorises how games are adapted from films in the case of movie-licenced games. It proposes a series of film-to-game adaptation models which describe the practice of this type of adaptation based on structuralist approaches to adaptation theory, aesthetic game studies, and scholarship on transmedia storytelling.

Keywords

Adaptation, Film-to-Game Adaptation, Transmedia

INTRODUCTION

Iteration, serialisation, sequelisation, and franchise exploitation has remained a major industrial factor throughout the history of commercial videogames, with film tie-ins being a significant aspect of the videogame industry due to the economic opportunities of cross-media promotion, branding, and synergy. The relative synchronicity of release of a game adaptation in relation to the associated film release provides a useful classification criteria to consider film-to-game adaptations from this industrial perspective.

As the scope of movie-licenced games is broad, the primary focus of this paper are games which adapt plot events, situations, moments, or exhibit narrative timelines consistent with the adapted film. This paper investigates the intersection of ludic and cinematic forms to theorise how videogames adapt existing film properties in instances where a film (or film series) is the basis for a subsequent game. Employing narratological approaches to both film and game form and guided by Genette's theory of transtextuality, the paper critically analyses the transmedia storytelling strategies of a range of games. A set of film-to-game adaptation models are proposed which describe the practice of this type of adaptation based on concepts drawn from structuralist approaches to adaptation theory and transmedia storytelling.

Three research questions are posed:

1. How do the concepts of film and game form, adaptation, and transmedia storytelling intersect with respect to film-to-game remediation?
2. How are textual strategies employed from patterned use of formal features to create various modes of film-to-game adaptation?
3. What models can be imposed in understanding film-to-game adaptation?

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This critical studies approach to film-to-game adaptation establishes four models that demonstrate that games provide the possibilities of reflecting, intersecting, extending, or extrapolating the core film by manipulating various factors via a range of textual strategies. Factors such as tone, theme, genre, aesthetics, narration, narrative architecture, and game mechanics are engineered using strategies drawn from adaptation scholarship such as addition, resequencing, omission, interpolation, and refocalisation.

The set of models formed by these strategies are applied to a series of games: *GoldenEye 007* (Nintendo, 1997), *Blade Runner* (Virgin, 1997), *The Thing* (Vivendi Universal, 2002), *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* (Vivendi, 2004), *The Godfather: The Game* (EA, 2006), and *The Lego Movie Videogame* (Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, 2014), in order to demonstrate the efficacy of the models of film-to-game adaptation proposed. Comparative readings of formal features of these games and their film counterparts are undertaken in which they are described, interpreted and analysed to determine the models of film-to-game adaptation.

BIO

Scott Knight is Assistant Professor of film, television and videogames at Bond University where he teaches courses in film and videogame aesthetics, history, and culture. He has held the role of programmer of the Brisbane International Film Festival from 1993 to the present. Scott has authored papers on fan cultures, censorship issues, and videogame history. He is currently engaged in research on the formal characteristics of film-to-game adaptation.

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The Adventures of ‘Mad Jack’: An Experiment in Documentary Game Design

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a new project that takes advantage of the emerging trend in developing a convergent game-documentary experience using the world and experiences of ‘Mad Jack’ Churchill, an eccentric English WWII Commando. This project will be supported by a case study analysis of related works to understand the possible limitations of the production of such a hybrid practice and the opportunities to be applied.

Keywords

Interactive documentary, hybrid documentary, serious games, docugame, design innovation, game design, digital media, design strategy, collaboration design, design-based research, practice-led research, design-based research.

INTRODUCTION

‘Mad Jack’ Churchill was an eccentric English WWII commando who passed away in 1996 leaving with us many stories of his wild and wonderful exploits such as fighting the European front with bows and arrows, escaping two notorious concentration camps and even a stint at being a Hollywood star. By 2009, the Mad Jack story had spread throughout the Internet via Reddit, StumbleUpon, Flickr, DeviantArt as well as numerous forums, and inspired memes, fanart and fanfics. Such instances have contributed to the growing mythology surrounding both Mad Jack and his family.

