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Acta Ludologica is a scientific journal in the field of games and digital games. The journal contains professional scientific reflections on digital games; it also offers academic discourses on games, especially media and digital competencies, creation, design, marketing, research, development, psychology, sociology, history and the future of digital games and game studies.

Acta Ludologica is a double-blind peer reviewed journal published twice a year. It focuses on theoretical studies, theoretical and empirical studies, research results and their implementation into practice, as well as professional publication and scientific reviews of digital games.

Acta Ludologica

Editorial

Stagnation of Originality, but Opportunity for Meeting Generations

Nothing goes on forever. At least not at full speed, and for everyone at the same time. In the past, it was not so difficult to come to the market with a new, completely original game because there were not so many games to compare it with yet. Every pioneering game had a chance to become its own genre-defining archetype. However, due to the "curse" of pop-cultural artworks, neither do games go away. They culminate. Each new game basically competes with everything previously created and designed to be played. Being original within such an oversaturated market might be a headache, at least as far as the mainstream is concerned. As in the entire contemporary pop-culture mainstream production, the share of original artefacts is decreasing; the digital-gaming sector is also increasingly approaching recycling to maintain profits. Many legendary hits and proven concepts – *Final Fantasy VII*, *Quake*, *Crash Bandicoot*, *GTA*, *Mass Effect* – have recently returned as remakes or remastered versions.

They have been remastered primarily not for the new generation of gaming devices, but for gamers both new as well as old. Younger generations usually no longer take into account anything incompatible with HD displays or do not consider them as interesting. Gaming companies are also aware of this fact, and they are gradually ending support for some features of their older devices. On the other hand, sometimes, voices from gaming generations who love those devices are nevertheless heard, and even giants of the digital-gaming industry can admit they probably made a wrong decision (as when Sony reconsidered ending support for the PlayStation 3 and Vita). Remastered and remade games currently represent a golden mean, a win-win strategy for all stakeholders. Today's generation of gamers gets proven quality with up-to-date standards and older generations are appealed to by nostalgia. Somewhere in between, an amazing opportunity for these generations to meet each other is created.

Unlike current trends, this issue presents an original set of content concerning different areas of game studies. The game studies section is introduced by Dinko Jukić and his analysis of the phenomenon of myth in digital games, culture, and brand identity by analysing the significance of the role of parenting and guardianship in the games *The Walking Dead* and *Heavy Rain*, all within the discourse of marketing semiotics. Matteo Genovesi then examines the themes of failure and death in digital games as integrated parts by case studies of the games *Dead Cells* and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*. The discourse of discrimination against women and stereotypical negative female gender roles in digital games is explored by Borivoje Baltezarević et al., utilizing the content analysis of female representation in digital games. Subsequently, the theoretical study by Dana Hodinková, Oľga Púchovská, and Lucia Račkovičová deals with the cosplay phenomenon from the perspective of art marketing, aiming to create a potential framework for further research in this area. The section is concluded by Steven Dashiell with a discussion on defining the meta-discourse of tabletop role-playing games, focusing on a conversation not linked to or completely unrelated to the game as a source of determinants of gaming capital, or elements of value.

In the next sections, the topic of how game jams can benefit the educational process, Tarja Porkka-Kontturi, a director of communications at Global Game Jam, and manager and organizer of other similar events, is discussed in an interview. Scientific reviews on the publications *Immersion, Narrative and Gender Crisis in Survival Horror Video Games*, and *Independent Videogames: Cultures, Networks, Techniques and Politics* are untraditionally followed by a review of the film *Free Guy* that thematically undoubtedly relates to game discourse. The issue concludes with news from the digital-gaming sector and add-on contributions that trace parallels between the historical world of the Holocaust and the mythical universe of *Castlevania*.

Paradoxically, even if the gaming industry was affected by a certain degree of originality stagnation, whether due to a change in the market's nature or as the result of the long-running COVID-19 pandemic, it stimulates creativity within the study and research of this area. I believe this issue proves that.

Mgr. Zdenko Mago, PhD.
Acta Ludologica's Editor-in-Chief

Contents

Marketing Semiotics in Digital Games: Myth's Analysis in The Walking Dead and Heavy Rain

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ABSTRACT:

The paper analyses the significance of the role of parenting and guardianship in the digital games The Walking Dead and Heavy Rain. The aim is to present, analyse and explain the phenomenon of myth, mythical structures in digital games, culture, and brand identity. R. Barthes' semiotic theory was used, which analyses constructs through denotation, connotation, and myth. The units of research analysis are scenes from the games that will be presented, described, interpreted, and understood by deconstruction analysis. In the first part, the phenomenon of myth is theoretically elaborated, and then the mythic structure in digital games is analysed. The focus is on myth as a phenomenon, which from a pedagogical point of view, shows the role of parenting and guardianship. Also, the analysis of the connotative sign shows the influence of the media on digital culture, but also on the creation of elements of brand identity of digital games. We will confirm these theses by analysing the content of the mythical structure. The unit of analysis is the mise-en-scène and refers to everything that interacts with the digital game and the player. The central concept is a semiotic analysis of the psychological concept of fidelity that is connected to the model of brand identity through the model of attachment. Finally, through a semiotic analysis of the attachment construct, the attachment construct from the aspect of brand identity is also presented. The brand was observed according to J. N. Kapferer's theory and analysed at the message and sign level. The contribution of this study is manifested in an interdisciplinary approach to work through marketing, psychology, pedagogy, media theory and semiotics.

KEY WORDS:

brand, digital game, Heavy Rain, marketing, myth, semiotic, sign, The Walking Dead.

Introduction

The existence of digital games, more precisely, the genre of adventure, *interactive drama*, in addition to being a very powerful medium for transmitting ideas, messages and even promotional activities, represents a new discourse of postmodern man. Digital games are a medium that displays reality with all its difficulties. *Heavy Rain*[1] shows all the dark, depressing, and anxious reality of a family tragedy accompanied by a metaphorical rain that symbolizes the lack of beautiful, sunny days to the painful symbolism of injustice that appears all the time in a palette of grey tones, and colourful images become fragments of fragile memories. It is playing with the role of colour symbolism that is initially shown in its splendour, marking a happy, carefree childhood and ease of living, the idyllic atmosphere of parents and children, after the prologue becomes filled with grey tones with darker and more depressing images.

Digital games today are a very powerful medium, both from a marketing[2] and cultural[3] point of view. Undoubtedly, video games carry some ethical, pedagogical, and social responsibility, opening various social topics. Digital games are not only fun, as has long

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1   QUANTIC DREAMS: *Heavy Rain.* [digital game]. San Mateo : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2010.
2   ZACKARIASSON, P., DYMEK, M.: *Video Game Marketing.* London : Routledge, 2017, p. 53-64.; See also: ZACKARIASSON, P., WILSON, T. L.: Marketing of Video Games. In ZACKARIASSON, P., WILSON, T. L. (eds.): *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future.* London : Routledge, 2012, p. 57-75.
3   For more information, see: DYMEK, M.: Video Games: A Subcultural Industry. In ZACKARIASSON, P., WILSON, T. L. (eds.): *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future.* London : Routledge, 2012, p. 34-56.

been confirmed by numerous studies, but also by numerous ludological fields that have opened interdisciplinary topics, such as marketing in the digital industry,[4] semiotics of digital games, narratological theories of digital games,[5] philosophical discussions,[6] medical research on the impact of digital games[7] and cultural essays. The very development of digital games is also manifested in breaking the stereotype that average gamers are children or young people who play immersed in the virtual world and are only passive and indifferent observers. The truth, however, is contrary to former pessimistic predictions. Today, the digital game industry has overtaken both the music and film industries together. Virtual reality is no longer reserved only for the entertainment of young people, but is increasingly being practiced by psychologists, sociologists, computer scientists, culturologists, philosophers, anthropologists, pedagogues and even doctors.

The aim of this paper is to explore, present, identify and analyse the role of semiotic signs in adventure games in the context of attachment construct. The role of parenting[8] here is viewed from the aspect of two different digital games in which models of attachment and self-image are presented. The construct of self-image will be viewed separately from the marketing aspect of the digital game because through identification with the main characters in the game, consumers connect on a narratological and semiotic level. This study presents an interdisciplinary theoretical framework in which models of digital game sign analysis and marketing are proposed. The study uses a qualitative research methodology and starts from a phenomenological approach. Interdisciplinarity is manifested through a comparison of different cultural theories, semiotic representation, sociological models, media pedagogy, and brand identity theory. The units of research are the constructs of attachment, i.e., parenthood and guardianship, from which, consequently, denotations, connotations and myths in digital games are interpreted by semiotic analysis. Ultimately, conclusions are drawn that portray digital games as cultural, sociological, and marketing phenomena.

Research Methodology

The paper uses a qualitative analytical-synthetic method[9] that aims to break down social phenomena and processes into their segments for more detailed analysis. The hermeneutic spiral method is used as a model of understanding.[10] Such a model of understanding implies that individual concepts expand the overall meaning of a phenomenon, entity, or text.[11] Therefore, two research approaches are used in parallel in this study: the critical-realistic method[12] and the phenomenological method.[13] With the qualitative method of the

4   MAGO, Z.: The Concept of Timelessness Applied to Advergames. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 30.
5   PEOVIĆ VUKOVIĆ, K.: *Medij i kultura: ideologija medija nakon decentralizacije*. Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2012, p. 187.
6   KŁOSIŃSKI, M.: Games and Utopia. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 12.
7   CLARK, N., SCOTT, P. S.: *Game Addiction: The Experience and the Effect*. London : McFarland Company, 2009, p. 91-115.; GRANIC, I., LOBEL, A., ENGELS, R.: The Benefits of Playing Video Games. In *American Psychologist*, 2014, Vol. 69, No. 1, p. 71-73.
8   For more information, see: BULJAN FLANDER, G., ĆORIĆ ŠPOLJAR, R.: Roditeljstvo nekad i danas. In BULJAN FLANDER, G. (ed.): *Znanost i umjetnost odgoja*. Sveta Nedjelja : Geromar, 2018, p. 21-28.
9   HALMI, A.: *Strategije kvalitativnih istraživanja u primijenjenim društvenim znanostima*. Jastrebarsko : Naklada Slap, 2005, p. 18.
10   SCHMIDT, L. K.: *Understanding Hermeneutics*. Stocksfield : Acumen Publishing Limited, 2006, p. 4.
11   HALMI, A.: *Strategije kvalitativnih istraživanja u primijenjenim društvenim znanostima*. Jastrebarsko : Naklada Slap, 2005, p. 27.
12   WILLIG, C.: *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*. Maidenhead : Open University Press, 2013, p. 48.
13   Ibidem, p. 50.

critical-realistic approach we discover the meaning, and with the phenomenological method we show the texture of the research itself, i.e., we expand the understanding. Such an interpretation of phenomenological analysis[14] places the initial description in relation to the wider cultural, theoretical, and social context, that is, the context of digital games.

The methods used in creating this paper are interpretive, deconstructive, and descriptive. The aim of the method is to explain, analyse and present metadata that appear in the discourse of the digital game and compare it with the construction of reality that an individual creates in the form of symbols and signs, making it a denotation, connotation, and myth. The research method used is qualitative analysis and aims to explain the role of emotions in the adventure digital games *The Walking Dead*[15] and *Heavy Rain*. Due to in-depth data collection, this method therefore does not give priority to statistical indicators of population size, or sample size. The emphasis here is on the depth of the data and its analysis, not the amount. R. Barthes' theory[16] and J. N. Kapferer's theory[17] were used. R. Barthes' theory served as a model of character functioning that was used to determine meaning, and J. N. Kapferer served brand identity as a representation of the brand identity of a digital game.

Digital Culture and Games

Digital culture is a social phenomenon the beginnings of which appear as the response of modern man to information. This is also a paradox because with the development of informatics, there has been a great development of structures that contribute to the availability of information. Such structures create new information and in this multitude of information resources users must become visible, which is most important of all.[18] Also, from the information-communication aspect, it is very difficult to distinguish relevant information in the multitude of unnecessary information. The amount of information is increasing every day, every second around the world 795 photos are posted on Instagram, 1 269 posts on Tumblr, 2 697 calls on Skype, 61 707 searches on Google, 70 220 views of videos on YouTube and 2 611 203 sent emails.[19]

Digital culture has also made a difference in the understanding of the concept of audience. With the concept of passive to active audience, there is a phenomenon of active to interactive audience.[20] However, in the information-communication context, the concept of interactive audience rests on the assumption of active use in public communications. Such interactivity is audience-related, and it signifies audience fragmentation. From a marketing perspective, such audience fragmentation signifies consumer segmentation because user groups are categorized into categories, where they can be classified according to expectations, habits, reactions, or preferences. From the aspect of digital games, we understand interactivity as the ability of a medium for a user to influence form or content.[21]

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14   LARKIN, M., WATTS, S., CLIFTON, E.: Giving Voice and Making Sense in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 105.
15   TELLTALE GAMES: *The Walking Dead (PlayStation 4 version)*. [digital game]. San Rafael : Telltale Games, 2014.
16   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 141-181.; BARTHES, R.: *Književnost, mitologija, semiologija.* Beograd : Nolit, 1971, p. 263-314.
17   KAPFERER, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management.* London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 171-197.
18   BARABÁSI, A. L.: *U mreži: zašto je sve povezano i kako misliti u znanosti, poslovanju i svakodnevnom životu.* Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2006, p. 65.
19   ARMSTRONG, S., BRUNSKILL, P.: *Informacijska pismenost.* Zagreb : Kosinj, 2020, p. 15.
20   McQUAIL, D.: *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory.* London : Sage, 2005, p. 406.
21   BAKKER, P., SÁDABA, C.: The Impact of the Internet on Users. In KÜNG, L., PICKARD, R. G., TOWSE, R. (eds.): *The Internet and the Mass Media.* London : Sage, 2008, p. 88.

The concept of digital culture, virtual culture and cyber culture will be considered here as a technologically advanced culture where the term *digital* means digital technology in the life and work of modern man. Of course, in such a modern society, digital culture, the categories of space and time are no longer the same, so the very notion of information has changed significantly. New possibilities of digital culture have expanded consumer experiences in all segments. However, is such a culture, in a sociological context,[22] a culture in the true sense of the word? Or is it an open culture[23] that transcends the boundaries of the classical understanding of the division of culture into elite, high and low? Observed from the aspect of active and passive subject,[24] we can understand digital culture as a popular culture. In this context, culture represents the link between a specific civilization and universal humanity.[25] We distinguish the term popular culture in three ways: popular is what many people like,[26] popular is the opposite of high culture, and popular is what users have produced for themselves.[27] In other words, digital games are therefore elements of popular culture.

In the context of digital games, the notion of popular culture requires redefining. Popular culture implies what users have produced for themselves and for others, but then from another aspect, we find a culture that is imposed for commercial interests. In this context, commercial interests create a mass culture.[28] Thus, we can establish a distinction between the notions of mass culture that is adapted to the broad masses, as a form of consumer practice, and popular culture that emerges as a reaction to what is offered and contains elements of selection.[29] It also then says that such an attitude is related to the notion of postmodern culture that blurs the boundaries between the sociological division[30] of higher and lower culture which is very similar to the model of culture spoken of by Eagleton.[31] Of course, the very term culture is not simple or unambiguous.[32] One of the difficulties of the notion of culture stems from its multidisciplinarity because different sciences define, interpret, and apply it differently in different discourses. Thus, it means that culture is dependent on social heritage, on user behaviour, symbolic practice of people, the question of identity or a reflection of human creation.

However, the culture of digital games still represents a subcultural industry[33] that produces subcultural content. This is, from the aspect of digital games, true, but from the aspect of cultural theory,[34] it is not precise because merging into one common culture alludes to the existence of mass culture. Such a common culture becomes a utopia because it implies that all members of society would equally contribute to the development of universal culture. Applying this to digital culture, especially to the concept of digital games as a subculture, sociological questions about gender equality in digital games immediately arise. As proof of the claim, let's compare *Assassin's Creed Unity*[35] which clearly

22   GIDDENS, A.: *Sociology*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2001, p. 22.
23   EAGLETON, T.: *Culture*. London : Yale University Press, 2016, p. 15.
24   PEOVIĆ VUKOVIĆ, K.: *Medij i kultura: ideologija medija nakon decentralizacije*. Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2012, p. 187.
25   EAGLETON, T.: *The Idea of Culture*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p. 112-119.
26   LABAŠ, D., MIHOVILOVIĆ, M.: Masovni medij i semiotika popularne kulture. In *Kroatologija,* 2011, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 113.
27   DUDA, D.: *Kulturalni studij: ishodišta i problemi.* Zagreb : AGM, 2002, p. 105.
28   Ibidem, p. 106.
29   Ibidem.
30   GIDDENS, A.: *Sociology*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2001, p. 22.
31   EAGLETON, T.: *The Idea of Culture*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p. 87-121.
32   WILLIAMS, R.: *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 87.
33   DYMEK, M.: Video Games: A Subcultural Industry. In ZACKARIASSON, P., WILSON, T. L. (eds.): *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future*. London : Routledge, 2012, p. 36.
34   EAGLETON, T.: *The Idea of Culture*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p. 87-94.
35   UBISOFT MONTREAL: *Assassin's Creed Unity (PlayStation 4 version)*. [digital game]. Montreal : Ubisoft Montreal, 2014.

shows us how the publishers made the mistake of not having female playable characters in multiplayer. They subsequently corrected this by changing the concept a year later and putting the twins Evie and Jacob at the centre of *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*[36] for the main characters. Or, as another example, hypersexualized female characters in digital games like *Dead or Alive 6*[37], Therefore, the digital gaming industry is still not a mass culture. The overreliance on this subculture hampers true development of the digital game medium.[38]

If we want to look at what media mediation[39] of digital culture should be, we are essentially talking about the relationship between media and culture. This leads us to the conclusion that different statuses of culture are not the same, but neither are their interests. Culture and medium are very complex constructs and relate at different levels and meet in different segments. We understand the medium as a message.[40] However, we can also perceive the medium as something that transforms experience into cognition, that is, the media give signs that provide meaning to events from everyday life.[41] Thus, the media become the main axis of communication, the media transmit the message. This message, of course, can be viewed from the informational, marketing, linguistic, but also from the semiotic aspect. From a pedagogical point of view, it is not the same who sends the message[42] and likewise it is not the same on which medium the message is sent. In other words, we can analyse the mediator of information from the aspect of the bearer of various social functions.[43] Therefore, we will look at digital culture from the aspect of the medium and understand the medium itself as a transmitter of the message.

The average video game users are not just children or young people, but adults who make up a large part of the market segment. It is enough to compare the film references of *Mortal Kombat 11*[44] and the cameo characters that appear to see very clearly that these are 'young people' who are in their mature years today. It is evident that characters like *Rambo*[45], *T-800*[46] or *RoboCop*[47] do not belong to the new generation of gamers, but surprisingly they are very well received and more alive now than at the time they appeared. This also says that these former children who grew up with the culture of the 80s and spent time with *Pac-Man*[48], *Donkey Kong*[49], *Q*bert*[50], today have their own children. Therefore, not only have games evolved, but players have matured along with graphics, resolution, and genres. The maturing relationship of the two generations of players is very clearly seen in the film *Pixels*[51] which, despite its comedy genre, is a kind of homage to classic digital games and society. It is therefore quite understandable that the themes in digital games also became diverse, and the discourse, which ultimately culminated in difficult, mature, and anxious themes, such as Heavy Rain and The Walking Dead, became more demanding.

36   UBISOFT QUEBEC: *Assassin's Creed Syndicate (PlayStation 4 version)*. [digital game]. Quebec City : Ubisoft, 2015.
37   TEAM NINJA: *Dead or Alive 6 (PlayStation 4 version)*. [digital game]. Yokohama : Koei Tecmo, 2019.
38   DYMEK, M.: Video Games: A Subcultural Industry. In ZACKARIASSON, P., WILSON, T. L. (eds.): *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future*. London : Routledge, 2012, p. 49.
39   INGLIS, F.: *Teorija medija*. Zagreb : AGM, 1997, p. 23.
40   McLUHAN, M.: *Razumijevanje medija*. Zagreb : Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2008, p. 17.
41   INGLIS, F.: *Teorija medija*. Zagreb : AGM, 1997, p. 3.
42   BAACKE, D.: *Medienpädagogik*. Berlin : De Gruyter, 1997, p. 19.
43   Ibidem, p. 19-20.
44   NETHERREALM STUDIOS: *Mortal Kombat 11 (PlayStation 4 version)*. [digital game]. Burbank : Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, 2019.
45   KOTCHEFF, T. (Director): *First Blood (1982 & 2007, Blu-ray edition)*. [Blu-ray]. Santa Monica : Lionsgate, 2007.
46   CAMERON, J. (Director): *Terminator (1984 & 2010, Blu-ray edition)*. [Blu-ray]. Beverly Hills : Metro-Goldwin-Mayer, 2010.
47   VERHOEVEN, P. (Director): *RoboCop (1987 & 2001 DVD edition)*. [DVD]. Beverly Hills : Metro-Goldwin-Mayer, 2001.
48   NAMCO: *Pac-Man*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Namco, 1980.
49   NINTENDO: *Donkey Kong*. [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1981.
50   GOTTLIEB: *Q*bert (Commodore 64 version)*. [digital game]. Chicago : Gottlieb, 1984.
51   COLUMBUS, C. (Director): *Pixels*. [DVD]. Culver City : Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2015.

The digital gaming industry, despite being progressive and surpassing the film and music industries in terms of revenue, still leaves great traces in its subcultural area. These traces are evident in all segments of society, from cultural and economic to pedagogical and psychological. Moreover, all cultural-social and economic aspects are related to digital games so that even concepts such as gamification are integrated into modern society. In such integration, the question arises is the gamification playing with us or are we playing with gamification?[52] In such an environment, the consumer has a blurred idea of his work and leisure activities. Digital games have marked modern society and we can observe them from a phenomenological point of view. References to digital games are so intertwined that they occur in all forms in film, comics, literature, theatre, and music. It was the intermediality of digital games that promoted them to the forerunners of postmodern culture. As an example of this intertwining, let us cite the cheats for *Heroes of Might and Magic 3*[53] in the form of a reference to *The Matrix*[54] on the red pill / blue pill, which suggests a choice between revealing an unpleasant truth, and remaining in blissful ignorance.

The Concept of the Brand as a Message and a Sign

Because the brand communicates with the consumer as a message, we will view the brand in the context of the sender and recipient of the message.[55] However, the sender of the message is the manufacturer, distributor or service provider, and the recipient of the message is the user, consumer or more simply, the gamer. The brand is, holistically speaking, a means of communication. In this context, we do not mean only the brand as a living organism,[56] but the concept of the message. When a brand is a means of communication it transfers a specific message. However, the recipient of the message receives only those elements of the brand identity that the sender wants. This means that, in the context of digital games, gamers receive only fragments of brand identity elements because they cannot perceive complete elements entirely due to perceptual selection. Such fragments of the elements of brand identity are perceived by the consumer individually and they create consumer images.[57]

We then understand a brand statement as a sign, not what that sign represents. In a communicative sense, the term subject represents a transmitter. Thus, it is necessary to observe such a subject from the aspect of message transmission, where the manifestation of the brand message is the statement of the subject. This means that the transmitter subject is different to the stated subject. Therefore, the relationship between subject and object appears here, which we will consider in further analysis as a statement of the brand. In terms of information technology, each brand statement is a unique form of education. The very act of such education starts from the assumption that the message is sent to the recipient in the form of information, which, as such, affects their attitudes and

52   ESCRIBANO, F.: Gamification as the Post-Modern Phalanstère: Is the Gamification Playing with Us or Are We Playing with Gamification?. In ZACKARIASSON, P., WILSON, T. L. (eds.): *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future.* London : Routledge, 2012, p. 216.
53   NEW WORLD COMPUTING: *Heroes of Might and Magic 3.* [digital game]. Redwood City : The 3DO Company, 1999.
54   WACHOWSKI, L., WACHOWSKI, L. (Directors): *The Matrix.* [DVD]. Burbank : Warner Home Video, 1999.
55   KAPFERER, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management*. London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 171-197.
56   Ibidem, p. 12.
57   KELLER, K. L., APÉRIA, T., GEORGSON, M.: *Strategic Brand Management: A European Perspective.* Harlow : Prentice Hall, 2008, p. 128-166.

beliefs. The concept of sign is observed here in accordance with F. de Saussure's theory.[58] The sign combines the term and the acoustic image into one. Thus, the sign denotes the whole, while the word *signifiant* denotes a notion, and the word *signifié* the acoustic image. So, the signifier is what stands for something else. This means that the signifier is like the thing or idea we are trying to evoke, while the signified is the idea in the consumer's mind projected by the signifier. De Saussure observes the concept of an acoustic image[59] in a broader sense and it is not a material sign, but a psychic imprint and an image given to us by the senses.

According to J. Baudrillard, the sign system is a complete analysis that requires a dichotomy, that is, a signifier and a signified. Consumer signs, accordingly, will be analysed as brands, and in ambient order, signs are more important than the product itself. If we start from the hypothesis that needs, in part, inaugurate the system of production, then we can speak of an abstract code of consumption.[60] Abstract consumption code distinguishes objects as signs rather than as individual expressions of need and pleasure.[61] With such an approach, not only does the consumer consume objects as signs (brands), but also relationships between objects. Brands are internally perceived as exchange and use values, however, the analysis of the sign points to two levels, i.e., to the signifier and the signified. Buying a brand signifies high consumer involvement because it reflects the consumer's self-image (Picture 1).

$$Brand\ (sign) = \frac{Signifier\ (subject)}{Signified\ (concept)}$$

Picture 1: Brand as a Sign
Source: own processing; SAUSSURE, F.: *Tečaj opće lingvistike.* Zagreb : ArTresor, 2000, p. 98.

Awareness creation is also an arbiter between low involvements because the consumer will perceive the brand exclusively because of its popularity, and it is conditioned by the advertising stimulus. The stimulus evoked by the advertising message is essential[62] because it is also the only marketing information, i.e., the communication channel between the sender and the recipient. Analysing the level of consumer involvement,[63] we indirectly assess and evaluate brands. The very concept of a brand requires much more than distinctiveness, so the role of semantics is the most important element in creating a trademark. We can draw a parallel between the object and the notion of the sign and the exchange value (EV) and the system of use value (UV) and display it as the function (Picture 2).[64]

$$Brand = \frac{EV \cong signifier}{UV \cong signified}$$

Picture 2: Economy of the Sign
Source: BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Simulacija i zbilja.* Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2001, p. 4.