The collisions and convergence between mediums, particularly within the ludic and stereotypical ‘fun’ nature of video games (Huzinga, 1949) with the historically politically-charged field of documentary film (Rabinowitz 1993; Renov 1993) can lead to a conflict of academic debate. Similar to the function and tradition in documentary film, these ‘serious games’ are seeking to promote social change. Flynn (2005), notably of the

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School of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Griffith University, questions whether participatory gameplay can move beyond these notions of authenticity or representations of factuality to explore and model a more complex and responsive analogy of lived experience.

These highly interactive documentary based forms can present historical representations that promise to be both innovative and challenging to traditional historiography. As an emergent form, the games-based interactive documentary represents new and expanded creative opportunities for identifying suitable historical content, construction of interactive narratives and a potential re-definition of interactivity in the face of historical knowledges and experience.

There is little in the realm of socially conscious gaming and games that genuinely challenge or confront social taboos or real cultural issues. This explains the lack of successful, or mainstream, examples in this emergent area. To date, this convergence between gameplay and cinematic mediums has been met with controversy, as in the case of *JFK: Reloaded* (2004), *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* (2005) and *9-11 Survivor* (2003). This is partly due to the sensitive subject matter inherent in these works, but also points to a larger issue of a lack of understanding in what is required, creatively, ethically and theoretically from hybrid works, especially in the realm of historical memoir and documentary.

Games cannot lay claim to the type of ontological relationship with their subjects in the manner of photography or film, which occurs almost naturally in documentary (Fullerton, 2008). Many games, particularly in the war genre, claim to be historically accurate representations of combat, such as *The Operational Art of War* (1998), *Brothers in Arms* (2005) and *Empire: Total War* (2009), and could be interpreted as being documentary-like. However, the struggle between entertainment and authenticity occurs when games position themselves as being 'serious games' as they lend themselves to being analyzed as performing documentary functions.

This suggests that the current paradigm of merging historical documentary functions within gameplay is fundamentally flawed. Video game hybrid works that encompass and embody documentary-like functions are increasingly being positioned as historically accurate representations. If these works can be framed and interpreted as performing the functions of a documentary film, then they must take on the responsibilities of the genre as well. It is vital to have historical accuracy in these kinds of video games due to the fact these works become cultural artefacts as outlined by Greenfield (1996), Bogost (2007) and Squire (2002).

In the increasingly hybridized landscape that is a response to convergence and innovation in narrative factual and fictional form, it is important that creative practitioners adapt and possess new language, tools and methods of both navigating and creating new works. Not all content and/or narrative are suited to hybrid mediums as the more 'traditional' documentary concerns of authorship, representation and point-of-view are granted to the control of the audience/player via the nature and construction of the chosen medium.

There are significant gaps in both game studies and interactive documentary theory, particularly in regards to transdisciplinary communication between the two schools of thought in hybrid practice. Areas of interaction strategy in games theory can answer pressing questions of authorship in interactive documentary theory, just as the

documentary preoccupation with point-of-view can compliment and illuminate knowledge gaps in player engagement concerns in game studies. Immersive environments in game studies can also solve issues of orientation and spatial limitations in documentary. Both fields of enquiry are fixed on narrative, the implications of narrative and the role of hypertext/cybertexts in both mediums across areas of immersion and experience.

Many of the game-documentary hybrid works and literature has been created in the past three-five years. It is the assumption that the issues lie in not an immaturity of tools, but an immaturity of practice. Through the development a WWII based project on cult historical figure Mad Jack Churchill, a practice-led research thesis will pursue new methodological approaches and tools to assist in historical documentary-based game-hybrid production.

BIOGRAPHY

Rebecca Wolgast is a PhD candidate at the Queensland University of Technology, her research interests lie in hybrid works, convergence, digital democracy, online fan communities and their assistance in research, social issues, documentary, narrative, videogames as an education tool and history. With a background in multiplatform production, documentary and freelance film production, Rebecca began collaborating with the Churchill family in 2011 on this interactive documentary project and is proud to be given the opportunity to bring this amazing story to the screen for the first time.