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58   SAUSSURE, F.: *Tečaj opće lingvistike.* Zagreb : ArTresor, 2000, p. 98.
59   Ibidem, p. 99.
60   BAUDRILLARD, J.: *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structure*. London : Sage, 1998, p. 76.
61   Ibidem, p. 49.
62   BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Inteligencija zla ili pakt lucidnosti*. Zagreb : Naklada Ljevak, 2006, p. 104.
63   BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London : Sage, 2017, p. 28-31.
64   BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Simulacija i zbilja.* Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2001, p. 4.

The relationship is established as a hierarchical function between the listed forms. However, J. Baudrillard tells us that UV is a consequence of EV.[65] Let us explain this through the dichotomy of objects: each sign consists of denotational (usable) and connotative (transferred) signification. When a brand gets a personality, the identity of the brand is created, that is, its character. By accepting the structure of the character, we come to the image in the consumer's consciousness, that is, to modern consumption caused by the desire and not the need of the modern consumer. The symbolic exchange then communicates with the consumer through the consumer's impressions,[66] which is true, since the most important asset of the brand is precisely in the consumer's mind.

Such a connection between the signs is agreed, arbitrary, which is also the most important principle of the sign. In other words, F. de Saussuere[67] argues that there is no inherent connection between the signifier and the signified. In the context of digital games, the signifier represents a word, an image, an object, while the signified is the mental image that the signifier recalls. In the field of digital games, the marker can be stylized yellow letters MK that associate the mental image of brutal fatalities. It is also important to note that the signs are conventional, meaning that the language and meaning itself belong to the public and not to the author. In other words, when we use language, we borrow conventions that are common and create them into a semantic whole. This means that the creation of meaning takes place by agreement.

Let us explain this with the example of the abbreviation MK. There is nothing in the letters M and K that necessarily means Mortal Kombat. Signs are differential, which means that the only way we distinguish signs, and their meanings is precisely in distinguishing them from others. The only way we recognize the yellow letters MK and number 11 is precisely because the stylized letters and number 11 form a sign. These letters and numbers, that is, colours and stylization, have no natural connection, so their relations are arranged. From the linguistic point of view, here the term is also the language that is the product, and individuals passively take it over.[68] We conclude that language itself does not mirror material reality but offers us a conceptual map that structures such a world. Therefore, conceptualized depends on culture because language is part of culture.

Myth Phenomenon

Myth cannot be easily defined. It has been the subject of various approaches in the sciences, and its interpretation depends on a scientific approach, such as sociology,[69] psychology,[70] theology,[71] philosophy,[72] anthropology,[73] literature,[74] and culture.[75] The term myth comes from the Greek word $μῦθος$[76] which has its roots in onomatopoeia. The notion of myth is complex, just like the notion of culture, because it is encountered in

65   BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Simulacija i zbilja.* Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2001, p. 12-16.
66   BAUDRILLARD, J.: *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structure.* London : Sage, 1998, p. 49-52.
67   SAUSSURE, F.: *Tečaj opće lingvistike.* Zagreb : ArTresor, 2000, p. 100.
68   Ibidem, p. 59.
69   DURKHEIM, E.: *Elementarni oblici religijskog života.* Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2008, p. 79-86.
70   FREUD, S.: *Tumačenje snova.* Zagreb : Stari Grad, 2000, p. 271-276.; BOWLBY, R.: *Freudian Mythologies: Greek Tragedy and Modern Identities.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 14-44.
71   TOMIĆ, C.: Mit i religija. In *Crkva u Svijetu*, 1991, Vol. 26, No. 2/3, p. 135.
72   HORKHEIMER, M., ADORNO, T. W.: *Dialektik der Aufklärung.* Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer Verlage, 1988, p. 4.
73   LÉVI-STRAUSS, C.: *Divlja misao.* Zagreb : Golden marketing, 2001, p. 87-94.
74   SOLAR, M.: *Edipova braća i sinovi.* Zagreb : Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2008, p. 257-260.
75   COUPE, L.: *Myth.* London : Routledge, 1997, p. 96-97.
76   BITI, V.: *Pojmovnik suvremene književne teorije.* Zagreb : Matica hrvatska, 1997, p. 227.

different disciplines.[77] Myth has become a fixed point of radical critique of reason.[78] Myth has played a major role in the history of human civilization because it has served as an interpreter of phenomena and states that are unsolvable. At its core, the myth works paradoxically because it brings the past closer to the present to interpret the future. Forms of myth are also manifested in behavioural economics because they express a state of consumer frustration created by the denial of desire and become an act of awareness, and thus the satisfaction of needs.

Ritual and myth are, from an anthropological aspect, connected. Myth depends on ritual, even if the ritual does not depend on myth. Without ritual there would be no myth.[79] From an anthropological point of view, myths strengthen social connections, give meaning to the individual, and ultimately, provide a sense of belonging. What gives the myth operational value is the fact that this stated pattern is eternal: the myth explains the present as well as the future.[80] Therefore, the myth is historical because it refers to events that happened, but the myth is also ahistorical because its stories are timeless. With myth, everything becomes possible.[81] Therefore, the purpose of myth is to enable the overcoming of contradictions because people function on binary oppositions,[82] and myth is in this context a mediator of binary oppositions.[83] Since the myth functions based on the unconscious, it appears in different forms and must be repeated for the meaning to be conveyed.[84] Therefore, there is no one true version of the myth, all versions convey meaning. This means that one myth can appear in different variants.[85]

From a psychological point of view,[86] myths are like a collective dream, and they reflect shared desires and anxieties. The psychoanalytic approach of myth interprets man's desires through the unconscious. According to S. Freud,[87] man is most often guided by the unconscious, and by repression he defends himself from unconscious, instinctive impulses, but this unconscious must come to the surface. Myths in psychoanalysis, therefore, are like collective dreams that reflect shared desires and anxieties. In this way, the myths use the same pattern and are compared to dreams. However, myths, unlike dreams, do not have a source in the emotion that is inherent in an individual, but become collective.

Myths are, according to C. Jung,[88] a reflection of the collective unconscious. The content of the collective unconscious is called archetypes, and they represent innate patterns of thought and behaviour. Archetypes are invisible universal images, but their manifestations are visible. This means that the myth, from a psychoanalytic aspect, does not possess content, but symbols that represent them.[89] However, the anthropological understanding of myth gives it a social function. The myth is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its object. Myth challenges, reinforces, and codifies belief.[90] Creating myths

77   WILLIAMS, R.: *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 87.
78   KNATZ, L.: *Geschichte-Kunst-Mythos: Schellings Philosophie und die Perspektive einer philosophischen Mythostheorie.* Würzburg : Königshausen & Neumann, 1999, p. 43.
79   SEGAL, A. R.: *Theorizing about Myth.* Amherst : Univerity of Massachussetts, 1999, p. 39.
80   LÉVI-STRAUSS, C.: The Structural Study of Myth. In *The Journal of American Folklore*, 1955, Vol. 68, No. 270, p. 430.
81   Ibidem, p. 429.
82   LÉVI-STRAUSS, C.: *Divlja misao.* Zagreb : Golden marketing, 2001, p. 104-105.
83   GEBERT, B., MAYER, G.: Mythos zwichen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Zur Einführung. In GEBERT, B., MAYER, G. (eds.): *Zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Formen und Funktionen des Mythos in theoretischen und literarischen Diskursen.* Berlin : De Gruyter, 2014, p. 4.
84   LÉVI-STRAUSS, C.: *Divlja misao.* Zagreb : Golden marketing, 2001, p. 240.
85   LÉVI-STRAUSS, C.: The Structural Study of Myth. In *The Journal of American Folklore*, 1955, Vol. 68, No. 270, p. 435.
86   FREUD, S.: *Tumačenje snova II.* Novi Sad : Akademska knjiga, 2013, p. 266.
87   Ibidem, p. 26-269.
88   JUNG, C.G.: *Psychological Types.* London, New York : Routledge, 2017, p. 60-67.
89   Ibidem, p. 120.
90   MALINOWSKI, B.: *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays.* Long Grove : Waveland Press, 2013, p. 100.

increases social solidarity, which means that every culture creates and values its own myths because myths have the function of preserving and maintaining culture. Thus, the function of the role of myth is analogous to ideology in modern society. According to R. Barthes,[91] the myth is presented as natural, and on the other hand, it conceals its production.

When asked what a myth is, R. Barthes instructs us that myth is speech.[92] He claims that this is not just any speech, for a myth to exist at all, a certain message is needed.[93] First, it should be clearly noted that a myth in this context is a message, which means that a myth can be an object, concept, or idea. In other words, myth is a way of denoting form. Myth is not just a genre, it is a way of saying something, that is, a way of convincing people of something. In the context of digital games and myths, everything can be a myth, and everything can be analysed. Myth should be analysed as a discourse phenomenon (*Diskursphänomen*),[94] i.e., as a product of the tradition of perception and thought. Myth, therefore, acts as a central concept for creating, reflecting, and changing the interface between presence and representation.[95] Admittedly, this form of representation does not necessarily have to be real, it even starts from fiction, but its fiction is never as questionable as in literature. Rather, the myth has elements of gossip and oral speech.[96] This is precisely the starting point of the claim that the mythical phenomenon is not only a visualization, but also a true present.[97] Such permeation of mythic discourse allows for a psychoanalytic approach to myth.

Myth is a second-degree semiotic system.[98] R. Barthes' theory relies on F. de Saussure's theory,[99] implementing two levels of notation: denotation and connotation. Denotation implies a literal meaning, and connotation an associative one. According to Barthes' theory, the myth is produced on a connotative level.[100] The connotation depends on the aspect of the vision, the culture of the user and the location. It is not the same as a myth perceived by a person who does not think about roles in society or a person who creates a myth. The relationship is actually very similar to creating a brand image and depends on the elements of brand identity. Building the elements of brand identity is the beginning of creating an image. Image is the result of the communication process, and communication itself has a positive effect on brand preference.[101] Communication is also a stimulus that forms a mental image. The image of an object is formed only by thought processing (perception). A brand image can be viewed as an image, notion, or complex experience i.e., the structure of attitudes, experiences and beliefs towards a product or service. Image is undoubtedly a psychologically integrated construct. A brand strength development strategy begins with a clear understanding of brand identity and image.

91   BARTHES, R.: *Književnost, mitologija, semiologija.* Beograd : Nolit, 1971, p. 263-282.
92   Ibidem, p. 263.
93   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 143.
94   GEBERT, B., MAYER, G.: Mythos zwichen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Zur Einführung. In GEBERT, B., MAYER, G. (eds.): *Zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Formen und Funktionen des Mythos in theoretischen und literarischen Diskursen.* Berlin : De Gruyter, 2014, p. 3.
95   Ibidem, p. 5.
96   SOLAR, M.: *Edipova braća i sinovi.* Zagreb : Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2008, p. 257-264.
97   GEBERT, B., MAYER, G.: Mythos zwichen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Zur Einführung. In GEBERT, B., MAYER, G. (eds.): *Zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Formen und Funktionen des Mythos in theoretischen und literarischen Diskursen.* Berlin : De Gruyter, 2014, p. 8.
98   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 143-144.
99   SAUSSURE, F.: *Tečaj opće lingvistike.* Zagreb : ArTresor, 2000, p. 98.
100   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 147.
101   KELLER, K. L.: Memory Factors in Advertising: The Effects of Advertising Retrieval Clues on Brand Evolutions. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1987, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 329.

Analysis of Mythical Structure

For a digital game to become a myth, certain conditions are required. First, it is necessary to accept the theory according to which the myth is a communication system i.e., a message.[102] From this, it is clear how a myth cannot be an object, a myth is a way of signifying, and a myth is a form. Thus, this means that the myth has no substantive, but formal boundaries. In that sense, digital games can be a myth because they are suggestive. Every object can pass from a closed, silent existence into an oral state that opens the possibility for society to appropriate it.[103] Therefore, we understand the myth as an image and it can be manifested in written discourse, photography, comics, theatre, film, digital game, but also the brand. The mythical statement arises from the material that has already been reworked to become suitable for a new presentation. In that sense, the picture becomes a letter as soon as it acquires meaning and demands to be read. Thus, speech in a digital game, image, display, or music makes up every meaningful unit and so photography becomes a statement.

For R. Barthes,[104] digital gaming can be understood as a cybernetic machine. It hides the *menu* in the moment of *pause*, but as soon as the game starts, it sends messages to the user. The property of these messages is the simultaneity of digital codes and in this algorithm the user receives several different messages. Analysing them, we notice the level of narration, image, music, and playfulness. What are the relationships between these signs? They are simultaneous, but not identical. In The Walking Dead, the focus is on the decision of the main character Clementine and the consequences of her choice. The music is expressed by silence, which is also a message. From a narrative aspect, Clementine takes on the role of an adult. The image is centred on a user and they immerse themself in the role the moment Lee, or Clementine, looks down. From this it follows that these signs make sense in retrospect of the game because the meaning is discovered only at the end. The silence between Clementine and Lee in the final seconds of the game is an introduction to the catharsis of the user who experiences it only at the end.

The relationship between code and digital play, the nature of the digital sign, denotation, and connotation here is polyphonic. This means that the digital game is in a privileged position, it is a semiological object because the system is stronger.[105] In both games, however, they represent a sign that is subordinate to the mental framework. Games are ideological, they take positions, but they are still games of consciousness, not solutions. The games implicitly end openly and with an awareness of the unconscious. That's why digital games are so powerful. Games don't offer an answer, they ask questions. In this way, the message of meaning and not of sense is understood here. Therefore, The Walking Dead, like Heavy Rain, is an example of an answer that can be located but not identified. The question, therefore, has no unambiguous answer, the answer depends on the gamer's perspective. From the aspect of marketing, here the question is posed precisely as a model of brand service,[106] therefore, it starts from the experience with the brand. Contact with the brand forms its relationship. This relationship can be different because it depends on the type of contact and can also arouse positive and negative consumer impressions. The consumer continuously maintains a brand relationship.

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102   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije*. Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 143.
103   Ibidem, p. 143-144.
104   BARTHES, R.: *Književnost, mitologija, semiologija*. Beograd : Nolit, 1971, p. 201.
105   Ibidem, p. 202.
106   GRÖNROOS, C.: *Service Management and Marketing: Customer Management in Service Competition*. Hoboken : John Wiley & Sons, 2007, p. 332.

In myth, we come across a three-dimensional pattern: signifier, signified, and sign. However, the myth is presented here as a special semiotic system that is built from a semiotic chain and eventually becomes a second-level semiotic system.[107] What is in the first system a sign, that is, the totality of the concept associated with the image, in the second becomes only a signifier. This means that the myth moves the formal system of original meanings to the next level. Picture 3 shows the semiological structure of the myth. As we see in the myth there are two semiotic systems on which one is dependent in relation to the other. The linguistic activity that myth takes on to build its own system is viewed as the subject of myth. The myth itself is understood here as a metalanguage because it is the second level of language that speaks of the first. Therefore, the letter, the image, the sound, in the same way belongs to the scope of the mythical structure because they are signs and thus reach the myth.
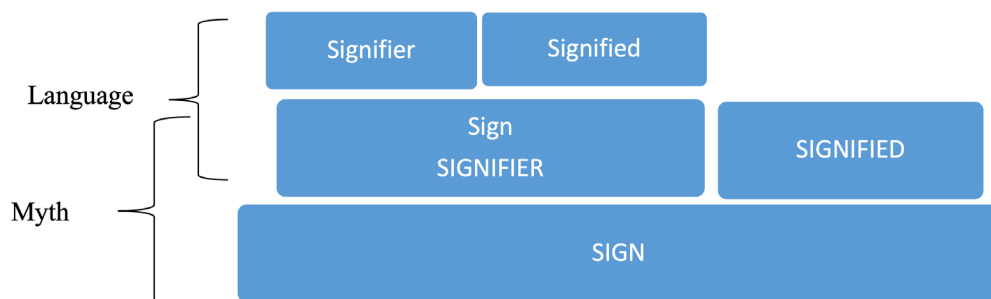
Picture 3: Semiotic structure of myth
Source: BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 147.

As can be seen from Picture 1, the signifier can be viewed in the myth from two points of view: as the final member of the language system or as the initial member of the mythic system. Since, according to the theory of structuralism,[108] we observe a linguistic sign as a relationship between the signifier and the signified, the sign signifies the whole, the word signifier signifies a concept, and the word signified an acoustic image. Therefore, in the mythical structure, we interpret the sign itself here as a new signifier that is in relation to the signified, to ultimately create a new sign, i.e., a myth. Therefore, in Picture 1, this second level of marking of the sign is shown in capital letters in which it is clearly seen how the original level of the sign takes on the role of marker. This is why R. Barthes[109] gives two names for the mythical structure, one at the level of semiotics, where the signifier is meaning, and at the level of myth he calls it *form*. It signified the *term* marked at the level of the semiotics of the linguistic sign, but also of the myth, and it still leaves the correlation between the signifier and the signified as the name sign. However, the third article of myth calls *meaning*, and that word is justified by the fact that myth really has a dual function: it signifies and informs.[110]

107   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 147.
108   SAUSSURE, F.: *Tečaj opće lingvistike.* Zagreb : ArTresor, 2000, p. 98.
109   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 149.
110   Ibidem, p. 149-150.

Decoding the Connotative Sign The Walking Dead

An analysis of the mythical structure of attachment[111] is shown through three scenes from a digital game. The first scene begins with meeting Lee and Clementine. Lee has a bloody shirt, and to his left is Clementine. Lee looks straight ahead, and Clementine's gaze points to the camera. Fear and hope are recognized in the looks. Signifier is Lee or Clementine, and signified are the hands. Hands represent salvation because care is taken over by Lee. The contrast of colours and the role of shadow is clearly seen. Everything is in the dark: a shelf, broken books, a family photo in the background, broken glasses, broken glass, and blood on the floor. Also, the role of bipolarity is recognized, which serves to emphasize the contrast: the main characters are illuminated and represent hope, and everything around them is in darkness and represents dying.

The first sign to read is denotation and it is a symbol of salvation, salvation as the hope that Clementine will survive the horror and Lee will find a way out. The connotative signifier is then the protector because Lee's determined look and holding of Clementine's hand is clearly visible. The camera shows the main characters from above emphasizing the fragility of the girl in a ruthless world. The connotative meaning is fear, and the connotative sign ultimately represents growing up. Thus, the first mythical structure of Picture 4 represents Clementine's growing up through the denotation of Lee as saviour and connotative signifier as protector. From the above, the pedagogical construct of taking responsibility and guardianship in the form of giving a hand as a signified and accepting that hand as a connotative signified fear is confirmed. Also, the deconstruction of the myth in the first scene is shown in Table 1 which as a final statement of the myth shows the construct of growing up.

Picture 4: Introduction Lee and Clementine
Source: author's screenshot; TELLTALE GAMES: *The Walking Dead (PlayStation 4 version).* [digital game]. San Rafael : Telltale Games, 2014.

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111   BOWLBY, J.: *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory.* London : Routledge, 2005, p. 134-148.

Table 1: Growing up

Signifier	Signified
Lee or Clementine	Hands
Denotation	
Lee the saviour	
Connotative signifier	**Connotative signifier**
Lee the protector	Fear
Connotative sign	
Growing up	

Source: own processing

The second scene shows Lee cutting Clementine's hair (Picture 5). The scene is extremely important because he had taught her moments before how she could defend herself. Clementine is sitting on the floor, Lee is cutting her hair, and in the background are the open doors of the train and the woods. Signifier is a haircut, and the object of the action is Lee holding scissors in his hand (signified). Clementine left (is without?) a hat that is also her trademark, which will later become an element of the brand's identity in the following sequels.[112] Denotation is a construct of learning, that is, the first sign is Lee's role as a teacher, and Clementine as a student. Connotative signifiers are views that reveal worry and fear (connotatively signified). Ultimately, it is clear from the connotative signifier and the connotative signified that the mythical structure is a construct of maturation. Lee takes on the role of protector, saviour, but also teacher. Clementine has taken on the role of growing up and this is marked by the ritual haircut which also symbolizes maturation (Table 2).

Picture 5: Clementine's haircut
Source: author's screenshot; TELLTALE GAMES: *The Walking Dead (PlayStation 4 version).* [digital game]. San Rafael : Telltale Games, 2014.

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112   KAPFERER, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management*. London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 171-197.

Table 2: Maturation

Signifier	Signified
Haircut	Scissors
Denotation	
Learning	
Connotative signifier	**Connotative signifier**
Views	Fear
Connotative sign	
Maturation	

Source: own processing

The third scene shows Clementine facing a harsh reality (Picture 6). Her fears have come true. It is also the turning point of her growing up that will define her in the following sequels: a student who becomes a teacher. The signifier is Clementine. Her face reveals pain, sadness, and disappointment. She doesn't look at the camera, she doesn't look at Lee, and she looks down and holds the gun firmly. Tears slide down her face, which are also inside the sign, the sub-sign, and the signifier of sadness. Signified is the gun itself in her hands. The focus of the camera is on her face, and the gun is shown in close-up. The denotation level is death. Thus, the sign of death consists of the signifier Clementine and the signified gun. The connotative signifier derives from this in the form of a tear, and the connotative signified is sorrow. Ultimately, a myth of forced upbringing is created (Table 3) that manifests itself in a broken frame, a darkened screen, and silence.

Picture 6: Farewell from Lee
Source: author's screenshot; TELLTALE GAMES: *The Walking Dead (PlayStation 4 version).* [digital game]. San Rafael : Telltale Games, 2014.

Table 3: Farewell

Signifier	Signified
Clementine	Gun
Denotation	
Death	
Connotative signifier	**Connotative signifier**
Tears	Sadness
Connotative sign	
Farewell and growing up	

Source: own processing

The role of parenting and guardianship in the digital game The Walking Dead is portrayed through the mythical structure of growing up. Clementine's confrontation with Lee's preparing her for independent living ends in the fifth episode of the first season. The pedagogical role of parenting and guardianship is evident throughout the play, and here the deconstructions of denotation, connotation, and myth through three scenes are analysed. The whole construct of parenthood, attachment,[113] caring for the weak and powerless, the role of learning and salvation is interwoven with the myth of growing up and dying together. The myth itself, therefore, reads like a struggle for life, growing up, and the inevitable loss of a loved one.

Decoding the Connotative Sign Heavy Rain

An analysis of the mythical structure in the digital game Heavy Rain reveals the mythical structure of the pedagogical construct of parenting that is presented through three scenes. The scenes are selected from three different parts of a play in which, according to R. Barthes,[114] semiotic analysis decodes the meaning. The meaning of a myth is understood according to a model in which the third member of the myth (connotative sign) has a dual function: it denotes form and informs the term.[115] Therefore, the first scene is taken from the prologue and shows Ethan and Jason who are in the mall and marks the denotation of family love between father and son. The second scene implies a connotative sign of parental suffering that is symbolically associated with the name of the game. And finally, the third image shows a form of redemption in which Ethan, Madison and Shaun are in focus.

The first scene is taken from the prologue. It is a picture of an idyllic family, a father, a mother and two children. The colours are bright, vivid, everything is beautiful, dazzling, and the faces of the main characters are illuminated, which further emphasizes happiness and fulfilment. The musical background is light, and the angle of recording emphasizes happiness, which is additionally shown by the ritual carrying of the son on the shoulders. Picture 7 shows Ethan and Jason embracing. The signifier is the very form of parenthood i.e., the father who embraces the son. Signified represents family, and the image of a father

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113 BOWLBY, J.: *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory.* London : Routledge, 2005, p. 134-148.; See also: BULJAN FLANDER, G.: Privrženost. In BULJAN FLANDER, G. (ed.): *Znanost i umjetnost odgoja.* Sveta Nedjelja : Geromar, 2018, p. 139-155.
114 BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 146-154.
115 Ibidem, p. 149.

and son embracing together suggests a denotation of true parental happiness and love. The connotative signifier is an embrace because it emphasizes the form of the signified, that is, the father and the son as one whole, the family. Connotatively signified is happiness, and connotative sign is parental love (Table 4).

Picture 7: Idyllic family

Source: author's screenshot; QUANTIC DREAMS: *Heavy Rain.* [digital game]. San Mateo : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2010.

Table 4: Family happiness

Signifier	Signified
Ethan, Jason	Family
Denotation	
Love	
Connotative signifier	**Connotative signifier**
Hug	Happiness
Connotative sign	
Family happiness and love	

Source: own processing

The second scene is taken from the third chapter Father and Son, which shows Ethan's teary-eyed face mixed with raindrops (Picture 8). This created the symbolism of the title of the digital game and the metaphor of rain as sorrow. We understand Ethan's rainy face as a signifier, and it signifies the pain that on a metaphorical level connects the associative title of the play and the father's teary eyes. The complete metaphor of rain is also a personification of gloomy clouds that 'cry' together with Ethan. Therefore, the denotation is Ethan's loneliness. The connotative signifier is the neglected Ethan, as evidenced by old clothes, an unshaven beard, and a neglected appearance. The colours are grey and gloomy which further enhances the suggestiveness of the accident (connotative signified). The mythical form is the neglected Ethan, and the mythical term is the father's misfortune leading to the connotative meaning of the father's suffering (Table 5).

Picture 8: Rainy face

Source: author's screenshot; QUANTIC DREAMS: *Heavy Rain.* [digital game]. San Mateo : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2010.

Table 5: Father's suffering

Signifier	Signified
Rainy face	Pain
Denotation	
Loneliness	
Connotative signifier	**Connotative signifier**
Neglected	Accident
Connotative sign	
Father's suffering	

Source: own processing

The third scene shows Ethan and Madison in an embrace, and it is set here conditionally as it depends on the alternate endings of the digital game (Picture 9). Specifically, this is the final scene from the chapter *A New Life* and according to it, we will perform a semiotic analysis of the mythical structure. It is taken as the correct ending in which the signifier is Ethan and Madison, and together they form the signified as a notion of togetherness. This togetherness alludes to a new beginning, a new community, and a new life, which ultimately denotes happiness. In Heavy Rain, there are alternate ends that do not have to match this representation, but due to the need for analysis, a connotative marker in the form of a kiss is shown. The connotative signified here represents the notion of warmness, which ultimately reveals the myth of redemption (Table 6). Redemption because Madison in the final scene says they deserved happiness after experiencing tragedy. The camera focuses on a new couple, a new communion that connotes warmth and represents redemption.