Deb Polson has enjoyed a career in the arena of game and simulation design, experimenting and innovating in the vibrant intersections of design, research and industry in Australia, China, the US and UK. Most significantly, Deb has led major CRC projects into commercialization phase, completed a PhD and senior research fellowship, designed and delivered over 30 new design theory and practice courses, and supervised numerous coursework masters and RHD students. Deb continues to lead large-scale, trans-discipline projects in her current position at the Queensland University of technology driven by a passion for sharing complex scenarios in accessible and playful ways.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Dr Sean Maher, Rod and Malcolm Churchill and Alice Steiner. Special thanks to the HUB Studio for supporting the production of the project: <https://www.facebook.com/HubGames>

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Videogame Visions of Post-Climate Change Futures

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I describe my current research into videogame depictions of the future, and those that engage substantially with anthropogenic climate change, building upon an understanding of the role played by visions of the apocalypse as an outlet for expressions of popular fears and anxieties. The paper looks at games that have been released in the recent period, which has seen a rise in corporately funded campaigns undermining popular and scientific consensus on climate change, discussing three games in detail and the climate future they present; *Anno 2070* (2011) which depicts a flooded earth; *Fate of the World* (2011) which presents a player with the supreme difficulty of balancing development goals with a finite carbon budget; and *ARMA 3* (2013), which deploys visual depictions of renewable energy power generation (windmills, tidal power, solar arrays) to evoke a sense of futurity and in the process projects an unexpectedly optimistic vision of our climate future.

Keywords

videogames, climate change, futurity, premediation, apocalypse, renewable aesthetics, *Anno 2070*, *Fate of the World*, *ARMA 3*

INTRODUCTION

It is fast becoming obvious that we are living in a slow apocalypse. This apocalypse takes the form of anthropogenic global warming and the world that it is predicted to precipitate. Estimated to have – at very best – only *somewhat* devastating impacts on the way that individuals and societies live and engage with their environment, at the extreme end of predictions it presents a vision of a future planet earth devoid of the capacity to sustain human life entirely. Videogames have frequently engaged with apocalyptic visions, though usually of a distinctly different character. The prominent place accorded visions of the nuclear post-apocalypse (and its aesthetic equivalents) is well documented in games, from the *Fallout* series (1997-2010), and the related visions of the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series (2007-09). Similarly, visions of apocalypses ranging from alien invasion to zombie apocalypses abound in commercially successful game franchises, from *Gears of War* (2006-13), to *Resistance* (2006-12), *Left 4 Dead* (2008, 2009) and *Dead Rising* (2006-13), along with countless others.

A less commonly acknowledged and as yet unexamined trend is videogames' depiction of future visions of climate change, apocalyptic or otherwise. This paper presents a brief attempt to examine the few recent instances of videogame visions of climate change that

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have emerged during a period that has seen both some of the most clear and dire warnings from climate scientists as well as the most organized and well-funded corporate campaigns to sow doubt and dissent. The paper sets out to examine the aesthetic and thematic resonances in three games, *Anno 2070* (2011), *Fate of the World* (2011) and *ARMA III* (2013) as well as the stark differences that are apparent in their various treatments of this issue, and the different visions of our climate future that they present. I have elsewhere previously argued (Abraham, 2010) that the post-apocalyptic open-world racing game *FUEL* (2009), though developed by a French studio, captures aesthetic elements of the Australian landscape in many of its distinct and varied locations. This is likely due in part to the significant role played by Australian landscape itself in our apocalyptic imaginarity, via such iconic films as *Mad Max* (1979) and *On The Beach* (1959).

Videogames have engaged with the issue of climate change largely through two registers: the first (and most obvious) in a mechanical way, either simulating climate change or certain aspects of it. The ominously titled *Fate of the World* offers a thoroughly systemic engagement with the issue, with the player tasked with mitigating the worst effects of climate change while also needing to balance those efforts against certain world development goals, such as increasing literacy and economic growth in countries across Africa and the third world. A strategy game, *Fate of the World* puts the player into a supreme-commander style role at the head of a worldwide organization reminiscent of the *X-Com* series (1994-2012), and gameplay revolves around utilizing limited resources and maintaining the delicate balance of pleasing member nations while also somehow keeping carbon emissions in check. More often than not, this is an impossible task, and the game has a certain air of despair about it, depicting the herculean task involved in curbing climate change successfully.