Picture 9: New happiness
Source: author's screenshot; QUANTIC DREAMS: *Heavy Rain.* [digital game]. San Mateo : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2010.

Table 6: Redemption

Signifier	Signified
Ethan, Madison	Togetherness
Denotation	
Happiness	
Connotative signifier	**Connotative signifier**
Kiss	Warmness
Connotative sign	
Redemption	

Source: own processing

The role of parenting in the digital game Heavy Rain is portrayed through the mythical structure of the father's redemption. The main character, Ethan Mars, experiences personal suffering due to the tragic loss of a child and blames himself for failing to prevent it. The pedagogical role of parenting is evident throughout the play, and here the deconstructions of denotation, connotation, and myth through three scenes are analysed. The first scene shows the ideal family happiness that symbolizes the connotative sign of parental love. Everything is subordinated in the very prologue of the digital game to emphasize perfection from bright colours, pleasant musical background, and interior to the contours of the face. The second scene forms the mythical structure of the father's suffering and here again, as in The Walking Dead's analysis, the bipolarity of the myth is shown which, in contrast to the first connotative sign, forms other myths. In particular, the entire second scene is shown in grey, dark and gloomy tones to associate the father's suffering and the denotation of loneliness, but also the connotation of unhappiness. Finally, the third scene shows Ethan and Madison Page experiencing a new togetherness that denotes happiness. However, the mythical structure reveals that this is a connotative sign of the father's redemption.

Discussion

From the above analysis of the connotative sign i.e., myth, we can conclude that R. Barthes[116] is right when he says that myth is speech. Here we understand this term as a discourse phenomenon (*Diskursphänomen*),[117] i.e., as a product of the tradition of perception and thought. A myth can then be perceived as a message, meaning that a myth can be an object, concept, or idea. In other words, myth is a way of denoting form. Of course, the myth represents a distinct cultural reality that can be interpreted by numerous perspectives. In a deconstructive analysis of the mythical structure of the digital games The Walking Dead and Heavy Rain, we have shown here how the myth recounts reality. This is in line with the philosophical aspect of the myth,[118] but also the literary-theoretical one, in which the myth is given 'additional trust'.[119]

Myth at its core requires absolute trust, as it produces absolute objects, myth produces solid units of meaning.[120] Simply put, literature in this context produces illusion, and myth reality. This is, after all, the reason why the consumer believes in the mythical structure because the myth gives it the character of an indisputable truth. The semiotic system in this analysis starts from R. Barthes' theory[121] which starts from analysing communication and understanding. Does this mean that modern gamers are consumers of myth because they do not start from understanding but exclusively from communication? If the digital consumer has become a consumer of myth, then we can accept the theory that myth is born from a rumour that should not be understood in terms of values.[122] Here, these rumours are an expression of the inauthenticity of language. Then, such gossip represents an undefined ability to understand, which is precisely why it is so accepted. Mythic consciousness has not disappeared, the autonomy of the sender and the interest of the recipient are important for the authenticity of understanding.

Since we know how the existential interest of the recipient depends on the sender, it is clear why the comparison of the mythical structure and identity of the brand shows the digital and the mythical consumer. Brand identity[123] implies constructs of personality, self-image, and relationship, which are at their core related to the mythical structure. Consumers develop brand attachment, cult brands affirm the above,[124] and brand loyalty also represents the denotational level of the brand sign. Although the visual elements of brand identity are used as a signifier, they represent the signified of the image itself, which in denotation and connotation symbolize the mythical structure of the brand. Consumers believe, adore, and identify with the brand precisely based on myth. Myth, therefore, acts as a central concept for creating, reflecting, and changing the interface between presence and representation.[125] R. Barthes argues that there are as many languages as there are

116   BARTHES, R.: *Književnost, mitologija, semiologija.* Beograd : Nolit, 1971, p. 263.
117   GEBERT, B., MAYER, G.: Mythos zwichen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Zur Einführung. In GEBERT, B., MAYER, G. (eds.): *Zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Formen und Funktionen des Mythos in theoretischen und literarischen Diskursen.* Berlin : De Gruyter, 2014, p. 3.
118   ELIADE, M.: *Aspekti mita.* Zagreb : Demetra, 2004, p. 6.
119   SOLAR, M.: *Edipova braća i sinovi.* Zagreb : Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2008, p. 257.
120   Ibidem, p. 255.
121   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 146-154.
122   SOLAR, M.: *Edipova braća i sinovi.* Zagreb : Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2008, p. 260.
123   KAPFERER, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management.* London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 171-197.
124   ACOSTA, P. M., DEVASAGAYAM, R.: Brand Cult: Extending the Notion of Brand Communities. In *Marketing Management Journal*, 2010, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 168.
125   GEBERT, B., MAYER, G.: Mythos zwichen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Zur Einführung. In GEBERT, B., MAYER, G. (eds.): *Zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation: Formen und Funktionen des Mythos in theoretischen und literarischen Diskursen.* Berlin : De Gruyter, 2014, p. 5.

cultural objects to which society has given the power of meaning.[126] Consequently, labelling systems, such as images, music, or digital games, do not have the same structure.

Here, the mythical structure in the digital games The Walking Dead and Heavy Rain is presented on the pedagogical construct of parenting and guardianship from the aspect of deconstructive analysis of myth. The analysis of the digital game The Walking Dead shows the myth of Clementine growing up and maturing, which will be an extended version of Lee in the following sequels. Also, note that the limitation of this research arises from the fact that the first season is taken for semiotic analysis showing the model of attachment[127] but not the identifications that will follow in other sequels, specifically, the pattern of behaviour that Clementine will take and follow on her way. This also confirms the theory of attachment[128] because the emotionality she achieved with Lee in socializing, growing up and surviving together (attachment, love, care, tenderness) confirmed the feelings of comfort and the inclusion of awareness. In an analysis of the digital game Heavy Rain the myth of parental suffering and redemption that destroyed Ethan's marriage, life and meaning due to the tragic loss of a child is shown. Structural analysis has shown how the original denotation of love and happiness becomes metaphorically related to the name of the game and makes a connotative sign of paternal suffering and guilt for his son's death.

Finally, how are the constructs of attachment we analysed in digital games related to the example of father (Ethan) and guardian (Lee) and brand loyalty related? To understand this, we must first accept R. Barthes' mythical structure according to which expression can be anything.[129] Also, the very core of such a sign and labelling points to arbitrariness and unmotivation, which means that it is inherent in the elements of brand identity created by the manufacturer. In branding process, brand as a sign, we accept digital games as brands or characters from digital games as brand extensions as an orientation system of myth.[130] In such a context, we read the connotative meaning of the sign of the digital game that can be analysed at the level of brand loyalty theory.

Brand loyalty implies repeated consumer purchase. Therefore, brand loyalty can be observed through the correlation of experience and attitudes that creates consumer satisfaction. Also, it is important to note that consumers have certain expectations of the brand and if their expectations are met, the probability of loyalty increases. Loyalty is primarily manifested in consumer impressions, beliefs, and perceptions of how a specific brand possesses unique qualities, a special image. Brand loyalty is a multidimensional construct that starts from the deeply ingrained consumer beliefs in the brand, its uniqueness, image and quality. We view the concept of brand loyalty through two fundamental dimensions: consumer behaviour and consumer attitudes.[131] We will focus on the conceptual framework of brand loyalty that we observe through the spectrum of loyalty effects, where four dimensions stand out: a) cognitive dimension, b) affective dimension, c) connotative dimension and d) action dimension.[132]

Interestingly, the dimensions of brand loyalty can be portrayed as a reflection of consumer attitudes. Attitudes encompass a cognitive, affective, and behavioural category that relies heavily on brand image. However, the satisfaction that comes from consumer

126   BARTHES, R.: *Književnost, mitologija, semiologija.* Beograd : Nolit, 1971, p. 166.
127   BOWLBY, J.: *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory.* London : Routledge, 2005, p. 134-148.
128   BULJAN FLANDER, G.: Privrženost. In BULJAN FLANDER, G. (ed.): *Znanost i umjetnost odgoja*. Sveta Nedjelja : Geromar, 2018, p. 143.
129   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 143.
130   SOLAR, M.: *Smrt Sancha Panze.* Zagreb : Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2006, p. 97.
131   JUKIĆ, D.: To Brand or Not to Brand: The Perception of Brand Image in the Digital Games Industry. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 32.
132   MOISCESCU, O. I., ALLEN, B.: The Relationship Between the Dimensions of Brand Loyalty. An Empirical Investigation Among Romanian Urban Consumers. In *Management & Marketing*, 2010, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 85.

beliefs in brand value does not necessarily have the effect of increasing fidelity. There is a certain asymmetry between the degree of consumer satisfaction and consumer fidelity. The phenomenon referred to by B. Bourdieu[133] reveals the connection between satisfaction and loyalty and presents consumer satisfaction as a cumulative category of different dimensions. It should be noted that fidelity starts from the construct brand attachment,[134] which, in the broadest sense of the word, can be distinguished as brand loyalty from brand love and brand devotion in the narrower sense of the word. Let us point out that the phrase brand love encompasses a deeper dimension of brand knowledge and understanding, and even intimate and individual knowledge that often culminates in the construct of brand dedication. It is undeniable that brand loyalty is built on the emotional category of consumers, which leads us to the conclusion that the simplest definition is the most comprehensive: brand loyalty reflects how much the brand attracts us.[135] This means that it includes consumer impressions, motives, needs, stimuli, desires, perceptions and relationships.

Brand identity as well as myth identity can be defined as a system of concepts and attitudes that condition the opinion and behaviour of myth consumers. In this context, we understand mythology as a system of stories and notions. Then the myth becomes an image and an ideology that is primordial.[136] This also agrees with R. Barthes's theory[137] that we can incorporate myth into the value attitudes of society that we analyse as mythical creations. The question that arises in the analysis of digital games is whether the mythic consciousness produces a brand, or the brand image produces a myth? This question is crucial if we accept that the components of brand identity[138] are constructs of self-image, loyalty, and commitment. These same constructs form a mythical structure and serve as a preservation of culture. From the aspect of marketing, we understand this preservation of culture here as brand recognition. Brand identification, loyalty and brand cult form the cultural object of the brand.[139] The elements of brand identity become archetypes (mythical structures) of the brand marked by the sign itself (brand message).

Myth as story (memory) is best seen from *The Walking Dead* series where Clementine builds and creates a myth about Lee and their values through identification with Lee and respect for his educational values. Separating this psychological and pedagogical aspect (sacrifice, upbringing, attachment) from the mythical aspect (the connotation of growing up, maturing, and losing a loved one) we come to the marketing aspect where Clementine symbolizes the whole series and becomes the franchisee presented as a digital game brand. The model of creating a brand through a character from a digital game is identical to the model of creating a brand of a product or service through the consumer's experience, use and consumption. Throughout the series, Clementine has elements of identity that are recognizable, and this distinction of product from product i.e., game from game, makes Clementine exactly what she is – *a digital brand*.

Value is a key factor in understanding the mythical structure and structure of a brand image. The notion of value[140] cannot be separated from the mythical context. Brand value

133   BOURDIEU, B.: *A New Examination of Service Loyalty: Identification of the Antecedents and Outcomes of an Attitudinal Loyalty Framework*. Tallahassee : Florida State University, 2005, p. 45-47.
134   MALAR, L. et al.: Emotional Brand Attachment and Brand Personality: The Relative Importance of the Actual and Ideal Self. In *Journal of Marketing*, 2011, Vol. 75, No. 4, p. 36.; PARK, W. C., MacINNIS, J. D., PRIESTER, J.: *Brand Attachment: Construct, Consequence and Causes*. Hanover : Now Publishers, 2008, p. 4-9.
135   SARTAIN, L., SCHUMANN, M.: *Brand from the Inside*. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 2006, p. 14.
136   SOLAR, M.: *Smrt Sancha Panze.* Zagreb : Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2006, p. 91.
137   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 146.
138   KAPFERER, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management*. London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 183.
139   JUKIĆ, D.: Advergaming: Identity Brand Analysis in the Virtual World. In *CroDiM: International Journal of Marketing Science,* 2019, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 89.
140   VRANEŠEVIĆ, T.: *Upravljanje zadovoljstvom klijenata.* Zagreb : Golden marketing, 2000, p. 90.

is the impression of the consumer. This is the expected value,[141] as opposed to the value of the myth in Heavy Rain representing the father's redemption, or in The Walking Dead where Clementine's upbringing is presented. Expected value is an idea of how it will meet the consumer's needs, desires and requirements. But that doesn't mean Ethan's mythical value is above Lee's mythical value. No, it just says that consumers value certain content and a certain mythical structure of the digital game that way. The strength of the brand is precisely in the consumer's perception, perceived quality and image, just like the experienced and repeated myth. For Barthes it is a speech, for Solar a story that creates a myth, for Keller the brand image or for J. N. Kapferer the brand identity. From whichever aspect you look at it, the myth (connotative sign) has the same root as the brand: both start from the consumer's perception and belief. Ultimately, it is the user who creates the brand[142] of the myth, and the myth lives on as long as they believe in it.

Conclusion

The value of myth cannot correct itself, just as the ideology of myth cannot be observed outside the social environment. The mythical structure in digital games forms connotative signifiers that represent digital discourse to users. Then the content of the consumer's consciousness constitutes the knowledge and experience of the myth. Mythic consciousness is understood as a message (speech according to R. Barthes[143]), as a sphere that embraces signification and reaches the denotations themselves. Mythology in digital games establishes meaning. In such a system of denotation and connotation, a myth is the transition of one message that is inherent in integrated marketing communication[144] to another stage of the message. It is about the notion of brand metaphor as a living organism.[145]

Therefore, concepts such as Clementine, Lee, Ethan, Madison and heavy rain are not just expressions, i.e., words in the discourse of myth that name the object, just as elements of identity are not only visual or auditory signs, but part of the whole connotative sign, i.e., brands. In this way, the myth becomes a message transmitted by the sender, and the gamer accepts this structure in the game in the role of the recipient. The same principle applies to marketing communication between consumers, manufacturers and brands. Such a projection of mythic discourse is consistent with a society to which mythic thinking corresponds. Therefore, Clementine, specifically her baseball cap, is an example that this is not the consequence of a mythical ideology that represents a new myth, but a carefully selected communication that on an emotional level, through consumer impressions, combines 'family' appeals with a signifier of childhood, happiness and parenthood into a brand kaleidoscope. The same is true of the Heavy Rain metaphor itself, where language returns to mythical foundations i.e., the name of the digital game refers to the regression of mythic consciousness.

Finally, another confirmation that adventurous, interactive dramas have become a kind of bearer of a new mythic consciousness stems from the fact that these games produce forms known as genres, mythical characters and mythical rituals of gameplay. The

141   BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Simulacija i zbilja.* Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2001, p. 18-25.; BAUDRILLIARD, J.: *Simulacra and Simulation.* Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 2017, p. 121-129.
142   GRÖNROOS, C.: *Service Management and Marketing: Customer Management in Service Competition.* Hoboken : John Wiley & Sons, 2007, p. 335-339.
143   BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije.* Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 146-152.
144   KESIĆ, T.: *Integrirana marketinška komunikacija.* Zagreb : Opinio, 2003, p. 28-34.
145   KAPFERE, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management.* London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 12.

Walking Dead started the series with Clementine and created a trademark, a recognizable type of game and a mythical structure that is identical to branding. The same goes for Heavy Rain, who created a trademark due to the recognizable emotional relationship of the characters, interactivity with the user and dramatic composition. In this context, the myth in games can also be seen as a utopia, a utopia of an ideal brand or an ideal parenting and childhood.

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ACTA LUDOLOGICA

I Passed Away, but I Can Live Again: The Narrative Contextualization of Death in Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

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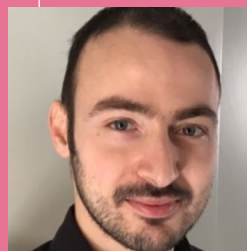
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ABSTRACT:

In digital games, the player's activity often includes a necessary repetition to achieve an appropriate knowledge of the game's mechanics and dynamics. This process can involve various failures of the player. Even if a digital game can be theoretically completed without failures, the player must practically learn from every mistake, which often corresponds to the death of the main character. Every avatar constantly lives in a vulnerable existence that includes its death during the gameplay. If a character can be vulnerable, the player can be inadequate, but digital games always provide a chance of redemption, and a failure becomes a necessary step on the path to further growth. On the basis of various Italian and other international scientific contributions on the themes of failure and death in digital games, the following essay will analyse two different case studies: Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice. In these titles, death is not only a necessary part of the gameplay, but it also becomes a focal concept of the storytelling thanks to two different principles which will underline specific modes to emphasize the narrative importance of death and failure in the digital game medium.

Introduction

Game Over. Players usually read this phrase many times, knowing the game is not over at all. As J. Juul claims, "while games uniquely induce such feelings of being inadequate, they also motivate us to play more in order to escape the same inadequacy, and the feeling of escaping failure (often by improving our skills) is central to the enjoyment of games".[1] This statement underlines that even if players fail, again and again, they can be stimulated to play more to develop their skills and avoid potential future failures. J. Juul argues that failure is a core part of the overall experience of playing a game, which can have a paradoxical motivating power and can stimulate every player to continue in a 'failure improvement cycle'.[2] The implicit stimulation of learning by failing in playful activities has been discussed by other Italian and International experts, such as M. Bittanti,[3] J. McGonigal[4] and D. Melhart.[5] Despite different methodologies, researchers agree that to achieve a detailed knowledge of a game, players must repeat their performance to master their skills. In digital games, specifically, the concept of failure often involves the death of the main character. Every avatar continually lives in a paradoxical existence condition that implies its death and resurrection during the gameplay. As R. F. Nohr argues, if

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1   JUUL, J.: *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2013, p. 7.
2   Ibidem, p. 60.
3   ADOLGISO, A.: *Enterprise: Voci dallo Spazio*. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.adolgiso.it/enterprise/matteo_bittanti.asp>.
4   McGONIGAL, J.: *La realtà in gioco. Perché I giochi ci rendono migliori e come possono cambiare il mondo.* Milan : Apogeo, 2011, p. 69-82.
5   See also: MELHART, D.: Towards a Comprehensive Model of Mediating Frustration in Videogames. In *Game Studies,* 2018, Vol. 18, No. 1. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1801/articles/david_melhart>.

a character can be vulnerable, the player can be inadequate, but digital games always provide a chance of redemption, and the failure becomes a necessary step on a "self-optimisation" path.[6]

Despite the essential ludic ability improvement of the player, the concept of death in digital games can have many contextualised functions. This essay will consider two different video games, *Dead Cells*[7] and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*[8], in which death is not only a necessary part of their gameplay, but it also becomes a focal part of their storytelling. The focalisation on death is etymologically underlined in the titles of these digital games born in two different contexts: Dead Cells is an indie game[9] by a small team of developers, while Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is a huge production from a massive Japanese studio. These two cases will be analysed through a textual approach focused on their structural configuration of spaces and the players' possibility to evoke narrative by moving inside them after every death. With a combination of pre-existing theories by academic researchers on spatial representation in the digital game medium and the developers' approach to level design of the two case studies, this essay will underline two different principles, namely *emerging elements,* and *hidden fragments*. The purpose is to demonstrate that these two principles can stimulate players to accept the event of death/failure in video games and overcome it to reinforce their knowledge.

The Procedural Generation of Emerging Elements in Dead Cells

Dead Cells is a two-dimensional side scroller action game based on a pixel art aesthetic and a procedural system for its level design: the player controls a mass of cells that occupy the body of a deceased and innominate warrior without memory, who must escape from a strange castle full of aggressive creatures. Every time the protagonist dies, the cells of its body can recreate the warrior in the prison, which is the first room of the castle; so, the player must begin from the start, and the structure of the castle changes with every new run for mysterious reasons. Even if the names of the macro zones do not change from one run to another, the progression is widely different, so as for the environmental composition of every zone, which can paradoxically be familiar and unknown after every death.

As the lead game designer, S. Bénard, explains, the small team decided to go for fully randomly generated spaces with some common structural aspects: for example, in a level, they know that at every generation there will be an entrance, eight rooms, and two exits, but the specific enemies, the environmental contents, and the usable weapons in each sin-

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6   NOHR, R. F.: Restart after Death: Self-optimizing, Normalism and Re-entry in Computer Games. In OUELLETTE, M., THOMPSON, J. (eds.): *The Game Culture Reader*. Cambridge : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 67.
7   MOTION TWIN: *Dead Cells*. [digital game]. Bordeaux : Motion Twin, 2017.
8   FROM SOFTWARE: *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice.* [digital game]. Tokyo : Activision, 2019.
9   Remark by the author: Even if the term 'indie game' is commonly related to a digital game created by a small number of developers without a publisher, the etymology of this terminology is more complex. For more information, see: GARDA, M. B., GRABARCZYK, P.: Is Every Indie Game Independent? Towards the Concept of Independent Game. In *Game Studies*, 2016, Vol. 16, No. 1. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1601/articles/gardagrabarczyk>.

gle room change each time.[10] This procedural level design leads to what S. Bénard considers the gameplay's three pillars: *combat*, *progression*, and *replayability*.[11] In fact, even if players must start again from the beginning of the castle after the avatar's death, they can have a different experience every time because of the mutation of the environment and the different combination of weapons inside it. Death becomes a paradoxical opportunity to progress in the game since in every run count: when the protagonist kills a creature, it can collect the cells of the enemy, which can be used in a huge shop inside the first room of the castle. This shop is only reachable by dying since the game does not allow backtracking to previous levels. Unlike shops that the player can find during the progression, which contain a relatively small number of accessories, the shop in the first castle's room is full of a vast range of weapons and general upgrades capable of reinforcing the protagonist.

The collection of different and more powerful gadgets is fundamental to reaching the perfect run in which the warrior can kill the final boss. Dead Cells is a game in which the player's ability is mainly based on the capacity to combine different types of weapons to facilitate the progression with every new run. In fact, as S. Bénard explains, the mechanics of Dead Cells are designed to help the player with movements during exploration and the various fights, in which the warrior automatically reach ledges while jumping and attacks in the opponent's direction.[12] These hidden tips facilitate the dynamics throughout the entire game, so it is up to the players to figure out the best weapons to use and in what combination, depending on their actual equipment. The incessant death of the warrior and the mutation of the castle offer not only the possibility to collect more weapons and try to progress but also to try to imagine a global narrative context. S. Bénard argued in various interviews that the developers did not build a specific storyline for their game because it would have been so hard to fit in with the procedural generation of levels. Despite that, they wanted to implement some potential narrative aspects to create an overall story with some strange and non-explained events.[13]

In fact, on every run, it is possible to meet various characters who can talk to the warrior, and environmental elements which can represent potential clues to build a global narrative that can potentially explain the mysterious changes of the castle as well for the background of the protagonist and its constant resurrections. For example, after the first death, a woman appears near the prison of the castle, and she says to the main character: "Anyway, it must be strange to be back from the dead... [...] I don't really understand it. [...]. But you're not the first to find yourself in this situation, if that's what you want to know...".[14] The protagonist is not able to answer since it cannot talk, but in the following progression, it can find various other clues and makes hypotheses about them. Another example: in a room, the main character can find a letter which talks about a mysterious plague, and it thinks "Maybe the guard who wrote this letter... and didn't survive".[15]

The procedural generation of spaces can evoke every possible clue in a random order, so the player has to collect and unify these clues to understand a global narrative context. In order to do that, the player has to interact with each possible clue in the virtual space by pressing a button when there is a contextual magnifier icon: in the previous two

10   *How Dead Cells Secretly Stops You From Dying | Audio Logs*. Released on 5th May 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtBNffzWhf4>.
11   *Dead Cells: What the F*n!?*. Released on 12th June 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfSpBoA6TWw>.
12   *How Dead Cells Secretly Stops You From Dying | Audio Logs*. Released on 5th May 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtBNffzWhf4>.
13   REINER, A.: *Dead Cells' Designer Discusses Scrapped Ideas, Roguelikes, and the Potential for a Sequel*. Released on 30th December 2018. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.gameinformer.com/interview/2018/12/30/dead-cells-designer-discusses-scrapped-ideas-roguelikes-and-the-potential-for>.
14   MOTION TWIN: *Dead Cells*. [digital game]. Bordeaux : Motion Twin, 2017.
15   Ibidem.

examples, so as for many other similar situations, the protagonist can discover something only if the player decides to press a button to have additional information from characters or environmental elements. Thus, many clues do not depend on pre-scripted cut-scenes, but on the player's willingness to navigate in the procedural spaces with the possibility to find new narrative suggestions on every new run.

As M. Nitsche argues, "game spaces can evoke narratives because the player is making sense of them in order to engage with them. Through a comprehension of signs and interaction with them, the player generates new meaning".[16] The clues implemented in the space to assist the comprehension are what Nitsche calls evocative narrative elements, and their aim "is not to tell a linear story, but to provide evocative means for the interactor to comprehend the virtual space and the events within it, and generate context and significance in order to make the space and the experience of it more meaningful".[17] M. Nitsche is fundamentally talking about environmental storytelling, a process where the narrative is basically incorporated in spaces, and the player has to explore to discover as many evocative narrative elements as possible. This argument is correlated with a reflection from H. Jenkins, who argues that game designers should think about levels as narrative architectures in which the player is free to explore and discover clues to subsequently imagine a story.[18] Starting with H. Jenkins' essay and M. Nitsche's monograph, there have been other international and Italian researchers focused on the concept of environmental storytelling,[19] and they have always emphasized the role of spatiality as a fundamental component for the narrative development of a game.

In Dead Cells, the space, as well for its procedural generation, is not only valuable for ludic purposes, but it contains different evocative narrative elements in casual order from one run to another and stimulates the player to collect and make sense of them through the mysterious resurrections of the protagonist. Even if the developers of *Dead Cells* did not think about a specific storyline, the game presents a global narrative context in which some details are discoverable only during the various runs, while other details do not have an implemented explanation. Dead Cells is a concrete example of what K. Salen and E. Zimmerman call emergent narrative,[20] which means that a huge part of the storyline can be built from the game through exploration and subsequently through single or collaborative imagination. In fact, players worldwide have created a huge ongoing wiki page and many videos in which they try to build an organic narrative by explaining every possible clue, demonstrating the innate propensity of users for immersion in stories, argued among others by F. Rose.[21]

So, Dead Cells is a game in which death represents a new possibility to collect new powerful weapons to improve survival chances and collect even more evocative narrative elements to imagine an emergent narrative. As a result, in this game the theme of death emphasizes *emerging elements*, both from a ludic and narrative perspective.

16   NITSCHE, M.: *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Worlds*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2008, p. 3.
17   Ibidem, p. 45.
18   JENKINS, H.: Game Design as Narrative Architecture. In HARRIGAN, P., WARDRIP-FRUIN, N. (eds.): *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2004, p. 121-129.
19   FERNANDEZ-VARA, C.: Game Spaces Speak Volumes: Indexical Storytelling. In COPIER, M., WAERN, A., KENNEDY, H. W. (eds.): *DiGRA '11 – Proceedings of the 2011 DiGRA International Conference: Think Design Play*. Hilversum : Digital Games Research Association, 2011, p. 2-11. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/Game-Spaces-Speak-Volumes.pdf>.; D'ARMENIO, E.: *Mondi Paralleli. Ripensare l'interattività nei videogiochi*. Milan : Unicopli, 2014, p. 81-151.; PLANELLS DE LA MAZA, A. J.: *Possible Worlds in Video Games: From Classic Narrative to Meaningful Actions*. Pittsburgh : ETC Press, 2017, p. 99-182.
20   SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2003, p. 377-379.
21   For more information, see: ROSE, F.: *The Art of Immersion. How the Digital Generation Is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories*. London, New York : Norton & Company, 2010.

The Embedded Hidden Fragments in Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is a third-person three-dimensional action-adventure game that is set in a re-imagined 16th century Sengoku period, with many references to Japanese folklore and Buddhist mythology. The storyline of the game is complex, and even if there is no space here to delve into the entire lore of this case study, it is important to analyse how it can be experienced as a player.

The main character is Wolf, a shinobi who must protect a young lord named Kuro, who has the gift of immortality thanks to a mysterious Dragon's heritage. A few minutes into the game, Wolf must fight against Genichiro, the grandson of a clan lord who wants to kidnap Kuro to take the gift of immortality from his blood so he can regain the Kingdom of Ashina after a tragic war. The fight, both for the protagonist and the player, is unwinnable since Genichiro in this part of the game is much more powerful and skilled than Wolf: as a result, in an inevitable cut-scene, the protagonist loses an arm, gets killed, and Kuro is kidnapped. After this inevitable failure, Wolf comes back from death in an abandoned temple, where an old shinobi gives him a prosthetic arm and explains that the protagonist had previously received the gift of immortality thanks to the Dragon's heritage of Kuro, but he has to pay attention since various resurrections can corrupt his blood with a plague named 'dragon root'. From now on, Wolf begins to search for his young lord in Ashina and other places near it, meeting various mysterious enemies and mystic creatures who want to stop him for initially unclear reasons. Those moments are important anticipators of the overall game, in which death is contextualised both in the gameplay and in the deep narrative. However, there are substantial differences from the overall playing experience of the previously discussed Dead Cells.

As the lead game designer M. Yamamura explains in an interview, the gameplay of Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is based on the mastery of each possible defence and the attack abilities of the protagonist, on the memorisation of the enemy's movements, and on the acquisition of experience points to learn more combat arts.[22] Unlike Dead Cells, in this case, the game does not assist the player, who has to learn the dynamics in his/her own way, and it is not based on the collection of weapons, since Wolf can only use a main sword and some improvements for his prosthetic arm. In Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, the learning and habit of the combat system imply a necessary repetition of the failure improvement cycle stated by Juul, since even against minor enemies, the player feels constant vulnerability. This is part of the philosophy design of the developer's team, which is used to create very tough games due to the necessity to master the dynamics by patiently repeating some battles and feeling a sense of achievement in the case of victory.[23] In Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, the learning of movements and techniques is particularly stimulated by the mandatory fights with bosses, who can seem, like in the initial duel against Genichiro, unstoppable at first. When the protagonist dies in a fight, the player can push a button to resurrect immediately with limited vital resources, but in the case of another death, Wolf cannot come back instantly, and he wakes up near the nearest idol (a symbolic statue that by praying can connect the kingdom of living beings with the kingdom of death entities).

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22   *New Gameplay and Details on Creating Sekiro's Combat*. Released on 6th January 2019. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipBDs0gnPRg>.

23   *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice Gameplay Interview – IGN Live E3 2018*. Released on 14th June 2018. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyqZYvbxJLw>.

As previously mentioned, each death is not without consequences. When Wolf dies many times, his blood can be corrupted by the 'dragon root'. This also afflicts some characters emotionally linked to him and lowers the chances of receiving upgrades for the player, who can remove the plague only by finding some special items through exploring the virtual world. This activity has a significant role in Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, both from a ludic and narrative perspective. When Wolf explores the environment, he can reach new zones where there are various optional enemies and bosses: even if they represent a concrete danger, the player is stimulated to engage in fights with them because he/she already knows the 'dragon root' has to be healed, and he/she can also obtain a considerable amount of experience by learning and mastering new techniques which can be potentially useful also against the mandatory bosses.

The exploration is also an integral and essential activity to comprehend the deep narrative: in this digital game, some cut-scenes highlight the main narrative nodes in chronological order, but they are not enough to understand all the lore of Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, which can be revealed only by observing clues and experiencing some hidden events in the virtual world. This is basically part of the previously mentioned principle of environmental storytelling. However, unlike the case of Dead Cells, in which there are a lot of evocative narrative elements potentially valuable for building an emergent narrative, in Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, there are entire areas, characters, and events that represent important integrations to the main narrative line. As the marketing manager Y. Kitao and the producer R. Conkey argue in an interview, the level design wants to build multiple interconnected environments with multiple paths to get to each other, in which the player always has the freedom to move inside it.[24] This assertion reflects a peculiar approach to level design by From Software, particularly in the last decade. As D. Vella argues in a most comprehensive reflection on his concept of the ludic sublime in *Dark Souls*[25], the Japanese company aims to create perpetual gameworlds, where the player has the impression to navigate inside a sort of labyrinth full of potential lore.[26]

Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice features an interconnected narrative discoverable in a different order, which is mainly hidden in various optional areas. For example, in a secret cavern inside a sunken valley, there is a giant white sacred snake, and the player can avoid the battle against the creature. However, if the player decides to go deeper into the cavern, there is the possibility to discover a secret item, and pick it up to make the creature vulnerable to a deadly attack. Then, if the player kills the giant snake, there are two rewards: many experience points and another element that will be fundamental to reach one of the possible four endings. Another emblematic example is the location of Hirata Estate, in which Wolf can physically (re)live some of his forgotten memories. To reach this area, the player must find two hidden bells and offer them in the Ashina Outskirts to a Buddha statue, which has the power to transport the protagonist three years in the past. The player can visit Hirata Estate two times: on both occasions, the exploration in that environment and the motivation to face fierce opponents can reveal crucial narrative portions, as the situation in which Wolf dies for the first time, the origin of his power of immortality, and the purposes of his adoptive father. The exploration of Hirata Estate, and the possible victories against the two bosses at the end of each flashback, can give many experience points, and they are also crucial in the steps to reach the best possible epilogue.

24   *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice Gameplay Interview – IGN Live E3 2018*. Released on 14th June 2018. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyqZYvbxJLw>.
25   FROM SOFTWARE: *Dark Souls*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Namco Bandai, 2011.
26   VELLA, D.: No Mastery Without Mystery: Dark Souls and the Ludic Sublime. In *Game Studies*, 2015, Vol. 15, No. 1. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1501/articles/vella>.

These circumstances emphasize the importance of exploration in Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, and the sense of ludic and narrative achievement it can indue into a player who wants to discover more and more aspects of the virtual world. As a result, even if some details are capable of players' speculations, the game emphasises an embedded narrative,[27] which can be fully understood only by exploring all the huge environments. In fact, as the lead concept designer T. Takahashi confirms in an interview, one of the game's purposes is to stimulate players to look at the world around them and notice some details in places they do not expect and move deeper to discover the reasons behind those details.[28] The propensity to do this activity is crucial for the epilogues since the four different endings depend not only on a choice at a certain point of the adventure, but also on the interaction with specific characters in some areas, and on the possession of special items before the final duel. So, Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is a game in which death represents the beginning of a ludic and narrative progression path, in which the player not only masters the techniques of Wolf but also discovers new areas that deepen the overall embedded and interconnected narrative. As a result, in this game the theme of death emphasizes *hidden fragments*, which give the opportunity to improve the combat abilities and integrate the main storyline with important narrative portions.

Conclusions

Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice are two different games that contextualise the theme of death both from a ludic and a narrative perspective, but they do so in two different modes, depending on what the player is encouraged to do to avoid new failures and obtain a global sense of achievement. Thus, Dead Cells is mainly based on emerging elements that materialise both in weapons that can facilitate the ludic progression and potentially useful clues to imagine an emerging global narrative. In the other case, Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice is mainly based on hidden fragments that materialise both in dynamics to be learned and in areas that contain conspicuous portions of an environmentally embedded narrative. Even if the two case studies of this essay are important examples of the two above-mentioned principles for their correlation with the theme of death, it is important to state that the procedural creation of emerging elements or the design of spaces as useful narrative hidden fragments is not exclusively correlated to Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice. They can relate to the development processes of many companies.

The procedural generation of levels and the creation of emerging elements are present in various games developed by independent teams; for example, one of them is *Neon Abyss*[29], in which the player controls a soldier who must go into a mutating structure to kill some crazy machines. Another example is the multi-awarded *Hades*[30], in which the player controls Zagreus, who repeatedly tries to escape from a mutating Underworld by fighting against other Gods to reach Mount Olympus and discover the truth about its family. The design of spaces as hidden fragments in the main storyline is a common trait of some games developed by From Software, as the previously mentioned Dark Souls (and the

27   SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2003, p. 377-379.
28   *Exclusive Interview on Creating Sekiro's New World.* Released on 19th January 2019. [online]. [2021-06-16]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qKBSMBMFDM>.
29   VEEWO GAMES: *Neon Abyss.* [digital game]. Xiamen : Team 17, 2020.
30   SUPERGIANT GAMES: *Hades.* [digital game]. San Francisco : Supergiant Games, 2020.

entire following saga) but also of games created by other companies. An example is *Nioh*[31], which presents another complex narrative based on Japanese folklore; another example is *Remnant from the Ashes*[32], which is set in a post-apocalyptic world where some mysterious machines enslave and kill human beings without mercy. Nevertheless, this essay has focused on Dead Cells and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice because they respectively emphasize the principles of emerging elements and hidden fragments inside virtual worlds in which death and resurrection represent a core concept, both for ludic and narrative purposes.

Therefore, the implementation of emerging elements through a procedural generation of contents can help the development of small teams of people since they do not have to think about a specific narrative to be integrated with the game dynamics, but instead to maintain a global balance during the procedural progression. This means that game programmers and gameplay designers must avoid the system generating the most powerful elements from the beginning, instead making them gradually discoverable to the user. In the other case, creating an embedded narrative through hidden fragments is more related to large companies since it often means metaphorical alchemy among many people specialised in many different areas of development, such as game designers, narrative designers, game writers, map designers, concept artists, environment artists, and more. Despite those differences, the implementation of emerging elements or hidden fragments and the stimulation to discover them after the main character's deaths can be a potential way to remember one of the main aspects of the digital game experience, which can be a sort of metaphor for our own lives: when we get involved in a challenge, we can fail, but failure is only part of a growth path by which we can discover more aspects of ourselves and the world around us, with the implicit promise that if we do not give up, sooner or later, success will come.

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31   KOEI TECMO GAMES: *Nioh*. [digital game]. Yokohama : Koei Tecmo Games, 2017.
32   GUNFIRE GAMES: *Remnant from the Ashes*. [digital game]. Austin : Perfect World Entertainment, 2019.

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Stereotypical Negative Female Gender Roles in Digital Games

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ABSTRACT:

Digital games represent a new media form dominated by men, either as characters or as players. The perception of digital games as 'Boys' Fun' has been denied by the latest research that points to the fact that women are increasingly accessing this medium. But the analysis of digital games shows that gender roles appear in this media as real-world stereotypes. It means that there is discrimination against women who often have a passive role, whether they appear as victims or as sexual objects. When they are not damsels in distress helplessly awaiting their saviour or playing heroines, then, they are most often portrayed as rebellious beauties with oversized dimensions. The subject of this paper is female representation in digital games. Authors used content analysis of 30 digital games with female protagonists, published at J Station, to examine the female gender roles in such digital games. The aim of the empirical study is to demonstrate that the elements of gender discrimination are present in digital games and that they can lead to the creation of harmful stereotypes against women.

KEY WORDS:

digital games, discrimination, female, gender roles, stereotype.

Introduction

Lately, digital games, which are an integral part of the daily lives of many people, are considered to be the fastest growing mass media in the world.[1] Digital games, with predominantly violent and sexual content, represent one of the most popular forms of contemporary media.[2] It is considered that digital games are primarily intended for men,[3] who appear in a twofold role: as creators of games and as players. Digital games, as a part of contemporary media, often promote incorrect and negative ideas of how a female person should look and behave. Studies indicate that men and women follow the expectations of gender roles within the allegedly liberated cyber space boundaries.[4] With such an approach, digital games are accepting stereotype gender roles, whereby gender stereotype is seen as a set of beliefs about what it means to be a female or a male. "Gender stereotypes include information on physical appearance, attitudes and interests, psychological traits, social relationships and occupation".[5]

The subject of this paper is the representation of female characters based on gender stereotypes in digital games that are supported by the creative game design that portrays women from the position of traditionally negative gender roles. Roles targeted at

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1 For more information, see: ROKOŠNÝ, I.: Digital Games as a Cultural Phenomenon: A Brief History and Current State. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 49-60.

2 MAKUCH, E.: *Best-Selling Games and Systems of July 2021 (US): Skyward Sword HD, PS5, and Switch Top the Charts.* Released on 13th August 2021. [online]. [2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/best-selling-games-and-systems-of-july-2021-us-skyward-sword-hd-ps5-and-switch-top-the-charts/1100-6495131/>.

3 See also: YEE, N.: Maps of Digital Desires: Exploring the Topography of Gender and Play in Online Games. In KAFAI, Y. et al. (eds.): *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming.* Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 2008, p. 83-96.

4 GUADAGNO, R. E. et al.: Even in Virtual Environments Women Shop and Men Build: Gender Differences in Second Life. In *Computers in Human Behavior,* 2011, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 305.

5 GOLOMBOK, S., FIVUSH, R.: *Gender Development.* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 17.

women are closely defined and often contain violent scenes in which woman are depicted as victims. Digital games encourage male players to perceive women as hypersexual individuals, so sexualized female characters in digital games portray women with overlapping female attributes (huge breasts, long legs, slim waist …) and thus degrade female characters to sexual objects. Sexism is a negative stereotype, prejudice or discrimination of one gender that is depicted as inferior to the other.[6] A woman who is portrayed in the digital game narrative as less intelligent and incapable of caring for herself, is perceived as an object fit for sexual violence. This phenomenon is known as sexual objectification,[7] because women are not viewed as personalities but as objects whose value is assessed based on their physical appearance and sexual attraction. Sexual objectivation is associated with patriarchal culture that emphasizes male domination, violence and sexism. This kind of 'macho culture' is referred to as 'cultural violence' by D. Gutierrez,[8] and such violence is covertly transmitted in the socialization process, while digital games are contributing to it. All this becomes even more important if we take into account the fact that digital games have a very powerful means of persuasion,[9] and therefore can negatively affect the attitude of male players towards women.

"The media have become the language of our public culture"[10] and in media stories "the body is socially constructed and represents social relations of power, as body is a collection of practices or techniques".[11] When game designers are introducing female characters in digital games, they tend to project gender stereotypes. "Stereotype involves stripping down the totality of a person to the series of exaggerated, usually negative character traits. Stereotype denotes the boundaries between the normal and the rejected, them and us".[12] Gender-based scheme theory reveals stereotypes and sexual interactions that define women as submissive, sexually-orientated and less intelligent than men.[13] Given that, women are 'helpless', they always fall into trouble and male characters are coming to their rescue. But women in digital games are not just damsels in distress, sometimes they get the main role of a heroine, but even then, their most prominent feature is sexuality.[14]

The aim of the paper is to explore the ways of portraying female characters in digital games and to point out that digital games support negative gender stereotypes. The research included an analysis of the content and design of digital games to provide input data on sexual objectification and violence against women that are represented in the virtual space and implemented in the culture of everyday life. The aim is also to point out that digital games represent an expression of existing culture and do not deviate from stereotypes regarding power hierarchy and gender differences. This approach to creating digital games contributes to the gender representation of patriarchal society constructs.

6   ABRAMS, D. et al.: Perceptions of Stranger and Acquaintance Rape: The Role of Benevolent and Hostile Sexism in Victim Blame and Rape Proclivity. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 2003, Vol. 84, No. 1, p.112.

7   FREDRICKSON, B. L., ROBERTS, T.: Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks. In *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 1997, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 173.

8   DÍEZ, G.: Video Games and Gender-Based Violence. In *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 2014, Vol. 132, No. 1, p. 59.

9   BALTEZAREVIĆ, R. et al.: Political Marketing in Digital Games: 'Game Over' for Traditional Political Marketing Methods. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 30.

10   DAHLGREN, P.: Media and the Public Sphere. In RITZER, G. (ed.): *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology.* Malden : Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 2908.

11   TURNER, B. S.: Body and Cultural Sociology. In NELSON, T. D. (ed.): *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology.* Malden : Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 326.

12   For more information, see: BARKER, Ch.: *Cultural Studies*. London : Sage Publications, 2003.

13   DOWNS, E., SMITH, S. L.: Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2009, Vol. 62, No. 11, p. 723.

14   MIKULA, M.: Gender and Videogames: The Political Valency of Lara Croft. In *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies,* 2003, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 84.

Digital Game Players

"The game is constantly present in the life of man and is needed both for the individual and the society, primarily because of the social connections that the participants of the game accomplish. The development of technology and the Internet has empowered the emergence of a new kind of game".[15] By observing the development of human society, we can conclude that man has never ceased to play certain games. However, the game was changing, as society changed, adapting to changes. "Digital games increasingly replace traditional games and have a direct impact on the way Internet users fill their free time. The availability of platforms and game delivery technologies is an important factor in the phenomenon of mass interest in video games".[16] Statista gives information that, in 2020, digital games were actively played by 2 billion 690 million players around the world.[17] In the early years of digital games there were few female players. It was registered that in the 1980s digital games were played by only 5% of women,[18] which is why it is not surprising that female players were considered a minority. However, the latest research indicates that female players today account for about half of all players. Data collected in the USA by polling more than 4,000 households in the first quarter of 2020 indicated that 41% of players were female.[19]

The research conducted in Europe by Ipsos Connect in the third quarter of 2018, covered a survey of 4,000 respondents in the UK, France, Germany and Spain. The survey indicated the following percentage of female players by country: in the UK digital games are played by 48% of female respondents; in France 66%; in Germany 52% of female respondents and in Spain 47% of female respondents.[20] However, although there has been an increase in female player participation, disparities are still present when it comes to creating digital games. Data for 2019 indicate that programmers were 71% male, 24% female and 5% transgender.[21]

Widespread changes, as a result of the activities of women's rights activists, have forced the digital game industry to change the ability to control characters and their appearance. Game companies, in order to increase the variety of games, have produced several games in which the main role is played by women. Between 2015 and 2017, several female characters that appeared on the gaming market became classic characters, and gaming companies won a number of awards for those games. A good example of digital games with main female characters are *Life Is Strange*[22] and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*[23]. In recent years, a large number of games have appeared that provide a more diverse choice

15   BALTEZAREVIĆ, R., BALTEZAREVIĆ, B., BALTEZAREVIĆ, V.: The Video Gaming Industry: From Play to Revenue. In *International Review,* 2018, Vol. 7, No. 3-4, p. 71.
16   BALTEZAREVIĆ, B., BALTEZAREVIĆ, R.: The Impact of Video Games on the Identity of the Players. In *KULTURA POLISA,* 2018, Vol. 15, No. 36, p. 476.
17   *Number of Active Video Gamers Worldwide from 2014 to 2021 (in millions).* [online]. [2021-06-01]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/748044/number-video-gamers-world/>.
18   For more information, see: GRAYNER, R. S.: *Gender Inclusive Game Design: Expanding the Market.* Boston : Cengage Learning, 2004.
19   *Distribution of Computer and Video Gamers in the United States from 2006 to 2020, by Gender.* [online]. [2021-05-16]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/232383/gender-split-of-us-computer-and-video-gamers/>.
20   WHYTE-SMITH, H. et al: *Game Track Digest: Quarter 3-2018*. 2018. [online]. [2021-05-15]. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2018-10/techtracker_q3_2018_final2.pdf>.
21   *Distribution of Game Developers Worldwide from 2014 to 2019, by Gender.* [online]. [2021-05-16]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/453634/game-developer-gender-distribution-worldwide/>.
22   DONTNOD ENTERTAINMENT, DECK NINE: *Life Is Strange (series).* [digital game]. Tokyo : Square Enix, 2015-2021.
23   NINJA THEORY: *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*. [digital game]. Cambridge : Ninja Theory, 2017.

to players, so that in many games players can create their own characters (to choose gender, appearance, skin, and body shape). Regarding the representation of male and female characters in digital games in the period 2008-2017, statistical data show that in the last decade there were fewer female characters than male. Female characters accounted for 27% of the total, while male characters accounted for 73%. Game designers were more inclined to offer male characters to players. Probably the main reason for this phenomenon is that it seems that the designers of digital games believed that female characters could not be the main heroine due to female stereotypes. Compared to men, women are weaker and, in many games, (for example *Super Mario*[24], *Zelda*[25] and *Final Fantasy XV*[26]) they usually need to be protected. Unfortunately, due to such stereotypes, the designers did not want to give female characters the same abilities as male characters, because they were not sure that the game would be sold. Fortunately, today male or female characters can be chosen at the beginning of the game, and this change increases the number of female characters in the database, but that number is still significantly lower than male characters.[27] In 2015, out of 76 games presented (at the E3 conference), only seven of them had female heroines as the main characters – less than 10 percent. In 2016, the number of games on which women were centred was only 3 percent. In 2019, of the 126 games we collected at E3 events hosted by Microsoft, Nintendo, Bethesda, Ubisoft, Square Enik, and EA, only six games had major female characters, while nearly five times as many games (28) had centred male characters.[28] According to available data, the ratio of male and female main characters in digital games in the period from 2015 to 2020 is as follows: in 2015, the ratio is 32% (male characters) versus 9% (female characters), in 2016, this ratio is at its lowest level, 41% (male characters), versus only 2% (female), in 2017 the ratio is 26% versus 7%, in 2018, 24% versus 8%, in 2019, 21% versus 5%. However, in 2020, there was a significant change in the digital game industry; the percentage of male main characters was 23%, compared to as many as 18% of female main characters.[29] Women still have little involvement in game design and development, which may be one of the reasons why female characters are under-represented as main characters, and because of which they have reserved secondary roles portraying them as sexual objects or damsels in distress.

Gender Roles in Digital Games

There is a good principle that created order, light, and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman.

Pythagoras (585-507 BC)

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24   NINTENDO EAD, NINTENDO EPD: *Super Mario (series)*. [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1985-2021.
25   NINTENDO EAD et al.: *The Legend of Zelda (series)*. [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1986-2021.
26   SQUARE ENIX BUSINESS DIVISION 2: *Final Fantasy XV*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Square Enix, 2016.
27   LIU, A.: *Gender Representation in Video Games*. [Master Thesis]. Boston : Northeastern University, 2019, p. 46.
28   SARKEESIAN, A., PETIT, C.: *Female Representation in Videogames Isn't Getting Any Better.* Released on 14th June 2019. [online]. [2021-10-16]. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/e3-2019-female-representation-videogames/>.
29   *Share of Video Game Protagonists from 2015 to 2020, by Gender.* [online]. [2021-05-16]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/871912/character-gender-share-video-games/>.