The *Anno* (1998-2012) series of trading game received its fifth installment in 2011, depicting a *Waterworld* (1995) like vision of Earth as flooded by polar icecap melt-water. Mechanically, the game involves city building and resource managing elements, and deploys only a fairly superficial difference between the two main rival factions – memorably described as “Eco Dudes and Smoke Belchers” by Jim Rossignol (2011) in a review of the game. The extent of its engagement with climate change boils down to clichéd aesthetic choices and gameplay elements compromised by the need for gameplay ‘balance’ between the two factions. Given the catastrophic nature of climate change events, which flood coastal cities and low-lying islands (Edwards, 2013), and which are predicted to force the movements of vast populations, it seems safe to assume that some social transformations would result, but little to none are depicted in *Anno 2070*.

The military simulation game *ARMA 3* (2013) is not the first game one might consider when searching for an optimistic depiction of a post-climate change future, but across the game’s two main island maps, the smaller Stratis and the sprawling Altis, is found one of the most subtly positive visions for the future of the climate in games or any media. Across the 270-odd square kilometers of Altis are dotted wind farms, solar arrays and giant thermal collectors of a type similar to the Ivanpah solar project in the Mojave desert, which has been described as a sublime piece of landscape art as much as it is a sustainable power plant. The aesthetic appearance of these sustainable energy plants gives the game most of its near-future feel, and in the process creates an optimistic vision of a world that has overcome the many obstacles in the way of a transition to low carbon energy production – quite unlike either the bleak procedural ‘realism’ of *Fate of the World* or the apolitical unreality of *Anno 2070*.

The paper argues for the importance of the examination of this theme in past, contemporary and future games for its contribution to our understanding of videogames place and relationship with popular visions of the future.

BIO

Ben Abraham is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Sydney researching internet communities including games communities, and the political and philosophical issues around the responsibility of non-human actors. His writing has been published online at *Gamasutra*, *Kotaku Australia*, and in print with *KillScreen Magazine* and the *Halo and Philosophy* anthology.

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REMEMBERING & EXHIBITING GAMES PAST: THE POPULAR MEMORY ARCHIVE

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ABSTRACT

The Popular Memory Archive is an online collaborative research portal for collecting and exhibiting the production and reception of Australian and New Zealand micro-computer games of the 1980s. Proposed as a resource for both historians of technology and media and the public, the site provides the means to collect and share the memories of those who lived and played their way through this period. We survey activity on the site and offer some preliminary evaluation of the significance of the online contributions. From this, we consider the discursive, inclusive and questioning practices of the portal as a means of exhibiting historic games.

Keywords

Games History, Digital Heritage, Games Preservation, Videogames, Fan Culture, Online Communities, Museums, Curation

INTRODUCTION

Play It Again is a game history and preservation project focused on locally-written digital games in 1980s Australia and New Zealand. In October 2013 we launched the *Popular Memory Archive* (PMA), an online collaborative research portal. The portal provides a way to disseminate some of the team's research, but importantly also, it provides a mechanism for collecting information, resources and memories from the public about

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1980s computer games. The PMA begins from the premise that in the 1980s games were often the first point of contact with micro-computers, and that in researching the reception of 1980s digital games, the memories of players are key. The ambitions of the PMA are to build resources for historians of technology and media, as well as the interested public, for this significant moment in computing history. The site provides the means to collect and share the memories of those who lived and played their way through this period.

The site features approximately fifty games selected from the 900 + locally-written titles from the 1980s documented by the team's research. These works were chosen to support curatorial themes relating to the history of local games and the challenges of their preservation. These include: the work of pioneering companies such as Beam Software; the rise of the home coder; local scenes and local themes; legal issues for game archivists; and a focus on the collector. This paper surveys the activity of the PMA over the eight months since it went live. We reflect on the expectations of the project and discuss the significance of the online contributions received. This includes some preliminary evaluation of how the PMA attracts invested communities to contribute to the archive and compares this ambition to the work and motivation of online fan communities.

The *Popular Memory Archive* is also conceived as a form of exhibition. Addressing Henry Lowood's question as whether videogames are artefacts or activity we reflect on the exhibition of videogames and games culture by the museum. Briefly comparing the PMA structure and curatorial narratives to those of recent exhibitions - *Games Masters* (ACMI) and *The Arts of Games* (The Smithsonian) - we argue they occupy distinct curatorial territories. We propose that online exhibitions -- such as the PMA and MoMA's online curatorial project *Design and Violence* -- are able to support more discursive, inclusive and questioning practice than conventional museum displays. The PMA utilises the possibilities of online space to develop an approach which addresses and honours games' dual natures as both text *and* performance.