In digital games roles are designed to meet social expectations. These roles represent gender roles that are fuelled by unhealthy stereotypes, such as a 'strong boy', who is violent and behaves like a playboy.[30] Men and women usually accept characters created on the basis of their gender patterns, even if the characteristics of a virtual character differ from their actual character traits[31] and often assume a "mask of masculinity".[32] Mass media influence the perception of the real world by providing unrealistic, virtual concepts of beauty and moral rules that are formed within cyber space. L. Papadopoulos, who in the capacity of a clinical psychologist deals with this issue, states that the permanent representation of men as dominant and aggressive and female characters as subordinate and humiliating results in the support of violence against women. A discriminatory approach to female characters becomes a gender negative message that is transmitted to digital game players, whose number is increasing every year.[33]

Theorists who deal with this issue, besides the reasons we have already mentioned (that women have little or no involvement in game design and development), also provide other reasons contributing to female subordination to male characters:

1. Economic Motive: It has been proven that digital games with stereotypical gender roles have a large audience contributing to the financial success of placement of such digital games;[34]
2. Male players mostly opt for games where the main characters are male;[35]
3. Digital games support accepted social standards and stereotypes, and such content is expected to be more acceptable to players, especially to male players for whom they are primarily intended;[36]
4. Female characters are too sexualized, as they are intended for younger male players who are predominantly playing these games and to whom such content is more interesting than other content.[37]

Terminology for gender issues was developed primarily in the 1970s by feminist movements that tried to draw attention to the struggles of their own gender. Their use of this term was focused on the difference in cultural representation of both sexes.[38] Gender discourse is present in various sociological and psychological studies.[39] It is assumed that gender is assigned on the basis of physical characteristics, as well as the social context, which differs from culture to culture. Descriptive details of what is male-female are based on the biological potential that a person has, as well as on the cultural roles that gender most often assumes.[40] In situations where women play digital games (such as the *World of Warcraft*[41]), they would rather choose a female character in a female role than a male character in a male role. This

30 MAHALIK, J. R., GOOD, G. E., ENGLAR-CARLSON, M.: Masculinity Scripts, Presenting Concerns, and Help Seeking: Implications for Practice and Training. In *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice,* 2003, Vol. 34, No. 2, p. 124.
31 GUADAGNO, R. E. et al.: Even in Virtual Environments Women Shop and Men Build: Gender Differences in Second Life. In *Computers in Human Behavior,* 2011, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 304.
32 EDWARDS, K., JONES, S.: Putting My Man Face on: A Grounded Theory of College Men's Gender Identity Development. In *Journal of College Student Development,* 2009, Vol. 50, No. 2, p. 216.
33 For more information, see: PAPADOPOULOS, L.: *Sexualisation of Young People: Review.* London : Home Office Publication, 2010.
34 NEAR, C. E.: Selling Gender: Associations of Box Art Representation of Female Characters with Sales for Teen- and Mature-Rated Video Games. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2013, Vol. 68, No. 3, p. 252.
35 Ibidem, p. 265.
36 LUCAS, K., SHERRY, J. L.: Sex Differences in Video Game Play: A Communication-Based Explanation. In *Communication Research,* 2004, Vol. 31, No. 5, p. 517.
37 BEASLEY, B., STANDLEY, C. T.: Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an Indicator of Gender Role Stereotyping in Video Games. In Mass Communication and Society, 2002, Vol. 5, No. 3. p. 289.
38 For more information, see: CASSELL, J., JENKINS, H.: *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 2000.
39 See also: BUTLER, J.: *Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity*. New York : Routledge, 1990.
40 See: BORNSTEIN, K.: *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. New York : Routledge, 1994.
41 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *World of Warcraft*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2004.

choice is considered to be in line with what social role theory predicts, but personal stereotypical beliefs about gender role have not taken these choices into account. In addition, the male and female 'tanks', available to players in this game, did not differ in the number of negative comments they received, which is contrary to predictions based on role congruence theory.[42]

Games that involve violence against female characters or otherwise objectify female characters can have profound social effects.[43] Digital games and media have the potential to influence how an individual, who experiences them, sees their inner self and the world around him/her. Exposure to gender stereotypes in digital games, as several studies have shown, affects how both female and male players make social judgments, about themselves and others. Significant interaction with such games showed that men, exposed to stereotypical content, made judgments that were more tolerant of real-life sexual harassment, in addition, long-term exposure to violence in digital games is correlated with greater tolerance of sexual harassment and greater acceptance of the myth of rape.[44] Exposure to games that adhere to sexist stereotypes for both male and female characters can affect how individuals construct their socio-cultural frameworks in the real world. This can happen on a personal level, as well as externally. Significantly, studies have found that exposure to gender stereotypes in games leads to effects on player self-perception. It is believed that women's self-efficacy is negatively affected by playing with a sexualized female character and as a result may lead to the adoption of beliefs and standards that are consistent with these sexualized depictions by players, resulting in a desire to be like digital game characters (among women) and to judge themselves and others on the basis of character (both among men and among women).[45] Children are also compared to their favourite characters in terms of strength, height and ability. Due to the lack of these characteristics, they may feel that they are not as "good" as their character from digital games.[46] Studies have shown that games have the potential to encode gender stereotypes in children. And while these special studies address concerns about children's self-perceptions, several others have highlighted the same kind of impact that games and media can have on adults, such as perpetuating myths about gender roles.[47]

Although there is a nearly identical percentage of female players, digital games are still dominated by male characters as main characters, while female characters are, in more than 80% of digital games, shown as sex objects and scarcely dressed.[48] Female characters appearing in digital games are most often presented as victims or as 'promised prizes',[49] or as overbearing sexual creatures and objects of sexual desire.[50] Given that

42   For more information, see: HEETER, C.: Femininity. In WOLF, M. J. P., PERON, B. (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*. New York, London : Routledge, 2014, p. 373-379.

43   See also: NEAR, C. E.: Selling Gender: Associations of Box Art Representation of Female Characters with Sales for Teen- and Mature-Rated Video Games. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2013, Vol. 68, No. 3, p. 252-269.

44   See: DILL, K. E., THILL, K. P.: Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2007, Vol. 57, No. 11-12, p. 851-864.

45   For more information, see: BEHM-MORAWITZ, E., MASTRO, D.: The Effects of Sexualization of Female Video Game Characters on Gender Stereotyping and Female Self-Concept. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 2009, Vol. 61, No. 11-12, p. 808-823.

46   See, for example: DILL, K. E., THILL, K. P.: Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2007, Vol. 57, No. 11-12, p. 851-864.

47   See also: HAYES, E.: Women, Video Gaming and Learning: Beyond Stereotypes. In *TechTrends*, 2005, Vol. 49, No. 5, p. 23-28.

48   DILL, K. E., THILL, K. P.: Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2007, Vol. 57, No. 11-12, p. 851.

49   DIETZ, T.: An Examination of Violence and Gender Role Portrayals in Video Games: Implications for Gender Socialization and Aggressive Behavior. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 1998, Vol. 38, No. 5-6, p. 438.

50   IVORY, J. D.: Still a Man's Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of Videogames. In *Mass Communication and Society,* 2006, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 107.

digital games emphasize female sexuality and treat women as sexual objects, there are fears that they may have a negative impact on players' notions of women. Players' respect for women players may be reduced after frequent exposure to sexually portrayed female characters, consequently influencing male gamers to more easily perform sexual harassment in the real world.[51] Digital games have the potential to shape players' attitudes much more than other forms of media because players are actively engaged and interactivity is at a much higher level due to the very nature of digital games.[52] Men who play sexist games are more likely to support the notion that women are the weaker gender and often need male help,[53] but J. S. Aubrey and K. Harrison find that counter-stereotypical views can reduce negative gender beliefs and attitudes.[54]

The virtual space in which digital games are played is a new medium, but, at the same time, it is also a social product. Thus, the media representation of female characters reflects a paradigmatic representation of women in one community, as players enter a game with deeply rooted attitudes that are a part of their existing identity. The first commercial digital game that has focused its action on the form of violence based on gender and race is *Custer's Revenge*[55] designed by Mystique Company in 1982. The game promotes sexual and racial violence. Players control the character of General Custer, who wears only a cowboy hat, scarf, and boots. Custer is the main character, and his job is to rape a naked Indian woman with large breasts who is chained to the cactus. If players successfully score the required number of points, they can rape the tied Indian woman, scoring points for each act of rape. Despite numerous attempts by women's associations to draw public attention to the fact that this digital game is a violation of human rights, around 80,000 copies of the game were sold. The game received negative media criticism and several lawsuits against human rights violations.[56]

In *Grand Theft Auto*[57], one of the best-selling digital games in the world, players can have sex with women and then kill them. Male characters are depicted as hyper-male, dominant and aggressive men. By contrast, female characters, which are peripheral in these games, are shown as sexual objects – their only purpose is to please the main male characters. After paying a prostitute for sex, players can kill her and get their money back. Instead of being punished for such behaviour, players are often rewarded. This behaviour of players is expected because the female characters are presented as objects in the narratives of digital games, and people feel empathy for other individuals, and not for objects. The fifth sequel of this *GTA V*[58] game, which promotes gender-based violence culture, has reached 1 billion USD in earnings.[59]

As for female gender stereotypes in digital games, it is important to note that many female characters represent weak victims protected or rescued by powerful men.[60] Visual representations of women tend to emphasize physical characteristics (e.g., through clothing)

51   YAO, M., MAHOOD, C., LINZ, D.: Sexual Priming, Gender Stereotyping, and Likelihood to Sexually Harass: Examining the Cognitive Effects of Playing a Sexually-Explicit Video Game. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2010, Vol. 62, No. 1-2, p. 86.

52   MILLER, M. K., SUMMERS, A.: Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2007, Vol. 57, No. 9-10, p. 735.

53   STERMER, S. P., BURKLEY, M.: SeX-Box: Exposure to Sexist Video Games Predicts Benevolent Sexism. In *Psychology of Popular Media Culture,* 2015, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 52.

54   AUBREY, J. S., HARRISON, K.: The Gender-Role Content of Children's Favorite Television Programs and Its Links to Their Gender-Related Perceptions. In *Media Psychology,* 2004, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 111.

55   MYSTIQUE: *Custer's Revenge.* [digital game]. Northridge : Mystique, 1982.

56   PRAGER, J.: *The Worst Video Game in Gaming History.* Released on 17th February 2020. [online]. [2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://screenrant.com/worst-video-game-in-gaming-history/>.

57   ROCKSTAR NORTH et al.: *Grand Theft Auto (series).* [digital game]. New York, NY : Rockstar Games, 1997-2021.

58   ROCKSTAR NORTH: *Grand Theft Auto V.* [digital game]. New York, NY : Rockstar Games, 2013.

59   FOX, J. et al.: Sexualized Avatars Lead to Women's Self-Objectification and Acceptance of Rape Myths. In *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 2014, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 359.

60   For more information, see: McCROSKEY, J. C., McCAIN, T. A.: The Measurement of Interpersonal Attraction. In *Speech Monographs*, 1974, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 261-266.

or exaggerate female sexuality.[61] Female characters fit into common gender-dominated stereotypes, for example by exaggerating the characteristics of the female body or sexually revealing clothing (mostly made of leather).[62] Among the gender stereotypes that can be observed among female characters in digital games, characteristics such as a flirtatious person in trouble, who pays too much attention to her physical appearance and is often presented as a person with large breasts also predominate.[63] Also, in recent years, gender – non-traditional female characters have emerged, who are portrayed as male characters and represent female lesbians (known as 'butch'), and such characters differ from the normative female characters we often see in video games.[64] Most digital games have been shown to contain negatively stereotyped gender images.[65] Among these depictions, the characteristics of men in dominant roles stand out, who are presented as overly masculine and violent heroes, while women in submissive, sexually exploitative roles are mostly portrayed as busty victims of aggression, for whom intelligence is not a strong side.[66]

Virtual Space as Reality Replica

Lara Croft from the digital game series called *Tomb Raider*[67] was one of the first featured virtual female characters. This first heroine of the virtual space often stands out as an example of how female characters as storytellers in digital games are also possible. Lara Croft fights her own battles and accepts the greatest challenges. She is educated, intelligent and capable, but all this was not enough to diminish criticism of the visual representation of her character. Although this character defies the stereotype of weak, helpless female protagonists, because she possesses enviable intellect, independence and strength, she is also reduced to the traditional terms of female sexuality and is subjected to the stereotype of sexual objectification.[68] The criticisms have affected the redesign of Lara Croft from a person of over-dimensioned physical attributes to a more realistic representation.

Technology, as part of a part of modern life, contributes to the formation of parallel online and offline spaces. "The social interactions of millions of people around the world, along with the creation of their virtual identities, social relationships and communities, lead to the scenario in which the computer technology and virtual communication are

61   See also: DOWNS, E., SMITH, S. L.: Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis. In *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 2009, Vol. 62, No. 11, p. 721-733.

62   See: BRYCE, J., RUTTER, J.: Killing Like a Girl: Gendered Gaming and Girl Gamers' Visibility. In MÄYRÄ, F. (ed.): *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference*. Tampere : University of Tampere Press, 2002, p. 243-255.

63   For example, see: PRENTICE, D. A., CARRANZA, E.: What Women Should Be, Shouldn't Be, Are Allowed to Be, And Don't Have to Be: The Contents of Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes. In *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 269-281.

64   For more information, see: RIFKIN, L.: The Suit Suits Whom? Lesbian Gender, Female Masculinity, and Women-In-Suits. In *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 2002, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 157-174.

65   See: DILL, K. E. et al.: Violence, Sex, Race, and Age in Popular Video Games: A Content Analysis. In COLE, E., DANIEL, J. H. (eds.): *Featuring Females: Feminist Analyses of Media*. Washington : American Psychological Association, 2005, p. 115-130.

66   PROVENZO Jr., E. F.: Computing, Culture, and Educational Studies. In *Educational Studies*, 2000, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 5-19.

67   CORE DESIGN et al.: *Tomb Raider (series)*. [digital game]. Tokyo, Redmond : Eidos Interactive, Microsoft Game Studios, Square Enix, 1996-2018.

68   KENNEDY, H. W.: Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis. In *Game Studies,* 2002, Vol. 2, No. 2. [online]. [2021-06-05]. Available at: <http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/>.

actually forming the parallel society and the new virtual cultural space".[69] The virtual space opens up a platform for building identity pluralism, that is, 'identities of many selves', as referred to by S. Turkle,[70] which are being implemented into computer culture. Computer culture cannot be seen as a completely new creation immune to existing cultural patterns, because virtual space is exposed to the influence of dominant/primary culture from which it takes over the learned hierarchical patterns. Identity migration from the offline world to the online world does not mean complete freedom of identity formation, because modified identities are "still determined by existing roles and established norms".[71] This further means that gender stereotypes are present in the virtual space and the computer culture considering that every identity is viewed as "[...] a product of society represented by the environment, as the cultural and behavioral contexts of an individual are the consequences of the society and the culture that person was born into and is living within".[72]

The representation of female characters in the virtual space represents a segment of the existing relationships of power and hierarchy of dominant groups in relation to marginalized ones.[73] Media representation is a form of social practice in which the stereotypical image of a woman implies that she is passive, always young, cheerful, and inferior to man. Such a definition of women is based on media matrices that frequently display sexism, violence and stereotypes. The media replicates the culture of power formed on patriarchal foundations, and virtual space loses its neutrality in relation to gender, race, or class. In this context M. Castells emphasizes: "We live in a culture of virtual reality, but real virtuality because our virtuality, meaning the internet networks, the images are a fundamental part of our reality".[74]

Female characters in digital games are constructed in relation to the already established social relationships, which have already defined the position of women, but also of other disadvantaged groups, as the position of the *Other*. The *Otherness* is a mark of minority and marginalized groups, and "reality becomes the reproduction of its reproductions, which are prepared with media matrices".[75] The theme of otherness refers to all groups that view accepted cultural values as marginalized: women, mentally ill, racially or religiously unacceptable, or minorities. However, when dividing into one and the other, as a product of culture, the second-order female otherness is determined by birth, so that all other characteristics of a woman as an individual being are neglected. The woman is the *other* sex, the object, the limited, inauthentic being. She is not a 'man' (a male gender noun) because a man is always a male being and she is his 'otherness'. "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute, she is the Other".[76]

"The network does not abolish the sexes, it has, in social terms, been determined by the body, sex, economics, social classes and race"[77] and this determination is based on offline social practices. "It is of the utmost importance to realize that new media exist within a social framework that is already established and embedded in an economic, political and cultural environment that is still deeply racist and under male domination".[78] The process of media

69   BALTEZAREVIĆ, R., BALTEZAREVIĆ, V., BALTEZAREVIĆ, B.: *Media Law, Ethics and Society.* Saarbrücken : Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2018, p. 67.
70   For more information, see: TURKLE, S.: *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet.* New York : Simon and Schuster, 1995.
71   KELLNER, D.: Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities. In LASH, S., FRIEDMAN, J. (eds.): *Modernity and Identity.* Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1992, p. 141.
72   BALTEZAREVIĆ, B., BALTEZAREVIĆ, R., BALTEZAREVIĆ, V.: *The Internet as Medium of Communication and Knowledge Sharing.* Saarbrücken : Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2018, p. 11.
73   See also: MURDOCK, G.: Citizens, Consumers and Public Culture. In SKOVMAND, M., SCHRODER, K. (eds.): *Media Cultures, Reappraising Transnational Media*. London : Routledge, 1992, p. 17-41.
74   MASON, P.: *From Networked Protest to 'Non-Capitalism'.* Released on 15th October 2012. [online]. [2021-05-15]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-19932562>.
75   ANDERS, G.: *Svet kao fantom i matrica*. Novi Sad : Prometej, 1996, p. 47.
76   DE BEAUVOIR, S.: *The Second Sex.* New York : Vintage Books, 2011, p. 15.
77   VAJDLING, F.: Gde je feminizam u sajber feminizmu. In *Genero: časopis za feminističku teoriju,* 2004, Vol. 3, No. 4/5, p. 88.
78   Ibidem.

socialization accepts already defined gender roles and thus promotes inequality that slows the transformation of media platforms into equal opportunities platforms. New technologies are defined as new, but present gender differentiation is old, taken from existing cultural patterns, so "women have never been equal in the online public sphere, and it seems that social media forums remain firmly grounded in the material realties of women's everyday experiences of sexism in patriarchal society".[79] Media texts are not neutral but play an active role in creating and distributing male/female roles and their ultimate product is discrimination. Based on the considered theory, we have developed the following research questions:

- RQ1: In which digital game genre are female characters represented?
- RQ2: To what extent are female characters in digital games positioned as main/secondary characters?
- RQ3: Is sexism present in digital games narratives, as well as the negative application of gender stereotypes aimed against the female characters? (For the purpose of this research we accepted the definition that "Sexism is belief that the members of one sex are less intelligent, able, skillful, etc. than the members of the other sex, especially that women are less able than men". [80])
- RQ4: Do narratives in digital games contain elements of violence against women?
- RQ5: Does the genre of narrative influence the positioning of female characters (main/supporting, or sexual object)?
- RQ6: Are sexistically depicted female characters accompanied by violence against women?

Methodological Framework

For this quantitative content analysis data were collected from samples of narratives from the list of 30 games with female protagonists in 2018 published at J Station X-Inclusive gaming news and reviews (Table 1).

Table 1. List of digital games used for research

Game title	Developer/Publisher	Platform(s)	Genre
Monster Hunter: World	Capcom / Capcom	PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows	Action role-playing game
The Inpatient	Supermassive Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment	PlayStation 4	Survival horror
Sea of Thieves	Rare / Microsoft Studios	Microsoft Windows, Xbox One	Action
Far Cry 5	Ubisoft Montreal; Ubisoft Toronto / Ubisoft	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Action game
Darksiders 3	Gunfire Games / THQ Nordic	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Adventure
Code Vein	Bandai Namco Studios / Bandai Namco Entertainment	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Action

79   MEGARRY, J.: Online Incivility or Sexual Harassment? Conceptualising Women's Experiences in the Digital Age. In *Women's Studies International Forum,* 2014, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 49.
80   *Sexism.* [online]. [2021-10-18]. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sexism>.

Crackdown 3	Sumo Digital / Microsoft Studios	Microsoft Windows, Xbox One	Action
Indivisible	Lab Zero Games / 505 Games	PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, Linux, MacOS, Windows	Action
Battle Princess Madelyn	Causal Bit Games Inc. / Causal Bit Games Inc. / Hound Picked Games	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Adventure
Anthem	BioWare / Electronic Arts	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Action
Bloodstaine: Ritual of the Night	Art Play / 505 Games	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch	Action
Bloodstaine: Ritual of the Night	Ubisoft Singapore / Ubisoft	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Action
Attack on Titan 2	Omega Force / Koei Tecmo	Microsoft Windows, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita, Xbox One	Action
State of Decay 2	Undead Labs / Microsoft Studios	Microsoft Windows, Xbox One	Survival game
Detroit Become Human	Quantic Dream / Sony Interactive Entertainment	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4	Adventure game
Greedfall	Spiders / Focus Home Interactive	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Action
Dauntless	Phoenix Labs / Epic Games	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch	Action
Conan Exiles	Funcom / Funcom	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Survival
Fortnite	Epic Games / Epic Games	Windows, macOS, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, iOS, Android	Survival game
The Darwin Project	Scavengers Studio / Scavengers Studio	Microsoft Windows, Xbox One	Survival
Overkill's The Walking Dead	Overkill Software / Starbreeze Publishing	Microsoft Windows	Action
We Happy Few	Compulsion Games Inc. / Gearbox Publishing	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One	Survival
Griftlands	Klei Entertainment / Klei Entertainment	Microsoft Windows	Adventure game
Telltale's The Walking Dead: The Final Season	Telltale Games (ep.1-2) and Skybound Games (ep. 3-4) / Telltale Games; Skybound Games	Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch	Adventure game
Ooblets	Glumberland / Double Fine Presents	Microsoft Windows, XBox One	Life simulation
Iconoclasts	Konjak / Bifrost Entertainment	PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita, Microsoft Windows, macOS, Linux, Nintendo Switch	Action
Forgotton Anne	ThroughLine Games / Square Enix Collective / Hitcents (iOS)	macOS, Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, iOS	Adventure game
Pathfinder: Kingmaker	Owlcat Games / Deep Silver	Linux, macOS, Microsoft Windows	Role-playing game

The Swords of Ditto	Onebitbeyond / Devolver Digital	PlayStation 4, Windows, Linux, macOS, Nintendo Switch	Action
Mineko's Night Market	Meowza Games / Humble Bundle	Windows, macOS, Nintendo Switch	Adventure

Source: own processing; HENRY, J.: *30 Games With Female Protagonists in 2018 You Should Be Excited For.* Released on 2nd January 2018. [online]. [2021-05-02]. Available at: <http://jstationx.com/2018/01/02/30-games-with-female-protagonists-2018/>.

The research was conducted over the period from December 2018 to February 2019. Data were analysed using the SPSS 20 IBM Statistical Package. The first four research questions were analysed through descriptive statistics. Digital games narratives were analysed in relation to the genre represented in the narrative, while the analysis of the presence of female characters was analysed in relation to the positioning of the female figure in the game, as well as in the representation of the female characters. Research questions RQ5 and RQ6 were transformed into three hypotheses:

- H1: The female narrative affects the positioning of female characters (main/supporting).
- H2: The narrative genre influences the sexual objectification of female characters.
- H3: If female characters in a digital game are sexistically depicted, the given narrative includes violence against women.

In the analysis of the hypothesis, we first checked the normality of the distribution using the Shapiro-Wilk normality tests because we have a sample less than 50 games. The result showed that we had a deviation from the normal distribution and we applied non-parametric techniques Chi-square test and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The results regarding the proportion of original content to aggregated content in legacy and new media may be limited in applicability because of the sampling method.

Results

- *RQ1: In what genre of digital games are female characters represented?*

Of the total of 30 digital games posted on the J-Station X-Inclusive gaming news and reviews Games with Female Protagonists, in relation to the genre represented in the game narrative, we obtained data that female characters appear in Action genre n = 15 (50.0%), Adventure genre n = 7 (23.3%), Survival genre n = 6 (20.0%), Life simulation genre n = 1 (3.3%) and Role Playing genre n = 1 (3.3%), M_{genre} = 1.87, SD_{genre} = 1.074.

- *RQ2: How often do female characters position themselves as main/supporting characters in digital games?*

The representation of female characters in relation to positioning in a game is: Main character n=9 (30%) and Supporting character n=21 (70%), $M_{character}$=1.70, $SD_{character}$=.466.

- *RQ3: Is sexism present in the digital games narratives as well as the application of gender stereotypes aimed against female characters?*

Sexism in the narrative in relation to gender differences and the application of gender stereotypes aimed against female characters is recorded in n = 18 (60%) of analysed digital games, $M_{Sexist\ female\ characters}$ =1.40, $SD_{Sexist\ female\ characters}$ =.498.

- *RQ4: Do narratives in digital games contain elements of violence against women?*

Violence against women is present in n=13 (43.3%) of analysed digital games, $M_{violence\ against\ women}$=1.57, $SD_{violence\ against\ women}$ =.504.

Analysis of Stated Hypotheses

- *H1: The narrative genre influences the positioning of female characters (main/supporting).*

Testing whether there is a correlation between the game genre and the female main/supporting role in the digital games narratives, showed that the correlation does not exist because c2 (4, 1) = 6.054, p> 0.05.

The first hypothesis was not confirmed because the results showed that the narrative genre had no influence on the positioning of female characters as main or supporting.

- *H2: The narrative genre influences the sexual objectification of female characters.*

For the correlation between the game genre and the representation of a woman as a sexual object, the result of Chi square test shows that c2 (4, 1) =2.302, p> 0.05 which means that there is no statistically significant correlation between the examined variables.

The second hypothesis is not confirmed because the results showed that the narrative genre had no effect on the sexual objectification of female characters.

- *H3: If female characters in a digital game are sexistically depicted, the narrative includes violence against women.*

Regarding the correlation between sexist female characters and the prevalence of violence against women, the obtained result c2 (1) = 5.792, p <0.05, shows that there is a statistically significant correlation of the examined variables, while Spearman's correlation Rho = .439 indicates a positive moderate correlation.

The third hypothesis is confirmed since the results obtained confirmed that the narrative of digital games, in which female characters are sexistically presented, contain elements of violence against women.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the initial years of digital games, they were considered 'fun' for male players and the contents were adapted to male audiences. Recent research indicates that today players' distribution in relation to changes is almost balanced, which is not the case with the content and accepted stereotypes that are difficult to change. Female characters are minimally represented, while patriarchal gender stereotypes are prevailing, suggesting that digital games are media in which gender stereotypes and discrimination against women are being applied. Women are most often represented as side characters, exposed to violence, helpless and unintelligent persons awaiting help and support from male characters, or are reduced to sexual objects. Even if they have a rare opportunity to be represented as main characters, hypersexual attributes are also included, and they are often portrayed with unrealistic bodies by design.

Sexism in digital games is based on social-structural and cultural-institutional practice as well as gained attitudes and beliefs, and is justified by existing gender stereotypes as accepted social behaviour. By adopting this discriminatory approach to gender roles, digital games are contributing to the promotion of negative gender stereotypes that are applied not only within the virtual space, but are also transferred as a model of behaviour to the real world.

In addition to the numerous negative implications, which can be caused by negative stereotypical depictions of female characters in digital games, it is necessary to mention the positive sides of this phenomenon. One study suggests that the powerful characters of women's digital games can have a positive impact on male players, regardless of sexuality, because they represent much stronger and more powerful representations of women than is typical of many other popular media products. It is thought that exposure to such powerful images may reduce the propensity for a gender stereotype based on appearance. Although digital games have had a negative impact due to negative portrayals, there is the potential for games to overcome such limitations and begin to show positive perceptions, which can lead to positive effects. In recent years, the gaming industry appears to have become, at least partially, aware of the social climate surrounding gaming and has taken steps to increase the fair representation of both male and female characters within digital gaming. There are several organizations and nonprofits, such as *Pickelles*, *Girls Make Games* and *iThrive Games*, which have been launched in recent years with the goal of involving women and girls in the gaming industry, by nurturing and providing a community of support. A recent survey conducted by digital gaming company EA found that 56 percent of 2,252 survey participants (ages 13 to 54) felt it was important for companies to make their games more inclusive, and 45 percent of respondents said they would likely play a game that incorporates these characteristics, which shows that digital games have the potential to cause positive effects.

This content analysis, of selected digital games, has shown that female characters are represented in all genres of digital games but are most prominent in action games. Representing female characters as main characters, in a third of the analysed digital games, indicating that digital game developers still give a significant advantage to male characters for key positions. Sexism in the narrative and the application of gender stereotypes aimed against the female characters, or representation of female characters with pronounced sexual characteristics and representation of women as sexual objects is represented in 60% of analysed digital games, while violence against women is present in nearly half of the games (43.3%) which indicates the high prevalence of gender discrimination that can lead to harmful stereotypes against women.

The research has also shown that the genre of digital games does not affect the positioning of female characters, but it indicated that sexist depiction of female characters is followed by violence against women. However, with the minor involvement of women in designing and producing digital games, and demand for such content resulting in significant monetization, no significant change is expected in the approach to creating characters in digital games that are continually depicting women from the unfavourable male perspective, as sexual objects and minor characters. The main limitations of this research refer to the fact that the research covered the position of female characters in digital games, without researching players 'perceptions' of the negative representation of female characters. Practical implications can be expected in applying the results of this research to further research work whose ultimate goal should be to draw the attention of both theorists and the public to the need to change the sexist approach to female characters in digital game narratives.

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Restoration, Reflection, and Nostalgia for the New in Yakuza Kiwami and Final Fantasy VII Remake

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ABSTRACT:

This study applies concepts of restorative and reflective nostalgia to 'remake' titles for eighth-generation consoles (here, PlayStation and PlayStation 2 titles remade for the PlayStation 4). Retro-game scholarship has considered 8 and 16-bit titles and fan practices through the concept of nostalgia since the mid-2000s. However, increasingly AAA game publishers have begun to remake and remaster more recent games. Given the potential for nostalgia to be either an oppressive or resistive set of interactions between object-game and subject-player, this paper analyses how restorative and reflective nostalgia is manifested throughout the narrative and gameplay mechanics of Yakuza Kiwami and Final Fantasy VII Remake, alongside players' and digital game journalists reactions to the titles. This study utilizes a qualitative analysis of the remade titles, user comments from the E3 trailers posted to YouTube for each game, and digital game popular press articles to approach nostalgic reactions. Ultimately, the potential for both modes of nostalgia coexist as each of these titles are consumed and exist alongside other consumer goods.

Retro and Remade Possibilities

Nostalgia is an often-cited concept through which digital game scholars explicate retro-games,[1] 'neo'-retro game development,[2] and retrogamers' community of practice.[3] Much of retro-gaming nostalgia literature builds upon the work of F. Jameson, in that reconstructions of the past are oriented towards understanding the present and are consistently linked to commodification.[4] Similarly, S. Boym describes nostalgia as "lateral.

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1   Remark by the author: Preservation activities revolving around older games, typically from the 1970s and 1980s, sometimes in their original format and sometimes in a lightly "restored" format that makes them playable on modern computers and consoles. For more information, see: PAYNE, M. T.: Playing the Deja-new: "Plug in and Play TV Games" and the Cultural Politics of Classic Gaming. In WHALEN, Z., TAYLOR, L. (eds.): *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games.* Nashville : Vanderbilt University Press, 2008, p. 51-68.; SUOMINEN, J.: The Past as the Future? Nostalgia and Retrogaming in Digital Culture. In *The Fiberculture Journal,* 2008, Vol. 6, No. 11. [online]. [2021-10-15]. Available at: <https://eleven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-075-the-past-as-the-future-nostalgia-and-retrogaming-in-digital-culture/>.

2   Remark by the author: Games that deliberately incorporate the aesthetic and/or mechanic conventions of the retro-games mentioned above into newly produced games. See also: GARDA, M. B.: Nostalgia in Retro Game Design. In PEARCE, C., KENNEDY, H., SHARP, J. (eds.): *DiGRA '13 – Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA International Conference: DeFragging Game Studies.* Atlanta : DiGRA, 2013, p. 1-13. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/nostalgia-in-retro-game-design/>.; SLOAN, R.: Nostalgia Videogames as Playable Game Criticism. In *G|A|M|E Games as Art, Media, Entertainment*, 2016, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 35-45.

3   For more information, see: HEINEMAN, D. S.: Public Memory and Gamer Identity: Retrogaming as Nostalgia. In *Journal of Games Criticism*, 2014, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1-24.; SWALWELL, M.: The Remembering and the Forgetting of Early Digital Games: From Novelty to Detritus and Back Again. In *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2007, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 255-273.

4   See: JAMESON, F.: *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham : Duke University Press, 1991.

It looks sideways".[5] While for S. Boym nostalgia and consumerism can overlap, there are also potential ethical implications for collective and individual memory, depending on the contours nostalgia takes. Understanding games and gamer reactions seeped in nostalgia serves to help us better understand the present moment, rather than offering insight into the past. Considering that the origin of digital gaming is traditionally placed in the 1970s, we now share almost fifty years of digital games as part of our digitally mediated lives. While 'retro-gaming' as a nomenclature still invokes the foundational years of arcade cabinets and the earliest consumer electronics iterations, it increasingly also includes hardware and software from the 8- and 16-bit eras.[6] Academic scholarship has attended to the linkages between 'old' digital games and nostalgia since the mid-2000s. It follows, then, that fifteen additional years of games should now be included in what is considered 'old', and if not 'retro'.

The fifth-generation 32- and 64-bit consoles (Sony PlayStation and Nintendo 64, among others) came to market starting in 1993 and most scholarship on gaming and nostalgia has not yet attended to fifth-generation and later titles in a substantial way. Though, there has been work on how contemporary games invoke nostalgia for the historical and aesthetic past in a manner deeply influenced by the 'authenticity' of film depictions corresponding genres.[7] Yet, AAA game publishers have begun to mine the fifth, sixth, and now even seventh generations for titles and profit. In this paper we consider *Yakuza Kiwami*[8] (*YK; Y1* for the 2005 PlayStation 2 title and Yakuza for the series) and *Final Fantasy VII Remake*[9] (*FFVII-R*; *FFVII* for the 1997 PlayStation title) as objects of nostalgia within the context of fifth- and sixth-generation digital game 'remakes'. While a remastered game may include updated graphics and performance adjustments, but largely retains the underlying engine and mechanics of the original game (F. Mäyrä's *core*[10]). Remakes may retain the bulk of the narrative content and characters design of the original game (F. Mäyrä's *shell*[11]) but fully replace the core with a new engine.

In 2017 developer Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio ("Like a Dragon" in Japan) released Yakuza Kiwami worldwide, a remake of their 2005 title *Yakuza*[12]. Rather than remaster the game, which was later done for their PS3 titles *Yakuza 3*, *4* and *5*[13] (*Y3*, etc.), the studio instead opted to remake Yakuza in the engine used for *Yakuza 0*[14] and *Yakuza 6*[15]. Rather than preserve the original game engine and mechanics, the decision was made to modernize both. While the in-game world maintained its mid 2000s cultural references, social expectations, and fashions, the game itself was firmly brought into the late 2010s. Perhaps the most anticipated of these remade titles, FFVII-R from Square Enix was released in April 2020. FFVII-R, however, does not remake the entire plot of the original game, but only the early-game sequences set in the city of Midgar. Future games will continue the plot and

5   BOYM, S.: *The Future of Nostalgia.* New York : Basic Books, 2003, p. 454.
6   For more information, see: WULF, T. et al.: Video Games as Time Machines: Video Game Nostalgia and the Success of Retro Gaming. In *Media and Communication*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 60-68.
7   See also: CRUZ, T.: It's Almost too Intense: Nostalgia and Authenticity in Call of Duty 2. In *Loading: The Journal of Canadian Game Studies*, 2007, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1-8. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/7/13>.; HODSON, J.: When I'm Sixty-Four: Beatles Rock Band and the Commodification of Nostalgia. In *Loading: The Journal of Canadian Game Studies,* 2012, Vol. 6, No. 10, p. 71-90. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/110/130>.; SLOAN, R.: Videogames as Remediated Memories: Commodified Nostalgia and Hyperreality in Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon and Gone Home. In *Games and Culture*, 2015, Vol. 10, No. 6, p. 525-550.
8   RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO: *Yakuza Kiwami*. [digital game]. Tokyo, Höfen : Sega, Deep Silver, 2016.
9   SQUARE ENIX BUSINESS DIVISION 1: *Final Fantasy VII Remake*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Square Enix, 2020.
10   MÄYRÄ, F.: *An Introduction to Game Studies.* London : Sage, 2008, p. 17.
11   Ibidem.
12   SEGA NE R&D: *Yakuza*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2005.
13   SEGA CS1 R&D: *Yakuza 3*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2009.; SEGA CS1 R&D: *Yakuza 4*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2010.; RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO: *Yakuza 5*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2012.
14   RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO: *Yakuza 0*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2015.
15   RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO: *Yakuza 6: The Song of Life*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2016.

Square Enix has yet to confirm how many games players will need to purchase in order to complete FFVII-R which will continue to be released episodically. Players will need to purchase multiple FFVII-R titles in order to complete the series.

Unlike *FFVII*,[16] Yakuza titles did not experience wide success outside of Japan upon their initial launch in 2005. The first game's North American release was marred by a trailer with poor quality voice acting that resulted in future titles in the series only being released with subtitles overseas.[17] The differences in reception of the original games make for a compelling comparison as they follow different trajectories in terms of fan engagement. Furthermore, the remakes were both initially released as PlayStation 4 exclusive titles and were developed in Japan with the intention of distribution to global audiences. Finally, each of the games' narratives are set in a single urban environment; YK in the fictional district of Kamurocho, in an otherwise realistic Tokyo and FFVII-R in the industrial science-fiction city of Midgar.

Utilizing qualitative analysis of each game's shell and core content, user comments posted on the official pre-release trailers of both games from the verified PlayStation YouTube channel, and digital game popular press articles, we address each game in light of M. B. Garda's nostalgia continuum for retro and neo-retro games[18] based on S. Boym's discussion of restorative and reflective nostalgia[19] as a way of testing the possibilities and limitations of 'nostalgia' as a framework for understanding interactions between games, gamers, and consumerism in AAA remakes.

Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia

S. Boym differentiates between restorative and reflective nostalgia, drawing examples particularly from urban landscapes and literature with roots in regions previously under Soviet administration. She explains that restorative nostalgia "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home", while reflective nostalgia "thrives in [...] the longing itself, and delays the homecoming".[20] More importantly, restorative nostalgia in fact does not admit to being nostalgia at all, but rather a preservation of truth and tradition, while reflective nostalgia is much more ambivalent regarding the nature of truth itself. Ultimately S. Boym draws an ethical distinction between the two, writing that reflective nostalgia "resists both the total reconstruction of the local culture and the triumphant indifference of technocratic globalism".[21] While it is important to remember that as commercial, global products, both YK and FVII-R should be treated with care when it comes to discussing any potentially resistive properties, it is also unfair to also attribute the creative effort of the human beings who worked on the games' development to solely profit seeking motives. And equally it is a disservice to suggest that a consumer-fan's enjoyment of these games should be dismissed as only naïve consumerism.

16   SQUARE: *Final Fantasy VII*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Squaresoft, 1997.
17   CONSTANTINE, J.: *Tokyo Beat Down: The Story of Yakuza*. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160525140414/http://www.1up.com/features/story-yakuza-franchise>.
18   For more information, see: GARDA, M. B.: Nostalgia in Retro Game Design. In PEARCE, C., KENNEDY, H., SHARP, J. (eds.): *DiGRA '13 – Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA International Conference: DeFragging Game Studies.* Atlanta : DiGRA, 2013, p. 1-13. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/nostalgia-in-retro-game-design/>.
19   See: BOYM, S.: *The Future of Nostalgia.* New York : Basic Books, 2003.
20   Ibidem, p. 18.
21   Ibidem, p. 342.

Working from S. Boym, M. B. Garda constructs a nostalgia continuum for retro games ranging from restorative 'classic' practices which seek to preserve 'original' hardware and software, to reflective 'neo' games that look back upon "1980's-ness, 8-bitness and 16-bitness".[22] Neo-games or as R. Sloan names them, "playable game criticism", are a pastiche of an era, rather than an attempt at reproduction.[23] The neo-game designer's nostalgia is one that fosters "creativity and artistic erudition".[24] But the remade game does not necessarily fit neatly into this nostalgia continuum. Nor should it, as M. B. Garda intended for its use in understanding practices focusing on very early gaming history, rather than the 32- and 64-bit eras. However, beginning from M. B. Garda's premise, and S. Boym's broader analysis, productive avenues for understanding how nostalgia develops between and interacts with games and players in a media landscape that increasingly includes remade titles open up.

Nostalgic Potentials and Perspectives

In addition to qualitative analysis of the games themselves, we draw from two additional bodies of commentary: YouTube comments and articles from digital game popular press outlets. User comments from the official E3 trailers for each game (YK in 2017, FFVII-R in 2019) posted to the official PlayStation YouTube channel were collected and analyzed qualitatively. Both games launched exclusively for the PS4 initially, though YK has since been released for additional platforms and exclusivity for FFVII-R is eventually expected to end. In total, the Yakuza Kiwami trailer had amassed 238 comments by June 2, 2021, the vast majority of which were posted within the first few weeks of the trailer's release on YouTube. The complete population of comments were collected and assessed for this study. The FFVII-R trailer received over 9,000 comments by the same date. Given the large number of comments, top level comments plus the first 10 replies were collected and assessed until the entire sample reached 250 comments.

A total of twelve digital game popular press articles from five outlets were assessed to provide additional context regarding how the games were discussed online. Six articles for each game were collected for use in analysis. Two articles, a game review, and an additional commentary article, were drawn from each IGN, Kotaku, and Polygon. No author repeated across articles, and the YK review from Kotaku is the work of two authors writing in dialogue. S. Boym importantly explains that nostalgia is not something inherent in an object. While popular culture objects may wish to invoke a particular romantic connection to the past, nostalgia itself is "an interaction between subjects and objects".[25] Nostalgia can be either/both collective and/or individual, and when considering the ethical possibilities of reflective nostalgia in particular, nostalgia plays an important role in mediating between official national-level memory and collective memory that play upon individual memory.[26]

22   For more information, see: GARDA, M. B.: Nostalgia in Retro Game Design. In PEARCE, C., KENNEDY, H., SHARP, J. (eds.): *DiGRA '13 – Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA International Conference: DeFragging Game Studies.* Atlanta : DiGRA, 2013, p. 1-13. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/nostalgia-in-retro-game-design/>.

23   SLOAN, R.: Nostalgia Videogames as Playable Game Criticism. In *G|A|M|E Games as Art, Media, Entertainment*, 2016, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 36.

24   See also: GARDA, M. B.: Nostalgia in Retro Game Design. In PEARCE, C., KENNEDY, H., SHARP, J. (eds.): *DiGRA '13 – Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA International Conference: DeFragging Game Studies.* Atlanta : DiGRA, 2013, p. 1-13. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/nostalgia-in-retro-game-design/>.

25   BOYM, S.: *The Future of Nostalgia.* New York : Basic Books, 2003, p. 354.

26   Ibidem, p. 18.

By setting the reactions of consumer-fans, digital game journalists, and analysis of the games by the researcher against one another, we hope to draw from both collective and individual memory of the games under consideration. Furthermore, it means the only interaction between object-game and subject-player represented here is not our own.

Yakuza Kiwami: Rapid Releases and the Ruin of Restoration

Yakuza Kiwami's narrative follows protagonist Kiryu Kazama after his release from a prison term beginning in 1995 and ending in 2005. Both the Kotaku and Polygon reviews[27] highlight the fact that YK, by virtue of being released more than ten years after the original game on which it is based, creates feelings of nostalgia not necessarily for the game itself, but for 2005 Tokyo, and by extension Japanese popular culture of the time. While Cooper-Chen in her interviews with Japanese artists and media professionals found that their intentions towards their works were largely, if not exclusively, aimed towards the domestic audience, nonetheless exports of Japanese pop-culture products tripled between 1993 and 2003.[28] Mainline Yakuza titles (with the exception of Y0, a prequel) are generally temporally set roughly within the year of their original release. Hawkins, reviewing the game for Polygon writes that Kiryu is released from prison and into a world that is fundamentally changed, and confronting that change serves as the player's (re)introduction to the character and the setting he will navigate. "[H]e has to figure out how to use a cellphone, and all the schoolgirls are wearing those huge baggy socks that they have to glue on because it's 2005".[29]

The player thus can potentially experience nostalgia for a particular place and time, regardless of any connections to digital game-specific nostalgia found in typical retro-gaming practice. The memories invoked by Kiryu's aforementioned phone, a small flip model, are much more temporally than spatially situated. Many people, all over the world, may have owned a similar phone in 2005. Aspects of place-based nostalgia can be culturally and spatially specific to Tokyo, but not necessarily limited to locals. Oh, writing for Polygon, and focusing on how YK changed her expectations for remasters, vividly invokes the nightlife scene of the game writing, "I left the arcade and ran past izakayas and ramen shops boasting bowls of colorful plastic in the windows. I started remembering my own experience with Japan, and I kept running".[30]

27   PLUNKETT, L., ALEXANDRA, H.: *Yakuza Kiwami: The Kotaku Review*. Released on 19th February 2019. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://kotaku.com/yakuza-kiwami-the-kotaku-review-1798372092>.; HAWKINS, J.: *Yakuza Kiwami Review*. Released on 21st August 2017. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/2017/8/21/16177600/yakuza-kiwami-ps4-playstation-4-remake-review>.

28   COOPER-CHEN, A.: *Cartoon Cultures: The Globalization of Japanese Popular Media*. New York : Peter Lang, 2010, p. 20.; For how initially Japan sought to use media as a soft power mechanism across Asia, see also: IWABUCHI, K.: Marketing 'Japan': Japanese Cultural Presence Under a Global Gaze. In *Japanese Studies*, 1998, Vol. 18, No. 20, p. 165-180.; For expansion of this soft power approach to the rest of the world, particularly after 2005, see also: VALASKIVI, K.: A Brand New Future? Cool Japan and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Nation. In *Japan Forum*, 2013, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 485-504.; 2009 for the beginnings of a shift in the gaming industry towards overseas markets, as Square Enix in particular began to see international consumers replacing domestic sales as Japan's population continued to age, see: CONSALVO, M.: Convergence and Globalization in the Japanese Videogame Industry. In *Cinema Journal*, 2009, Vol. 48, No. 3, p. 135-141.

29   HAWKINS, J.: *Yakuza Kiwami Review*. Released on 21st August 2017. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/2017/8/21/16177600/yakuza-kiwami-ps4-playstation-4-remake-review>.

30   OH, A.: *The Yakuza Series Changed the Way I Look at Remastered Games*. Released on 2nd August 2018. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/2018/8/2/17630668/yakuza-0-kiwami-remaster-backlog-week>.

Indeed, much of S. Boym's original analysis of nostalgia focuses on urban settings, how cities and the people that inhabit them, particularly those formerly under Soviet administration, grapple with nostalgia through architecture, public works projects, memorials, and history. Similarly, L. Plunkett at Kotaku identifies the district of Kamurocho as "maybe the real star of the [Yakuza] series".[31] Both Plunkett and Alexandra, who complete their review as a dialogue, comment upon the fact that the series moves the player through the development of Tokyo over some 30 years as they progress from game to game. Kemps at IGN also notes that the true-to-lifeness of the setting is key to the Yakuza series; Kamurocho is filled with real-life Japanese brands and stores.[32] And the improved remake graphics only makes the details of these products and packaging more legible. This focus on the realness of Kamourocho, which despite being fictional as a district takes place in a Tokyo that is otherwise near-reality, suggests a nostalgia that is more restorative than reflective. YK depicts a more vibrant, lively, detailed setting, with more subtle facial animations and a handful of largely well-regarded scenes that flesh out the antagonist's evolution from Kiryu's best friend to rival, but the game in isolation presents a restoration of the setting and characters, improving upon their aesthetic qualities and smoothening out how the player controls Kiryu, rather than a transforming the game in a way that compels one to question their memory of the original.

And, perhaps, for a game where the Western audience was originally quite small, where for many audiences outside of Japan there was no memory of the original, generating nostalgia of a more reflective type in fans would be unlikely through a single game. But as becomes apparent from YouTube comments and the game's discussion in the digital game press, playing YK is rarely about a single game. Among YouTube commenters, expressions of excitement for YK were frequent, with many comments simply containing enthusiastic exclamations with little additional content. Other Yakuza titles were discussed with regularity among the comments. Twenty-six comments, or nearly 11% of the total population, referenced other Yakuza titles. Y0 was the most frequently mentioned game. Y0 was released less than six months before the YK trailer, and arguably the game that actually introduced the Yakuza series to western audiences in a meaningful way. Several commenters cited the incredibly recent experience of playing Y0 as their motivation for interest in YK. One commenter writes that they "[n]ever heard of the series until Yakuza 0. Goddamn, I mean that game was amazing".[33] While another explained "Yakuza 0 was my favorite game of 2017, I know this'll top it". There were those who also expressed that the impending remaking/remastering of all the Yakuza games for the PS4 would motivate them to play the entire series. "as someone who joined on Yakuza 0. i wanna wait till they are all released, get em all at once".

When commenters did reflect on their experiences of the original PlayStation 2 Y1 title, their remarks tended to either focus on the niche nature of the game or the serendipity of having purchased the title at all. Combining both these threads, one commenter shared "i need to pre order this, i was lucky to get the last yz one in the 'Game' shop in the uk, haven't seen one since". This comment in particular captures the memory of browsing the shelves in a brick-and-mortar game store in order to actually locate the title. Equally

31   PLUNKETT, L., ALEXANDRA, H.: *Yakuza Kiwami*: *The Kotaku Review*. Released on 19th February 2019. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://kotaku.com/yakuza-kiwami-the-kotaku-review-1798372092>.

32   KEMPS, H.: *Yakuza Kiwami Review*. Released on 21st August 2017. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.ign.com/articles/2017/08/21/yakuza-kiwami-review>.

33   Remark by the author: All directly quoted YouTube users' comments concerning Yakuza Kiwami (here and further) have been left unedited, i.e. cited with original grammatical and spelling errors. Square brackets with ellipses indicate the intentional reduction of comments in length from the original, maintaining the meaning value. Source of comments: *Yakuza Kiwami – PS4 Trailer | E3 2017*. Released on 13th June 2017. [online]. [2021-06-02]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8mrKxZRDCQ>.

descriptive of the actual discovery of the physical disk, another commenter explains "[...] I discovered this on the PS2. Found it in a bargain bin. Played all the games that followed since [...]". Notable in both these comments is at least some of the nostalgic impulse is explicitly tied to the act of purchasing the game disk, rather than playing it. While the second commenter does go on to say that they played the games, the first does actually not mention the experience of playing Y1 at all, only purchasing it, and anticipating purchasing YK.

S. Boym considers the merchandising of nostalgia as being a particularly American phenomenon, owing at least in part to its domination in the global media landscape. The easy availability of souvenirs results in a place where "the past eagerly cohabits with the present [...] a marketing strategy that tricks consumers into missing what they haven't lost".[34] While YK is a Japanese title, the comments on the PlayStation channel's trailer are overwhelmingly in English and take place within a global media setting. Furthermore, the increased globalization of Japanese media through the 1990s and 2000s has been discussed above. The experiences described by commenters, while not exclusively American, are set against a backdrop of American media practice, and are tied to games localized and released for English-speaking consumers.

The past and present being always mutually available through consumer goods is vividly realized in Yakuza's remake/remaster distribution schedule. Seven mainline Yakuza titles would be released for the PlayStation 4 in English (and additional Western languages) within three years (2017-2020). Spanning 1988 to 2020 in diegetic years, and 2005 to 2020 in initial release years, these seven titles collapse the timeline of Kamurocho and by extension, near-reality Tokyo. Cellphone technology, building developments, and social realities become a kaleidoscope of overlapping visual and aural experience. Plunkett jokes that YK may be the only game of the series where Kiryu dresses in a way that is fashionable, as he retains the same suit through the rest of the games that follow.[35] He, like the player, remain out of time as they race through thirty years of settings, shifting social expectations, and narratives. The streets stay the same, but the shops and fashions (of everyone but Kiryu) change. Even as Kiryu, the player, and the half a dozen or so additional playable protagonists who come and go throughout the series move through other urban settings scattered across Japan, they always begin and end in Kamurocho.

While Kiryu is always roughly the man of 2005 (excepting Y0), the player, if indulging in the games in quick succession, is always really situated in the late 2010s. Perhaps then it is most fitting that Kiryu finally changes his suit in 2020's *Yakuza: Like a Dragon*[36], when he is replaced by a new protagonist and the player no longer experiences the world through him. This collapsing of time is so accelerated, so obvious, that it undoes much of the initially restorative potential of YK. While early in the string of *Yakuza* releases that would follow, the quick succession of titles allows for immediate, and sometimes less than flattering comparisons between titles. A commenter on YouTube writes "I frankly don't see why I should buy this with 0 still providing me with tons of content and the vastly superior Yakuza 6 being right around the corner". While multiple users reply to disagree with them, insisting that they should still play YK for the story and the relatively inexpensive price tag, digital game press reviewers did ultimately find YK to be less satisfying than Y0. Hawkins begins her review by stating that while YK was undoubtably improved by development of other Yakuza titles, "that doesn't mean it surpasses them".[37]

34   BOYM, S.: *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York : Basic Books, 2003, p. 38.
35   PLUNKETT, L., ALEXANDRA, H.: *Yakuza Kiwami: The Kotaku Review.* Released on 19th February 2019. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://kotaku.com/yakuza-kiwami-the-kotaku-review-1798372092>.
36   RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO: *Yakuza: Like a Dragon*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2020.
37   HAWKINS, J.: *Yakuza Kiwami Review.* Released on 21st August 2017. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/2017/8/21/16177600/yakuza-kiwami-ps4-playstation-4-remake-review>.