BIO

Helen Stuckey has been actively involved in game culture and game history, fostering a broader international cultural profile for games and participating in many capacities in international gaming. She was the Games Curator at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image where she produced and curated the Games Lab, a space dedicated to addressing the significant contribution to screen culture of video and computer games, and a permanent exhibition space dedicated to exploring game culture. She was the Director of the Games Program in the School of Media and Communications at RMIT University. Currently Helen is completing her PhD on 'The Early History of the Australian Games Industry' at Flinders University.

Melanie Swalwell is a scholar of digital media arts, cultures, and histories, and she has been researching local histories of digital games and software in Australia and New Zealand since 2004. Her work has been published in *Convergence*, *Vectors*, the *Journal of Visual Culture*, and *Media International Australia*. Her co-edited anthology, *The Pleasures of Computer Games: Essays on Cultural History, Theory and Aesthetics*, was published in 2008 (McFarland). She is currently Project Leader of the multi-disciplinary Linkage Project "Play It Again", which is concerned with the history and preservation of digital games from 1980s Australia and New Zealand. Melanie is an Associate Professor in the Screen and Media Department at Flinders University.

Angela Ndalianis is Professor in Screen Studies at Melbourne University. Her research focuses on entertainment, media histories and the convergence of films, video games, television, comic books and theme parks. Her current research explores the intersection of entertainment culture and robotics. Her publications include *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2004), *Science Fiction Experiences* (2010), *The Horror Sensorium; Media and the Senses* (2012) and *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero* (editor, 2008). She has published numerous essays in refereed journals and anthologies, and is editor of the refereed journals *Refractory: a Journal of Entertainment Media and Animation: an Interdisciplinary Journal*.

Denise de Vries Dr Denise de Vries has, since the early 1980s, developed commercial complex database systems on a variety of platforms from mainframes to a range of personal computers. She is currently a lecturer of computer science in the School of Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics at Flinders University. Denise's current research is on techniques to preserve digital history and data semantics including techniques to deal with changes to information in a database such as structural change, semantic change and constraint change. She is a Chief Investigator of the multi-disciplinary Linkage project "Play It Again" and developed the "Australasian Heritage Software Database" which is co-managed with Melanie Swalwell.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is supported under the Australian Research Councils Linkage Projects funding Scheme (project number LP120100218).

Earlier versions of this paper have appeared in: Stuckey H, Swalwell M and Ndalianis A, "The Popular Memory Archive: Collecting and Exhibiting Player Culture from the 1980s" in Arthur Tatnall (ed), *Making the History of Computing Relevant* (IFIP Springer 2013), and Stuckey, Helen, Melanie Swalwell, Angela Ndalianis, Denise de Vries (2013) "Remembrance of Games Past: The Popular Memory Archive", 9th Australasian Interactive Entertainment Conference proceedings, ACM Digital Library, <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2513570>

Software migration applied to Commodore BASIC video games

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ABSTRACT

Migration as a means of preserving legacy software is an under-utilised approach which offers an alternative perspective to the more commonly used paradigm of either system or application level emulation. A prototype system to translate legacy BASIC software for the Commodore VIC-20 computer to a combination of HTML5 and Javascript was developed and serves as a basis for ongoing work.

The preliminary system has been tested by performing an unassisted (automatic) translation of a Melbourne House title, “Grand Prix” (Ramshaw, 1983), to Javascript. This game was found to run at an acceptable frame rate within a web browser on a relatively recent Core2 Duo system. Future work will involve extending the system to work with a greater range of BASIC programs and optimising the generated Javascript for readability and performance. Eventually titles which include machine language subroutines and also games written purely in 6502 machine language will be supported using a similar framework.

Keywords

Software preservation, migration, translation, BASIC, digital heritage, videogame

INTRODUCTION

This work seeks to document issues involved in the development of a software tool for the migration of legacy video games to a contemporary language, suitable for running within a web browser. This work comprises a part of the “Play It Again” project, a multidisciplinary effort “conducting research into the largely unknown histories of 1980s game development in Australia and New Zealand, ensuring that local titles are documented, preserved and make it into national collections” (Swalwell & de Vries, 2013).

Emulation has been used extensively to provide access to legacy titles, with notable success, however it is not a panacea. Each new iteration of computer hardware requires

Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play.

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the emulators to be rewritten (or emulated themselves), unless some solution along the lines of Rothenberg's (1999) Emulation Virtual Machine is employed.

The use of software migration as an alternative technique to provide access to legacy titles is less common, however may offer some benefit. For example, emulators typically require proprietary software, such as a copy of the operating system for the platform in question. This practice places the use of emulation in a legal grey area, where legal action is possible, although unlikely to be carried out in practice. Migration may circumvent this issue by translating the legacy operating system library calls to a modern equivalent, providing similar functionality.

The BASIC programming language was often the language of choice for homebrew software coded by home computer enthusiasts and hobbyists. Swalwell and de Vries (2013) echo Barnes' (1982) assertion that "whilst BASIC was sometimes maligned as a crude and even 'disgusting' language for amateurs, it may be that as a language, it survives the passage of time better than 'professional' languages". In particular, so-called "type-in" programs published in hobbyist magazines were quite often written in BASIC.

The Commodore VIC-20 system was chosen as the legacy platform of interest due to its relative simplicity and similarity to the more popular Commodore 64 platform. The version of the BASIC programming language used in each machine is identical. The VIC-20 contains a more primitive graphics chip, which lacks tile-based (or sprite) graphics, making it less complex to implement.

A prototype system for migration was constructed in Javascript, containing enough functionality to allow for the execution of BASIC programs. An HTML5 Canvas element provides a mechanism for character graphics to be displayed which were obtained by examining the data from a read-only memory (ROM) dump of the original machine.

A Javascript function library provides equivalents to various BASIC statements. Initially, the functions were tested by manually translating the legacy code from its original form to Javascript. Overall, the Javascript functions aim to replicate the functionality of the various BASIC statements but some differences are unavoidable. For example, keyboard input is event-driven in the browser environment rather than polled continuously, as in the original hardware (or an emulator).

A parser and lexer for Commodore BASIC V2 was constructed using the Python scripting language by extending an existing Dartmouth BASIC interpreter which was included as an example with the PLY lexer and parser package (Beazley, 2001). This involved adding in support for additional keywords, relational operators and also string and integer data types.

Another Python script processes the parsed program and outputs the equivalent Javascript function calls. Due to the absence of branching instructions in Javascript, a switch construct was used to achieve flow control, with a case statement for each line of the original source. This approach is analogous to that of the Sega Genesis Java translator (Delwadia, 2007).

Strictly, only the targets of branches are required to be separate cases in the switch statement, however, including more case statements than necessary allows for finer granularity in the timing of the translated program. Since BASIC programs are

interpreted on the original hardware (or an emulator), calculating the precise number of CPU cycles (and hence, time) a given BASIC statement takes to execute is not trivial.

At the time of writing this abstract, the naive approach employed is to assume every line of the program takes the same amount of time to execute, irrespective of its content. The effect this has upon gameplay is negligible, being mitigated by the fact that BASIC programs tend to be less responsive to user input than titles written purely in machine code, in any case. This makes user evaluation slightly problematic since even titles running on original hardware may be judged poorly as a result.

Future work will involve extending the system to work with BASIC programs which include machine-language subroutines and also games written purely in machine language. The graphics routines may be rewritten to use libraries with better performance, such as WebGL. Sound capabilities have yet to be implemented. In addition, it is hoped that the unstructured BASIC code can be manipulated into a more structured form, taking advantage of the more modern control-flow mechanisms in the Javascript language, whilst retaining the semantics of the original code.

BIO

Craig Harrington holds a Bachelor of Science (with Honours) from Flinders University. He is currently studying full-time as a PhD candidate in the School of Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics at Flinders University. His current research is focused upon the development of software tools to migrate legacy applications to contemporary languages, as a part of the “Play It Again” project.

Dr Denise de Vries has, since the early 1980s, developed commercial complex database systems for a variety of industry domains including local government, airline, public libraries, para-medical, diet and nutrition, commercial cleaning, automotive parts manufacturing, building and construction, inventory control, conference organisation and commercial photography. Based on this industry experience she researches techniques to preserve digital history and data semantics including techniques to deal with changes to information in a database such as structural change, semantic change and constraint change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the following organisations for their support: The Flinders University of South Australia, The University of Melbourne, Victoria University of Wellington, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, The New Zealand Film Archive and Berlin Computerspiele Museum.