In an example cited by multiple reviewers, the *Majima Everywhere* system added to YK made the experience of the game disjointed and the merging of old and new content obvious. Majima, a playable protagonist in Y0, but otherwise a sometimes-friend-some-time-rival in other Yakuza titles, finds his role in YK expanded compared to the original Y1 through the Majima Everywhere mechanic. At any given moment, Kiryu and by extension, the player, might be thrust into an impromptu boss battle against Majima, disconnected from the game's plot but required to advance one of Kiryu's skill trees. Reviewers noted that such interruptions frequently took away from the experience of playing the game. Plunkett and Alexandra disagreed on the system, while Alexandra enjoyed additional interactions with Majima, Plunkett felt that it distracted too much from the story.[38] Both agreed that Majima's characterization was jarring in the light of Y0 and later games, where the character was portrayed as far more nuanced. Hawkins at Polygon also highlighted the interruption Majima posed, as "core-plot Majima and street-stalking Majima are two different characters doing completely different things at different times".[39] Such interruptions arrest the restorative potential of the game, highlighting how the Majima of YK is not the Majima of Y0 or titles set narratively later in time. Majima within YK is not even always the same Majima. Sometimes he is the character from the original game in 2005, and sometimes he is the character of 2017, newly inserted into the game where he otherwise would not belong.

Comparison between the Yakuza PS4 remakes, remasters, and new games breaks the potential of restorative nostalgia, the idea of returning the game to its original, or better than original form in any sort of faithful way. The seams of the game become visible in a way they would not otherwise be. The ready availability of past and present, instead of facilitating restorative nostalgia, may actually serve to break it. It matters little that players may have not experienced the original game (for S. Boym, American nostalgia is best summarized by a fascination with literal dinosaurs), and Yakuza Kiwami's reviews in the digital game press readily describe how the restoration is far from seamless. In presenting the Yakuza series to potentially old fans, but perhaps more often newly developed fans of the series, with rapid back-to-back releases, the potential of constructing a cohesive, restorative experience proves impossible to achieve. Back-and-forth comparisons are easy for fans and reviewers too make, there exist within the characterizations and narratives too many obvious inconsistencies, and too few opportunities to forget the unnatural flow of time.

Final Fantasy VII Remake: Reflective Excess and Reinstating Restoration

FFVII-R had been long-anticipated by fans of the original role-playing game, and numerous fans created after-the-fact. Seemingly every time a new "Compilation of FFVII" (the designation given to various media products set in the FFVII world, including spin-off games and movies) property was teased, fans hoped that it would be the long-awaited

38   PLUNKETT, L., ALEXANDRA, H.: *Yakuza Kiwami: The Kotaku Review*. Released on 19th February 2019. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://kotaku.com/yakuza-kiwami-the-kotaku-review-1798372092>.
39   HAWKINS, J.: *Yakuza Kiwami Review*. Released on 21st August 2017. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/2017/8/21/16177600/yakuza-kiwami-ps4-playstation-4-remake-review>.

remake or remaster of FFVII. What exactly that title would look and play like was contentious, with some fans advocating for a faithful, restorative remake that would enhance the game's graphics while leaving the plot and mechanics wholly intact, while others conceded that there was perhaps more updating and refinements that could be afforded to the game's ludic core, plus the opportunity for expanded side quests to contribute to additional world building.[40]

Writing in 2021, it is impossible to accurately identify what exactly FFVII-R will be in the end. Releasing episodically, it is unclear how much of FFVII-R's plot, in its completed form, will deviate from the original game. Set industrial fantasy world where massive power reactors, sucking up lifeforce from the planet, co-exist alongside magic and fantastic creatures, FFVII-R expands the first six to seven hours of the 1997 title into a standalone 30+ hour game. FFVII-R, excluding a handful of flashbacks, takes place entirely within the two-tiered city of Midgar, and does not explore the world beyond its walls. The graphics have been brought up to 2020's standards. Additional side quests have been added, though many reviewers find that they drag down the plot of the game, and too frequently resemble tedious fetch quests or focus on tangential characters.[41] The battle mechanics have been completely redesigned, in what might be the most contentious change to the game among fans.[42] And none of this touches the potential deviations from the original plot that have been suggested throughout the first episode. These transformative alterations suggest that FFVII-R participates more fully in notions of reflective nostalgia than restorative. It creates a game that follows the narrative highlights of the original, sometimes recreating original scenes nearly frame-for-frame, while also introducing new elements, characters, and potentialities as the familiar characters traverse a Midgar that manages to be both familiar and strange to those who played (and did not play, as we will see) the original.

The top comment on the YouTube trailer invokes a temporal and affective connection between 1997 and 2020, reading "I skipped school on launch day in 1997. I'm skipping work on launch day in 2020".[43] This comment generated predominantly positive responses, with several users commenting that they did, and plan on doing, the same. This initial comment succinctly connects the memory of a moment in time back to the present day, and the desire to replicate a particular feeling that is invoked on launch day. Another comment pointing towards this temporal collapse and the associated memories reads "Me in 1997 wow these graphics are amazing 🙈 Me in 2019 wow these graphics are amazing 🙈". These user comments, made prior to the launch of the game, invoke a desire to remember and recreate the same feelings that they recall having as children.

Another comment is suggestive of fans casting a nostalgic lens over the game, in a way that actually brings the remake closer to the game of memory. "Pretty sure this is how everyone imagined it looking on the original Playstation". Replies to this comment

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40   Remark by the author: None of these, ultimately, describes what Square Enix released in 2020.
41   MARKS, T.: *Final Fantasy 7 Remake Review*. Released on 6th April 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.ign.com/articles/final-fantasy-7-remake-review>.; PETIT, C.: *Final Fantasy 7 Remake Is a Flawed, but Fascinating Reimagining of a Classic*. Released on 6th April 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/reviews/2020/4/6/21208806/final-fantasy-7-remake-review-playstation-4>.; SCHREIER, J.: *Final Fantasy VII Remake: The Kotaku Review*. Released on 6th April 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://kotaku.com/final-fantasy-vii-remake-the-kotaku-review-1842697312>.
42   For more information, see: NEILL HOCH, I.: "Action Combat Trash:" Final Fantasy VII Remake, Control, and Combat Nostalgia. In CASH, J., OLSEN, C. (eds.): *Final Fantasy VII at 25.* Jefferson, NC : McFarland & Company, 2022. (In press).
43   Remark by the author: All directly quoted YouTube users' comments concerning Final Fantasy VII Remake (here and further) have been left unedited, i.e. cited with original grammatical and spelling errors. Square brackets with ellipses indicate the intentional reduction of comments in length from the original, maintaining the meaning value. Source of comments: *Final Fantasy VII Remake – E3 2019 Trailer | PS4*. Released on 11th June 2019. [online]. [2021-06-02]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3xSGv3Hfio&t=91s>.

largely concur that this is the game they imagined in their childhood while playing with boxy polygons. "Wait, you're telling me this isn't what I played in 97?!? LIES!!!" and "People are complaining about this yet this is how i imagined them when i played the game". Both of these reactions are emblematic of this style of comment, expressing the excitement that they felt as their imaginary Midgar was brought to life in the FFVII-R trailer. In a separate top-level comment, another user writes "It's looking exactly like how I imagined it in my 9 year old brain".

J. Schreier, reviewing the game for Kotaku goes so far as to write: "Sometimes, abstraction is better than reality. It's always tough for a game developer to surpass what's been locked into a player's brain after years of imagination. But Final Fantasy VII Remake's Midgar is truly something to behold – a spectacle at which I could spend many hours marveling".[44] The realized Midgar is here touted as better than imagination, better than any possible memory. The game seemed almost a challenge to review, with Petit at Polygon conceding that one's understanding and appraisal of the remake cannot be separated from how one understands the original game.[45] Even if one had not played the original game, it is difficult to approach FFVII-R without preconceptions, given the influence the original 1997 game had on the role-playing game genre. Memory itself is not a singular encoding of an event, but rather is a composite of information stored during the original event, emotional states both at the time of the event and the time of memory recall, and relevant information stored both prior to the original experience and occurring after the experience but prior to recall.[46] Comments left by users prove how influential this composite really is when 'remembering' FFVII.

In a particularly vivid comment that succinctly categorizes the collapsing of time, place, and memory, a user writes, "This remake is so well done that those scenes gave me deja vus, even though I had never actually seen them before". However, it is not as if these imagined scenes and characters are untouched by the 20+ years between games. FFVII's characters have been recreated in an endless array of products. A commenter points out "Actually, my imagination came after watched FF 7: Advent Children Complete and FF 7: Crisis Core". These later Compilation of FFVII titles, one a CGI movie and the other a game for the PlayStation Portable, featured more detailed, higher resolution graphics than the original game and included many of the original characters. These encounters, spread out over up to 23 years, collapse when encountering the remade game. This points towards Boym's cohabitation of past and present typical of mass media. Time collapses in FFVII-R, but in a different fashion than in the Yakuza series. There is little comparison in the YouTube comments between FFVII-R and other numbered Final Fantasy titles which, while sharing some thematic elements, exist independently of each other. However, Compilation of FFVII properties is discussed in a manner that makes obvious the number of contributing factors that have collected and transformed in players' memories.

L. J. Lohrenz, writing for IGN before FFVII-R's release, compares the character models from the original games to the models from available pre-release promotional materials. She notes of the game's protagonist, "it was probably really hard to mess with this design since we've seen Cloud rendered in high-def so very often that every element has become iconic".[47] Beyond the official depictions of the characters, L. J. Lohrenz acknowledges

44   SCHREIER, J.: *Final Fantasy VII Remake: The Kotaku Review*. Released on 6th April 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://kotaku.com/final-fantasy-vii-remake-the-kotaku-review-1842697312>.
45   PETIT, C.: *Final Fantasy 7 Remake Is a Flawed, but Fascinating Reimagining of a Classic*. Released on 6th April 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/reviews/2020/4/6/21208806/final-fantasy-7-remake-review-playstation-4>.
46   MOSKOWITZ, G.: *Social Cognition: Understanding Self and Others.* New York : Gilford Press, 2005, p. 22.
47   LOHRENZ, L. J.: *Comparing the FF7 Remake Character Designs vs the Original Final Fantasy VII*. Released on 31st January 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/06/04/ff7-remake-vs-original-final-fantasy-vii-character-designs>.

the contributions of cosplayers, who have over the years constructed costumes and especially wigs based on the original designs that look much more realistic, writing "thousands of cosplayers have done the work of translating the original geometric yellows [of Cloud's hair] into feasible wigs. All the design team had to do was model it".[48] These observations demonstrate how composite the memory of FFVII actually is, a combination of the original game, Compilation titles, imagination, and fan works.

A small number of YouTube commenters explicitly noted that they had never played the original game, yet were excited for FFVII-R. In most cases, they did express a familiarity with the world and characters built through the prevalence of Compilation content. A top-level comment reads, "Never played Final Fantasy and I'm incredibly hype. I couldn't imagine how hype diehard fans must be". Additional commenters follow up by replying, "Same here, never played the original, but I do love the characters when they've appeared in other works & I'm really looking forward to this game" and "I too didn't play the original game but already know the characters in it [...]". The latter commenter goes onto explain that they just bought the original (remastered version, presumably) on Steam because of the announcement.

FFVII-R's reflective orientation permeates the game, beginning from the original iconography of the games, while suggesting there are larger, more radical departures to come. However, it is also possible that in departing from the original in such a vivid fashion, even if these departures are only occasional in the first episode, there is a restorative impulse buried in FFVII-R. It is impossible to go back to the original FFVII of 1997. It is, of course, possible to find a working PlayStation and disk in playable condition. Square Enix has also released ports of the original game, in a remastered format for mobile devices, PC, and consoles. It is thus entirely possible to play something akin to the original software. But the experience of 1997, of course, is long gone. Either someone playing the 1997 title for the first time in 2019, 'in honour' of the announcement of the remake, or returning to the game and trying to recapture the feeling of their youth, are not actually transported back into a time when we did not know what Cloud, Tifa, and Aerith looked like in higher resolution graphics. Indeed, even as Lohrenz tries to compare the original designs to their remake counterparts, the blocky polygons in the 1997 game would have never been the picture in many gamers' heads, imagination notwithstanding. Even before *Advent Children* was first released in 2005, T. Nomura's character artwork provided images of the main and supporting cast that included details in their designs and costumes difficult to render in 1997's technology.

In making its reflective tendencies obvious, FFVII-R allows the nostalgia attached to the original 1997 game to remain intact. There is no mistaking one for the other. And indeed, this is one of the principles of reflective nostalgia emphasized by S. Boym, and what makes reflective nostalgia a potentially ethical practice. Writing of nostalgia and its connections "to be at home," S. Boym writes that: "Restorative nostalgics don't acknowledge the uncanny and terrifying aspects of what was once homey. Reflective nostalgics see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts".[49] FFVII-R's narrative is quite literally haunted by the 'whispers,' semi-corporeal spectres that visibly intercede whenever an action taken by the characters seems to deviate from the original plot of the game (a character shot through the chest and dying too early; someone living through a city infrastructure collapse they should not have; the wrong group of characters attempting to complete a mission). Aside from this literalization

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48   LOHRENZ, L. J.: *Comparing the FF7 Remake Character Designs vs the Original Final Fantasy VII.* Released on 31st January 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/06/04/ff7-remake-vs-original-final-fantasy-vii-character-designs>.

49   BOYM, S.: *The Future of Nostalgia.* New York : Basic Books, 2003, p. 251.

of ghosts attempting to 'correct' the characters' actions, FFVII-R is also a mirror, though perhaps a potentially more-perfect mirror, one that anticipates the imaginations of consumer-fans and aims to do one better. But it also serves to obfuscate the aspects of the 1997 software that might prove to be unheimlich. It allows the remastered copies of FFVII to parade about as 'untouched', bolstered by how blatantly FFVII-R presents itself as something different.

Conclusion

Both remade titles, Yakuza Kiwami and Final Fantasy VII Remake fail to fit neatly into M. B. Grada's nostalgia continuum for retro and neo-retro games. They are both simultaneously restorative and reflective, though not through identical processes. YK, in reproducing a near-reality 2005 Tokyo, complete with recognizable brand names and pop culture, should invoke restorative nostalgia. While some additional content has been added, YK much more closely adheres to Y1's original plot than FFVII-R resembles FFVII. Yet, the condensed production and release schedule of both new Yakuza titles and remakes/remasters allows for consumers and critics to compare titles that, while covering decades of diegetic and original production years, can now be played back-to-back. The comparisons and judgements facilitated by this production schedule induces players into more reflective patterns of nostalgia, where they are not quite settled or at home. FFVII-R, in its more pronounced departure from the original game, including not only additional narrative content, expanded character backstories, new characters, and the implication that the plot will continue to deviate in subsequent episodes, adopts an approach that more closely aligns with reflective nostalgia, closing off the possibility of return to artificially untouched memories of the original game and original experience playing. However, in deviating so drastically from the original title, FFVII-R can allow players to leave their original perceptions of the 1997 title undisturbed, to be revisited and restored through the remasters of the original or never engaging with the original material again, only the memories of the first game. In being quite obviously not the original FFVII, FFVII-R may not invoke reflection at all.

The engagement with nostalgia precipitated by both titles is furthermore contingent on the initial differences in their reception among Western audiences. YK, for all its restorative trappings, was released to an audience that largely had few memories of the original game, in effect restoring something that was never there. FFVII-R, based on a deeply beloved by many title, was released to an audience who already participated in both restorative and reflective practices through both prior remasters and a consistent stream of Compilation games, films, and other media in the intervening years. In setting FFVII-R as a potentially different continuity altogether, the remake potentially allows consumer-fans and critics to set the game aside as something else, something different.

As we have conceded earlier, these are not the titles M. B. Grada anticipated when considering how to make sense of retro game preservation practices and neo-retro game development. Nonetheless, there are processes of nostalgia at work in both YK and FFVII-R, and stepping back one layer to S. Boym's discussion of restorative and reflective nostalgia proves productive in understanding the ways in which these games as consumer objects interact with subject-players and both individual and collective memory. The games invoke elements of both restorative and reflective nostalgia in a manner that may ultimately protect their status as consumer products. Players may in fact both wish to restore their original reactions to these titles and reflect upon the intervening years and

how these games have been transformed in the light of technological improvement and shifting social context. The two remakes addressed here offers players both options, potentially appealing to ever-widening audiences, both new and old.

As a textually analytic project, investigating both user comments and digital gaming press articles, this study has several limitations. First, the practices and perceptions of game developers have not been directly considered here, and the staff working on AAA game remakes are likely to include both those who may have worked on the original titles, and individuals who were themselves fans of the originals. Understanding the perspectives of those involved in production may further complicate the processes of nostalgia perpetuated by these games. Additionally, while the methods utilized here allow for an analysis of nostalgic reactions brought on by exposure to the games' trailers rather than interaction with the researchers, there is much that can be learned through interview procedures with players discussing their affective engagement with such games, as well as their motivations for purchasing remake titles.

It remains that players not only purchase and play these titles, but as seen through their comments on YouTube, also argue the games' merits, assess their own personal experiences with the titles that predate them, and speculate on what is to come from each franchise. In mixing nostalgia, both restorative and reflective, there is the potential for AAA game remakes to engage multiple audiences who may not all expect or anticipate the same level of engagement, memory, and future expectations from the games they play.

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The Cosplay Phenomenon in Intentions of Art Marketing

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ABSTRACT:

Since the 1980s, the cosplay phenomenon has become a significant aspect of popular culture mainly in Japan, but also in other parts of Asia and in the Western world as well. Nowadays, cosplay events are the most common feature of various fan conventions and there are also dedicated conventions, such as local and international competitions. Websites, social networks, and other forms of social media centred on cosplay activities are just as popular places for the presentation of cosplayers work, and also for cosplay fan conventions. We encounter the definition of this phenomenon mainly in sociological studies, but in its definition from a marketing point of view, and also in term of art studies is less frequent in an academic environment. In the presented study, we look at the cosplayer as an artist with the possibility to become a brand. Cooperation with cosplayers is attractive for different categories of products, not only directly connected with popular culture, e.g., cooperation with bank institutions. On the other hand, it is really necessary to underline the connection with products and texts of popular culture. In the case of self-promotion of cosplayers, games, movies and other pop-culture festivals and events take really important place. This study aims to present a theoretical reflection of the cosplay phenomenon from the perspective of art marketing, as a potential basis for the further research in this area. The situation is illustrated by practical examples.

KEY WORDS:

art marketing, cosplay, digital culture, performance art, personal brand, social media.

Introduction

Digitization and challenges of the virtual environment stimulate the increase of the popularity and potential of the cosplay phenomenon, also in the Czech-Slovak environment. In the perspective of J. K. Lome, we look at cosplay as the "act of dressing up or emulating fictional or historical characters",[1] such as figures known from popular comics, movies, digital games or other various forms of media texts. At the same time, this underlines the connection between the phenomenon and culture itself, as it contains "many material practices that use the text as a starting point for new forms of play and productivity".[2] The terms 'play' and 'productivity' can also be identified in the term cosplay itself. When analysing the etymology of the word cosplay more deeply, we will find out that the term "is a linguistic mash-up typical in modern Japanese language, the combination of the English words 'costume' and 'play', which become コスプ".[3] According to the mentioned perspective it is necessary

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1   For more information, see: LOME, J. K.: The Creative Empowerment of Body Positivity in the Cosplay Community. In *Transformative Works and Cultures,* 2016, Vol. 22, No. 1. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/712/645>.

2   LAMERICHS, N.: *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures.* Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 201. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28223/1001770.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

3   ITO, K., CRUTCHER, P. A.: Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay. In *Society*, 2014, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 47. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://silo.tips/download/15446>.; Remark by the authors: Japanese meaning of コスプレ is called "kosupure" – see: TRUONG, A. H., GAUDET, S.: Costume Play and Young Adults' Socio-Economic Insertion Pathways in Japan. In *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure,* 2020, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 177-196. [online]. [2021-06-27]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s41978-020-00054-3.pdf>.

to look at cosplay as a *form of art*, or *the way people produce art* – they create art products and become pieces of art themselves. Based on the above, this study offers an innovative and little-reflected view of the cosplayer as an artist. The aim of the study is to present a theoretical reflection of the cosplay phenomenon from the perspective of art marketing illustrated by practical examples, as a potential basis for further research in this area.

Brief Definition of a Cosplayer as Part of a Cosplay Community

According to the World Cosplay Summit's fundamental principles we can define cosplay as "the act of dressing up as a character from a manga, anime, or game and cosplayers are the people who dress up as a character from manga, anime, game".[4] As we mentioned above, the term 'cosplay' originated by the combination of two English words – 'costume' and 'play' – and "it indicates the identification of a cosplayer with his or her favourite fantasy hero (e.g. cartoon, manga, movies, or videogames), imitating gestures, behaviour, and especially the aesthetic aspect through refined costumes accompanied by the same accessories (e.g. weapons, rings, sceptres, etc.)".[5]

A. H. Truong and S. Gaudet also use term 'kosupure' as the original Japanese name of this unique phenomenon. They also argue that cosplay can be viewed as a tool which young adults use to "negotiate the opportunities and constraints they face in their life course or even forge alternative trajectories outside traditional norms, in a context where young people sometimes no longer have access to, or no longer wish to conform to, conventional life courses".[6] The authors underline the importance of cosplay according to its ability to reframe the socio-economic and cultural participation of young adults in Japanese society. Based on the above perspective, it is possible to point out the important socially anchored position of the phenomenon, which offers young people the possibility of open alternative participation and self-expression in social and cultural issues. A similar perspective is offered by the concept of the so-called 'cultural citizenship', which B. S. Turner defines as "a cultural empowerment, namely the capacity to participate effectively, creatively and successfully within a national culture",[7] while the author also adds that in contemporary societies "cultures proliferate, fragment and diversify through political and social experimentation".[8] The phenomenon of cosplay can thus be seen as a subculture with an anthropologically anchored interest in the specifics of the culture of Japanese youth and the values shared by it.[9]

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4   *About World Cosplay Summit*. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://www.worldcosplaysummit.jp/en/about/>.

5   ROGORA, A., CARLI, P., MORGANTI, M.: The Imitation Game: The Urban Sustainability Game as an Experience of Participation, Knowledge, Evaluation, and Project Sharing. In SAYIGH, A. (ed.): *Green Buildings and Renewable Energy: Med Green Forum 2019 – Part of World Renewable Energy Congress and Network*. Cham : Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020, p. 520.

6   TRUONG, A. H., GAUDET, S.: Costume Play and Young Adults' Socio-Economic Insertion Pathways in Japan. In *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure,* 2020, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 181. [online]. [2021-06-27]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s41978-020-00054-3.pdf>.

7   TURNER, B. S.: Outline of a General Theory of Cultural Citizenship. In STEVENSON, N. (ed.): *Culture and Citizenship*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi : SAGE Publications, 2001, p. 12.

8   Ibidem.

9   TRUONG, A. H., GAUDET, S.: Costume Play and Young Adults' Socio-Economic Insertion Pathways in Japan. In *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure,* 2020, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 179. [online]. [2021-06-27]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s41978-020-00054-3.pdf>.

Another social level of the concept, determined by elements of popular culture, is the culture of fandom, which points to the possibility of updating the original story with the intentions of expectations and preferences of a specific community of fans, while cosplay thus becomes a form of social integration of young people.[10]

In terms of anchoring the origin of the cosplay phenomenon, it is possible to identify the presence of two currents – the influence of American and Japanese culture.[11] In the case of the historical perspective connected with America, the primary American festivals of popular culture, organized in the 1960s in North America (in the USA), come to the fore.[12] As mentioned by T. M. Winge, perhaps the earliest mention of cosplay in the American context can be considered a unique masquerade ball, which took place in honour of Jules Verne's novels in 1877, at which guests were disguised as heroes from his books.[13] Other examples of dressing up as fictional characters follow-up caricatures created by A. D. Cond (early 20th century) and the first special masquerade ball *Worldcon* took place in 1940, at which visitors could even receive an award for the best costumes.[14] On the other hand, there is the Japanese perspective, as K. Ito and P. A. Crutcher directly associate this phenomenon with Japanese theatres called *Kabuki*. These performances are associated with feudal times, when male actors portrayed both male and female characters, using make-up and wigs as well as camouflage by clothing.[15] As mentioned by H.-J. Niu, Y.-S. Chiang and H.-T. Tsai, a new, internet technology-stimulated, *otaku subculture* was formed in the 1980s in Japan, which had subsequently a share in a significant role in forming the cosplay subculture.[16] Otaku specifically symbolizes a generation of young people growing up, and often socialized, with computers and computer games. In the case of the Japanese branch of the cosplay phenomenon, it is also necessary to replace the connection of cultural elements "manga, pachinko, and cosplay are three immensely popular parts of Japanese pop culture entertainment today".[17] A. Truong and S. Gaudet associate the cosplay phenomenon especially with the onset of the new millennium, pointing to it as one of the most recognized practices of the cultural industry in Japan.[18] In the case of Japan, N. Lamerichs emphasizes the important, even prominent, position of cosplay also in Western settings and notes that "cosplay is associated with Japanese popular culture. There seems to be significant overlap between cosplay and other forms of dressing up such

10   For more information, see: LAMERICHS, N.: Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay. In *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 2011, Vol. 7, No. 1. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/246/230>.; TRUONG, A. H., GAUDET, S.: Costume Play and Young Adults' Socio-Economic Insertion Pathways in Japan. In *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 177. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41978-020-00054-3#citeas>.
11   WINGE, T. M.: Costuming the Imagination: Origins of Anime and Manga Cosplay. In *Mechademia Second Arc*, 2006, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 66. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/368597>.
12   LAMERICHS, N.: *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures.* Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 199. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28223/1001770.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
13   UNWIN, T.: *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*. Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2005, p. 223.; WINGE, T. M.: *Costuming Cosplay: Dressing the Imagination*. London : Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019, p. 2.
14   WINGE, T. M.: *Costuming Cosplay: Dressing the Imagination*. London : Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019, p. 3.
15   ITO, K., CRUTCHER, P. A.: Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay. In *Society*, 2014, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 47. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://silo.tips/download/15446>.
16   NIU, H.-J., CHIANG, Y.-S., TSAI, H.-T.: An Exploratory Study of the Otaku Adolescent Consumer. In *Psychology & Marketing*, 2012, Vol. 29, No. 10, p. 713. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.20558>.
17   ITO, K., CRUTCHER, P. A.: Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay. In *Society*, 2014, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 44. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://silo.tips/download/15446>.
18   TRUONG, A. H., GAUDET, S.: Costume Play and Young Adults' Socio-Economic Insertion Pathways in Japan. In *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 178. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s41978-020-00054-3.pdf>.

as (live-action) role-playing but also customizing one's avatar. In cosplay, games are embodied and transposed to new, physical settings".[19] Although this is a phenomenon strongly associated with the contents and products of popular culture, the impetus and starting point of cosplay can be a fictional, but also of historical character. As mentioned by J. K. Lome, "fictional characters can include figures from television, comics, movies, and other various forms of media. In cosplay – the term is a portmanteau of 'costume' and 'roleplay' – people create and become the art".[20]

As we can see, this popular phenomenon has truly broad roots based on elements of at least two major cultural entities. For the time being, however, we can unequivocally conclude that this phenomenon, at least in its elementary forms, existed within these cultures much before it was given the currently established name, the authorship of which is attributed to Japanese film director and game designer Takahashi Nobuyuki.[21] N. Lamerichs states that the origin of the name is based on Takahashi's visits to the USA in the 1980s, when he became acquainted with the practice of American fans dressing up in the costumes of their heroes.[22] On the other hand, A. H. Truong and S. Gaudet also point to a fan perspective, that combines the popularization of cosplay with the famous science-fiction author and critic Kotani Mari, "who is said to have been among the first to dress-up in manga and anime *characters at two major events* – Comiket *and* Ashicon – *in the late 1970s*".[23]

From the point of view of a broader perspective and anchoring of the cosplay phenomenon, one can lean towards the concept of the author J. K. Lome, who defines cosplay culture as a collective production of traditions, products as well as ideas mentally and physically supporting the self-confidence of individuals. According to him, "cosplay can transcend conventional costuming to become a transformative and creative means to view a character, as well as the person embodying them".[24] Cosplay can therefore be seen as an opportunity to get a fan closer to their fictional hero, to the world presented in popular movies, series, comics, or digital games. We can perceive cosplay as a way of a unique self-presentation of enthusiasm and admiration for a given work, which also brings the potential of individual personalization of the portrayed hero.