“Play It Again: Creating a Playable History of Australasian Digital Games, for Industry, Community and Research Purposes” is supported under the Australian Research Councils (ARC) Linkage Projects funding scheme (project number LP120100218).

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Game Design Inspiration in Global Game Jam

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a pilot study on the connectivity of ideas at the Global Game Jam. After the 48-hour game development competition, a survey was administered by the Game Jam committee. Drawing from the free-response data, the authors investigated the idea formation of teams in a time-limited competition. The authors will present a visualisation demonstrating the connectivity of ideas and their findings for an inspiration network. Future work includes a broader study of idea generations through background data collection.

Keywords

game design, game development, game jam, inspiration network, design process

INTRODUCTION

Global Game Jam is an annual global game design competition aiming at making a game in just two days. Participating jammers are given a central theme to incorporate into their games. This Global Game Jam (2014) attracted 23,198 game developers in 488 jam sites located in 72 countries to make a game in 48 hours. Due to time constraints imposed on the participants by the rules, the resulting games have short gameplays and are generally simple in terms of game design. This relative simplicity presented a suitable window to investigate the idea generation process at a time-limited competition.

This working paper describes a pilot study on diverse game design inspiration and how ideas are connected through a self-reporting survey. The authors will present the data set collected from Global Game Jam with extracted statistical significance and an artful visualisation (Lombardi 2000) to demonstrate connectivity of ideas (Popova 2011).

Following the jam event, participants were asked to fill out a structured survey prepared by the Global Game Jam Research Committee about their experience, team dynamics,

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technological choices, and idea formation. In particular, the survey asked the participants if the theme was inspiring, how many ideas the team went through before making the cut, and how the idea came to being. To identify participants who belong to the same team, the survey asked for their group name for synthesising responses from the same team. Using free-response questions in a structured survey allows the participants to share a healthy amount of information focused on the question or topic. At the time of writing, Global Game Jam is the world's largest game development event with a growth rate of approximately 150% per year (Fowler et al. 2013), allowing this investigation of game design inspiration at a large scale.

The game jam hosted a central theme and required the participating teams to incorporate it into their games, but no two games were made the same. The amount of diversity in game design was visually apparent. It is this diversity that created a challenge in the study: too much generalisation would diminish the value of individual sources of inspiration, and presenting too little organised information might generate poor results due to information overload.

To overcome this problem, the authors use a mixed method to analyse the survey data for sources of inspiration. The textual data is first encoded by notions of inspiration: new vision, motivation and action (Thrash & Elliot 2003) as well as categories like game mechanics and genres (Zook & Riedl 2013). The majority of inspirations come from personal experience of the game developer and their culture; it is this personal experience that could become an inspiration to design for player experience in games (Hagen 2012).

Encoded textual data are grouped by categories as well as similar or identical products or features, which are the foundations to finding the connections between synonymous ideas. This connection can be drawn in a graphical layout to visually examine influences and idea formations, as well as central themes and popular trends. Representing the data through a visualisation makes it more user-friendly as people prefer and are more capable of reading graphics than tables (Samsel 2013). Choosing an artistic style for the visualisation can further help to evoke more reflective and interpretative engagement with the data compared to an analytic visualisation style (Vande Moere et al. 2012). Insights derived from the free-reporting survey can contribute to future research in understanding idea generation in a rapid game design process.

In closing, the Global Game Jam survey has presented an excellent opportunity to study inspiration in game design at a large scale. Future work in this area includes statistical analysis of ideation cycles and a deeper investigation into the idea generation process through background data collection.

BIO

Graduated from Griffith University with a University Medal for Bachelors of Engineering (Software Engineering with Advanced Studies) with Class I Honours, Xavier currently pursues his Doctor of Philosophy at Design Lab, University of Sydney under the supervision of Martin Tomitsch and at CSIRO Computational Informatics with Tomasz Bendarz. He is an assistant lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering and IT at the University of Technology, Sydney. In his free time, he works on a Kickstarter project to publish a fantasy campaign setting named Aereon, and he plays a lot of video games.

Dr Martin Tomitsch is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Sydney. He is the Director of the Design Computing program, research member in the Design Lab, founding member of the Media Architecture Institute, state co-chair of the Australian Computer-Human Interaction Special Interest Group (CHISIG), and visiting lecturer at the Vienna University of Technology's Research Group for Industrial Software. His research on interaction design and media architecture has been published in three books and over fifty conference and journal articles.

Dr Tomasz Bednarz currently works as a Computational Research Scientist at CSIRO's Computational Informatics division. He is actively pursuing activities in the field of Computational Imaging and Visualisation - his broad range of expertise spanning from image analysis, through numerical simulations and experiments with fluids, visualisation, computer graphics, games development to demoscene is evidenced by the quality and number of publications. Currently he leads project on Big Data Analytics and Visual Analytics.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the Global Game Jam organisers, participants, jam sites, and the research committee who has been very supportive in working with us.

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Ten Years of Pushing Buttons: The Role of Freeplay in Australian Games Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the historical and contemporary significance of the Freeplay Independent Games Festival. This event focusing on critical issues in game production and culture, and has taken place in Melbourne, Australia over the last decade. Presenting an overview of both the diversity of discourse and recurring concerns over the last ten years of Freeplay Festival events, the paper locates Freeplay as a key organisation in Australian games education, and a central player in the critical conversation around games, and the industry and culture in which they are embedded.

Keywords

Freeplay, Independent, Games, Festival, Australia

INTRODUCTION

Freeplay is Australia's longest-running and largest independent games festival. Since 2004, the event has assembled, almost annually, a unique mix of players, makers, critics, artists, academics, students, and the general public to explore and discuss games and the industries and cultures that surround and influence them. Over the last decade, and like games themselves, Freeplay has developed and grown. Nolonger simply attracting a select few that might associate themselves as independent game makers or players, the event now draws a diverse audience of people with both passing interest and deep appreciation of a wide variety of games and experiences of play. Freeplay seeks to highlight the cultural significance of games exploring all that they are and all that they can be, and in doing so, has no reservations in pointing out the growing pains of the medium.

While Freeplay exists in order to promote and investigate independent game culture through both professional development and engagement with the public, far from simply being a celebration of games, the event has, from the outset, sought to centralise discussions and antagonisms from within the industry and culture from which they appear, issues that are often overlooked in other game discussion spaces. From its first year in 2004, Freeplay has brought attention to the financial, political and cultural aspects of games and has encouraged conversations on the ethics of labour practices, concerns of game distribution, and the fundamental importance of recognising diversity in games, game players and makers. These important and progressive streams of conversation upon

Proceedings of DiGRAA 2014: What is Game Studies in Australia?

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which the event chooses to focus, are not simply exercised and then left for another year, but become part of a wider international discourse of games that the Freeplay organisation itself gives voice to at higher levels. The most notable examples of this are through Freeplays formal response to both Screen Australia's Interactive Games Fund of 2012, and to the Australian Government's 2013 national cultural policy, Creative Culture. In this way Freeplay is central to the national literacy of games and culture. These response documents bring the concerns of the community to government, but also underscore to the nations leaders that games are no longer a narrow band of practitioners or audiences, but are pervasive cultural artefacts embedded within a global community of discussion, one in which Australia has many confident and independent voices. Freeplay advocates that the government acknowledge and support these voices and practitioners at a variety of levels. It is through Freeplays' continued engagement with the politically difficult and playfully inspiring aspects of games that it aims to champion and advance the cultural significance of this growing medium. Importantly, Freeplay is no one individual, or even a stable community, but a spirit of generosity to create an experience games and advance the culture that surrounds them. This paper reflects on Freeplays history of activity and its role in Australian games education and operates as an invitation for continued activity in the critical discussion and celebration of the medium of games.

BIO

Hugh Davies is a Senior Lecturer at La Trobe University where he is also deputy director for the University's Centre for Creative Arts. Previously, Hugh has held lecturing positions at Monash University, The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and the University of South Australia. Hugh is a PhD candidate at Monash University where he is undertaking research into serious alternate reality games. He has operated as chairman of the board of the Freeplay Independent Games Festival for the last three years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper draws heavily on the documentation of former Freeplay Creative Director Paul Callaghan and is influenced by multiple conversations within the Freeplay board and across the community of Freeplay Festival supporters and attendees.

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