19   LAMERICHS, N.: *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 201. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://library. oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28223/1001770. pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
20   For more information, see: LOME, J. K.: The Creative Empowerment of Body Positivity in the Cosplay Community. In *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 2016, Vol. 22, No. 1. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/712/ 645>.
21   ITO, K., CRUTCHER, P. A.: Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay. In *Society*, 2014, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 47. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://silo.tips/download/ 15446>.
22   LAMERICHS, N.: *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 201. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://library. oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28223/1001770. pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
23   TRUONG, A. H., GAUDET, S.: Costume Play and Young Adults' Socio-Economic Insertion Pathways in Japan. In *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 178. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s41978-020-00054-3.pdf>.
24   For more information, see: LOME, J. K.: The Creative Empowerment of Body Positivity in the Cosplay Community. In *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 2016, Vol. 22, No. 1. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/712/ 645>.

Cosplayer as an Artist – Cosplay as a Form of Art

Cosplay can be also considered as "costume play or costume playing",[25] however, on the other hand it is necessary to emphasize that cosplay is not standardly perceived in the perspectives of art, although as J. Martin emphasizes creativity, which is presented by the created costumes as well as the way of portraying a given character, represents a unique form of art.[26] As mentioned by J. K. Lome, cosplay should be seen as a transformative form of visual art, based on the potential to enhance a person's creative identity as well as stimulating feelings of bodily self-confidence and supporting self-confidence.[27] At the same time, the author emphasizes that cosplay also includes elements of dramatic play, which creates a unique performance. This perspective is also confirmed by the approach of I. Abizu, who perceives cosplaying as a mixture of various forms of art – "a visual art (something to be appreciated with the eyes), a plastic art (something built as representing an object), and a performance art (something to be performed in front of an audience)".[28] In the case of cosplay, four factors come to the fore: (1) *a narrative*, (2) *a set of clothing*, (3) *a play or performance before spectators*, and (4) *a subject or player.*[29] Based on the definition of different forms of products in art,[30] in confrontation with the above factors, we propose to distinguish two primary levels of cosplay as an art product. The first level represents 'the product in the sense of the performance', because each costume hides a story behind it, that is most often anchored in a fictional work of popular culture. At the same time, however, it gives the author of the cosplay the possibility of self-presentation and self-reflection in the actions of the portrayed character. Here we mainly underline the combination of visual and performance art. On the second level it is possible to point to *the product in terms of the costume itself*, while the elements of visual art come to the fore but are based on aspects of 'plastic art'.[31] In the case of both perspectives, however, we also emphasize the position of the author of the complex work himself, who becomes an artist with the potential to build their own brand. J. Martin also emphasizes the presented perspective of cosplay in two basic forms – the costume creation and the performance – while he also underlines that this is the way for creative expression, self-presentation, and social-interaction too.[32]

25   LAMERICHS, N.: *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures.* Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 199. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://library. oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28223/1001770. pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

26   MARTIN, J.: *Cosplay as Art.* [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://nashvillearts.com/2015/04/ cosplay-as-art/>.

27   See also: LOME, J. K.: The Creative Empowerment of Body Positivity in the Cosplay Community. In *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 2016, Vol. 22, No. 1. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https:// journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/712/645>.

28   ALBIZU, I.: *Is Cosplay a Performance Art?.* Released on 7th September 2018. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://ingmaralbizu.com/is-cosplay-a-performance-art/>.

29   For more information, see: LAMERICHS, N.: Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay. In *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 2011, Vol. 7, No. 1. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://journal. transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/246/230>.

30   JOHNOVÁ, R.: *Marketing kulturního dědictví a umění: Art marketing v praxi.* Prague : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 16-18.; ŠTEFKO, R., KRAJŇÁK, R.: *An Analytical View on Fine Arts Marketing.* Katowice : Publishing House of the Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education, 2013, p. 54. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/25721/Fine%20Arts.pdf>.

31   Remark by the authors: In the case of the concept of 'plastic art' we start from the perspective of 3-dimensional art – see: *Definition of Plastic Art.* [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://www. merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plastic%20art>.

32   See: MARTIN, J.: *Cosplay as Art.* [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://nashvillearts.com/2015/04/ cosplay-as-art/>.

In the context of the above definition of cosplay as a form of art and the cosplayer as an artist, or as a free creator of art, we come to a specific area of marketing –art marketing – which applies to area of commerce and presentation of art as capital.[33] In a broader sense, according to R. Johnová, art marketing does not "include only fine arts, but also marketing in all areas of culture and art, i.e. literature, libraries, publishing houses, music, theatre, architecture, film and applied arts. It deals with the marketing of performing artists as well as the marketing of copyright works, as well as the sale of works of art".[34] Art marketing enables the acquisition of funds for individuals or organizations who choose to implement and publicly present fine artistic, cultural and social events.[35] Art marketing can be seen as a 'subordinate servant of art', as it brings to its 'customers' the possibility of internal filling and enrichment of life on the basis of the artistic experience itself. In its application, however, it is necessary to accept the subordination of marketing to artistic goals, and also not to adapt the product to market requirements, but on the contrary – to attract the audience to the current offer.[36] From the marketing point of view, the place of presentation for the cosplayer are mainly various festivals of popular culture, connected with the fantasy world, inspired by the game, film or serial environments. They offer various possibilities of self-promotion for the cosplayer, but also its application in cooperation with various brands falling under the products of popular media culture. We consider these events to be a very important stepping-stone in terms of building publicity and recognition of the cosplayer with the potential to create their own brand.

Promotional Activities of Cosplayer as an Artist

Based on the above findings it is clear that cosplay is an integral part of various sci-fi, comics, and gaming festivals and competition, which we consider to be primary possibilities of presenting the cosplayer and their work. Among the leading festivals we can undoubtedly include the *World Cosplay Summit*, which was first held in 2003 in Nagoya City (Japan) and was even sponsored by TV Aichi. As is stated by K. Ito and P. A. Crutcher, "the purpose of the summit is to promote international friendship and exchange through the medium of Japanese pop culture and to recognize its popularity and importance abroad".[37] WCS is an event that brings together cosplayers to promote international and cultural interaction as well as the exchange of cultural values, and is supported by local governments as well as foreign diplomatic missions.[38] Equally important is the traditional *Comic-Con* event organized in San Diego. As a result of the pandemic situation in 2021, this meeting has been moved into the online space (the period from 23rd to 25th July 2021). As a replacement for the traditional

33   ŠTEFKO, R., KRAJŇÁK, R.: *An Analytical View on Fine Arts Marketing*. Katowice : Publishing House of the Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education, 2013, p. 11. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/25721/Fine%20Arts.pdf>.
34   JOHNOVÁ, R.: *Marketing kulturního dědictví a umění: Art marketing v praxi*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 13.
35   ŠTEFKO, R., KRAJŇÁK, R.: *An Analytical View on Fine Arts Marketing*. Katowice : Publishing House of the Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education, 2013, p. 5. [online]. [2021-06-29]. Available at: <https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/25721/Fine%20Arts.pdf>.
36   SPÁLOVÁ, L., SZABÓOVÁ, V.: Recipročný transfer umenia a značiek alebo kultúrny supermarket?. In *Culturologica Slovaca*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 40.
37   ITO, K., CRUTCHER, P. A.: Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay. In *Society*, 2014, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 47. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://silo.tips/download/15446>.
38   *About World Cosplay Summit*. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://www.worldcosplaysummit.jp/en/about/>.

"offline" meeting, the organizers promise a special event called *Comic-Con Special Edition*, which should take place on 26-28th November 2021.[39] This event also includes the *Masquerade Costume Competition*, which is attended by cosplayers from all over the world every year.

In Slovakia, popular cosplay festivals include an international festival of pop culture (e.g. comics, anime, games, Japanese culture, KPOP, science fiction, fantasy and horror) called *Animeshow* or *ComicSalon* (it depends on the term in which it is realized), which includes a rich offer of lectures, workshops, competitions, presentation of the latest films, fantasy literature, music and art. In addition, it offers meetings with actors, writers and other various foreign and domestic guests. It was organized under the name *Istrocon* as early as 1988 and is currently held on a semi-annual basis, mostly in March and September. Due to the pandemic situation, the 14th edition of the Spring Festival version *Animeshow* took place from 2nd to 4th July 2021 (after more than a year break) and once again enjoyed great success.[40] Also worth mentioning is the *UniCon* festival of games, electronic sports and virtual reality, which offers its visitors the opportunity to get an overview of the latest technologies in the field of virtual reality.[41] This year was its 6th edition (from 20th to 21st February 2021),[42] which due to the pandemic situation also took place (as well as most other mass events) in the online space (last year this took place directly in the building of the Jozef Matúš Hall in Trnava). Last year there was a special novelty for all cosplayers, a photo shoot of the Cosplay calendar for 2021, the sale of which was launched in support of the crowdfunding campaign on 20th January 2021. Undoubtedly, the traditional Czech festivals include *Animefest*, which has been organizing by the *Brno Otaku* association at the Brno Exhibition Grounds since 2004.[43] This annual meeting of fans of Japanese comics (manga) and animated films (anime) is considered as the oldest and also the largest independent con of its kind in the Czech Republic. The last event took place in 2019 (16th edition) and the next event is scheduled for 2022 (events in 2020 and 2021 were cancelled due to the pandemic situation). In addition to these festivals, cosplayers have the opportunity to participate in other interesting events organized in the Czech Republic or in Slovakia, however, some of them, as well as several global events, did not take place as a result of the pandemic or took place in modified virtual form, e.g., *Advík*, *Fantasy Festival*, *Comic Con Prague*, *VUB Y-con* or *Nipponfest & Hangukon*, etc.

Festivals and specialised competitions offer these creators a unique space for the presentation of their art, represented both by the costume itself and by a complementary performance depicting the character itself (see the definition of a cosplayer as an artist). For this reason, most festivals create a special space for cosplay in the form of so-called fashion shows, photography sessions and cosplay acts,[44] which represent the basic limit of the institutionalization of this phenomenon at the same time, while from a competitive perspective they are elements of motivation. N. Lamerichs adds that "cosplay is gradually influencing the professional game and media industry. Some media companies are already very aware of the quality of fan's costumes and use them for promotional activities".[45]

39   *Comic-Con International: San Diego 2021*. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.comic-con.org/cci>.
40   *AnimeSHOW 2021*. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.comics-salon.sk/>.
41   ŠMILŇÁKOVÁ, M.: *Unicon vám ukáže najväčšiu zbierku retro hier na Slovensku a Česku. Príďte zažiť jeho jedinečnú atmosféru*. Released on 26th February 2020. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://aetter.sk/unicon-vam-ukaze-najvacsiu-zbierku-retro-hier-na-slovensku-a-cesku-pridte-zazit-jeho-jedinecnu-atmosferu/>.
42   *UniCon 2021*. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://unicon.lol/20-21/>.
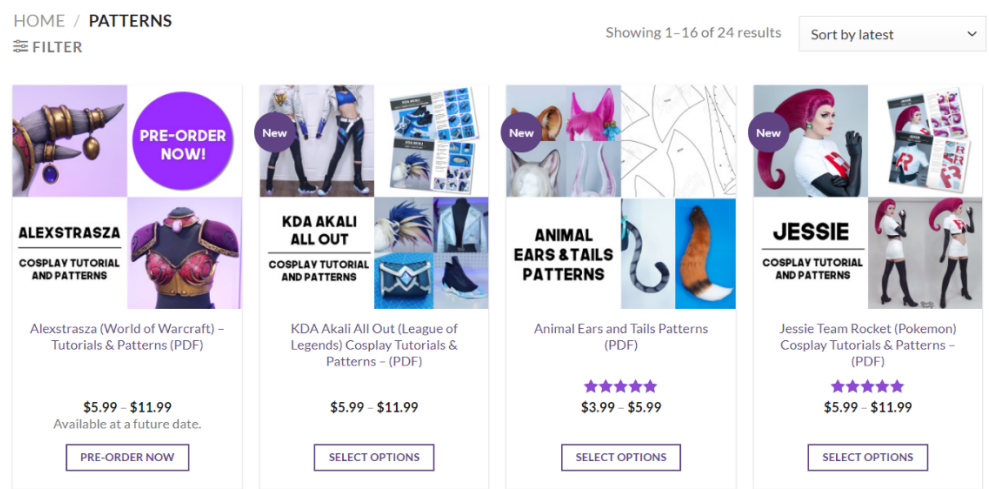43   *O Animefestu*. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.animefest.cz/cs/Animefest>.
44   For more information, see: LAMERICHS, N.: Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay. In *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 2011, Vol. 7, No. 1. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/246/230>.
45   LAMERICHS, N.: *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 202. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28223/1001770.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

At the same time, we also perceive this cooperation as a perspective way of cosplayer promotion from the perspective of the general public, e.g., a way of spreading awareness about the cosplay phenomenon in general, but especially the promotion of the unique cosplayer.

Although we consider festivals to be the dominant way for the presentation and interaction of the cosplay community, the digitization and virtualization of the online environment have brought opportunities for promotion in the online environment as well. Cosplayers can create their own promotional web page or use a specific 'cosplay sites' (e.g. Cosplay.com, Worldcosplay.net, etc.), which offer cosplayers spaces to create a virtual profile and present their work as well as procedures for processing their own costumes.[46] As an example of the use of a promotional web page we have chosen a cosplayer and artist originally from South African who is currently operating in Canada – *Kinpatsu cosplay* (>330k followers on FB, 430k followers on Instagram), who has her own website and e-shop, where she not only promotes her work and monetizes her passion through the sale of e-books, tutorials or templates for creating add-ons, but also presents herself as an artist who can be engaged as part of a program in workshops, discussions, e.g. as 'a photo attraction' and so on (Picture 1). Cosplayers become not only sellers of costumes as creators, but also of ideas and so-called 'know-how' presented in the form of tutorials and patterns for creating cosplays, for which dedicated fans are willing to pay considerable money.[47]

Picture 1: Kinpatsu cosplay promotion website
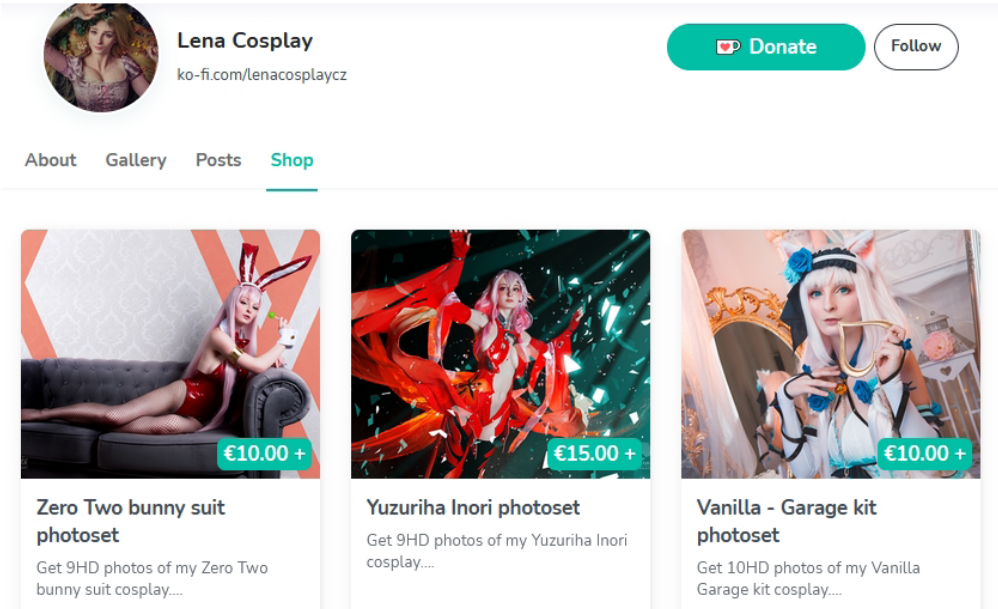*Source: authors' screenshot; Kinpatsu cosplay.* [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://kinpatsucosplay.com/>.

Even in the case of the Czech-Slovak cosplay scene, it is possible to identify cosplayers whose name is their brand. However, unlike abroad, where the sale of so-called *know-how* of materials is at the fore, in the case of the Czech-Slovak environment, products are mostly photo-sets of the cosplay brand (Picture 2). As an example, we present

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46 LAMERICHS, N.: *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 202. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28223/1001770.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

47 *Kinpatsu Cosplay profile on Facebook.* [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/KinpatsuCosplay/>.

the Czech cosplayer *Lena Cosplay*, who sells professional photos of her own cosplay under her brand, however, uses a specialised *ko-fi.com* platform.[48]

Picture 2: Sales page of photosets from Lena Cosplay

Source: author's screenshot; Sales page of photosets from Lena Cosplay. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://ko-fi.com/lenacosplaycz/shop>.

On the other hand, this space, although less unique and closed, is still offered by so-called *traditional* social platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. "Online communities, much like in person social communities, develop their own rhetoric that participants in the community use when interacting with other members. Part of the inclusion in the knowledge capital is being able to develop and participate in the rhetoric of an established community",[49] which develop their own unique virtual subcultures represented by own language, values and behaviour which support "feelings of inclusion and membership".[50] Whether we are talking about specific cosplay forums or 'traditional' social media, it is necessary to look at them as an environment for creating and presenting a personal cosplayer brand. W. Greyser emphasizes the importance of a personal brand, especially in connection with online operation, as a personal brand is everything that represents a person in the online environment – their abilities, skills, experience and personality as such, it is a way to present, emphasize strengths as well as passions, making the individual recognizable and memorable to potential audiences.[51] According to this statement, a person

48   Remark by the authors: Ko-fi.com is free platform to accept donations, memberships and sales directly from fans.; For more information, see: *What Makes Ko-fi Different?.* [online]. [2021-10-16]. Available at: <https://ko-fi.com/about>.
49   KANE, L.: *Why Cosplay? Motivations behind Participation and Use of Social Media among Cosplayers Who Maintain Facebook Artist Pages.* [Dissertation Thesis]. Oregon : Oregon State University, 2017, p. 54. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/j098zd59k?locale=en>.
50   Ibidem, p. 55.
51   GREYSER, W.: *What Is Personal Branding [Free Personal Brand Health Checker].* Released on 17th August 2021. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-personal-branding/>.

who has built a personal brand becomes more trustworthy and has a higher potential to influence the opinions of other people, which is especially important in the case of millennials, which is also supported by results of recent research, according to which a significant part of them (up to 84%) express distrust of advertising, emphasizing the tendency to trust people from whom they acquire a sense of credibility and acquaintances.[52] This perspective is also applicable in the case of the cosplay community, while the awareness, popularity or recognition of the creator associated with their name or personal brand are a promise of effective cooperation from the perspective of other brands. A typical example is cooperation with producers or sellers of accessories or materials needed to make a costume. Due to the growing segment of cosplay fans, specialized shops began to emerge (mostly foreign), in which it is possible to buy ready-made costumes of various characters. And it is these stores that tend to work with cosplayers often, either in the form of long-term ambassadors, or in the form of one-off collaborations, where cosplayers as influencers receive either percentage discounts or free products in exchange for their reviews and promotion in their social media profiles.[53]

Another example is cooperation in the presentation of events or festivals, which, however, in the case of really established events can be understood as a very valuable connection with a significant promotional potential for the cosplayer himself. These represents further potential for cosplayers not only to promote themselves as creators of products with art value (cosplay costumes, cosplay accessories, tutorials, acting, etc.), but also in the position of opinion authorities, long-term ambassadors or influencers – basic levels of the three-component model of social influencers.[54] In this case, in terms of the wide possibilities of cooperation as well as due to current measures restricting various international festivals, we will focus mainly on the potential of social media. In the case of influencer marketing, collaboration can take various forms. According to A. Gaid, sponsored content, reviews, competitions and various gifts, cooperation in the creation of products or content, or even long-term cooperation in the form of brand ambassador come to the fore.[55] On the other hand, *Engaio Digital* company introduces more specific types of influencer marketing campaigns, e.g. gifts and bets, competitions and events, social media management, affiliate marketing, sponsored posts, sponsored blogs, unboxing and reviews, guest blogs, program of brand ambassadors as well as pre-release campaigns.[56]

The organizers of game or pop culture festivals have also adopted the use of the cosplayer as part of their promotion. They use cosplayers for their promotion, e.g., in the form of sponsored competitions for event tickets (Picture 3), which are presented in the social media profile of the cosplayer (influencer). The organizers of these festivals tend to attract visitors especially well-known foreign names from the cosplay community, but the use of nano- and micro-influencers represented by smaller 'local' influencers is also a motivation to visit a specific close community of followers.

52   GREYSER, W.: *What Is Personal Branding [Free Personal Brand Health Checker]*. Released on 17th August 2021. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-personal-branding/>.

53   For example, see: *Senko-san Cosplay Review (Trustedeal) by Quee the Cosfailer*. Released on 27th October 2019. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1v3DyTvxaQ&feature=youtu.be>.

54   SPÁLOVÁ, L., MIKULÁŠ, P., PÚCHOVSKÁ, O.: Attitudes Towards Different Influencer Categories – Exploration of Generation Z. In *Communication Today*, 2021, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 49.

55   GAID, A.: *6 Top Types of Influencer Marketing Campaigns (with examples)*. Released on 18th December 2020. [online]. [2021-06-28]. Available at: <https://www.oberlo.com/blog/influencer-marketing-examples>.

56   *8 Influencer Marketing Campaign Types*. [online]. [2021-06-30]. Available at: <https://engaiodigital.com/influencer-marketing-campaign-types/>.
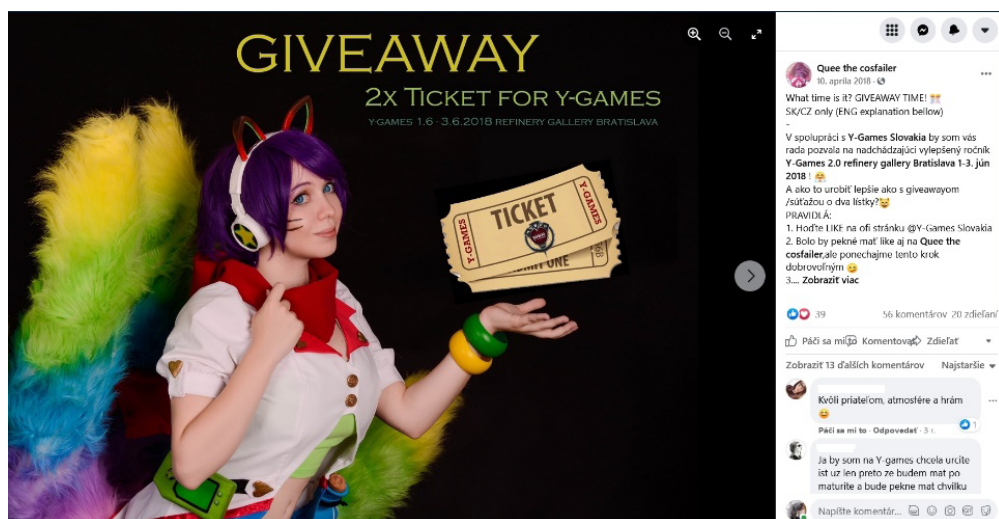
Picture 3: Promotion of the Y-games festival in the form of a competition for tickets to the event by cosplayer Quee the cosfailer

Source: authors' screenshot; Post from Quee the cosfailer Facebook profile. Released on 10th April 2018. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/335296803506371/photos/pb.100056417477454.-2207520000../572632286439487/?type=3>.

In the Czech-Slovak environment, cooperation with television stations such as *HBO*, where cosplayers are used to promote current TV series and film news, comes to the fore as well as the presentation of new television stations (Picture 4). The potential of cosplayers is gradually being discovered by cinema chains too, which invite cosplayers to movie premieres or the shooting of thematic video spots (e.g., the cinema chain Cinemax, which engaged several Slovak cosplayers in its Christmas spot in 2020) (Picture 5). Cosplayers can also be involved in corporate events and promotions, as it was the case with the cooperation of the *nekonečno.sk* store in *SC Eurovea* (Bratislava) with cosplayer *Kaminari Cosplay* (Picture 6).
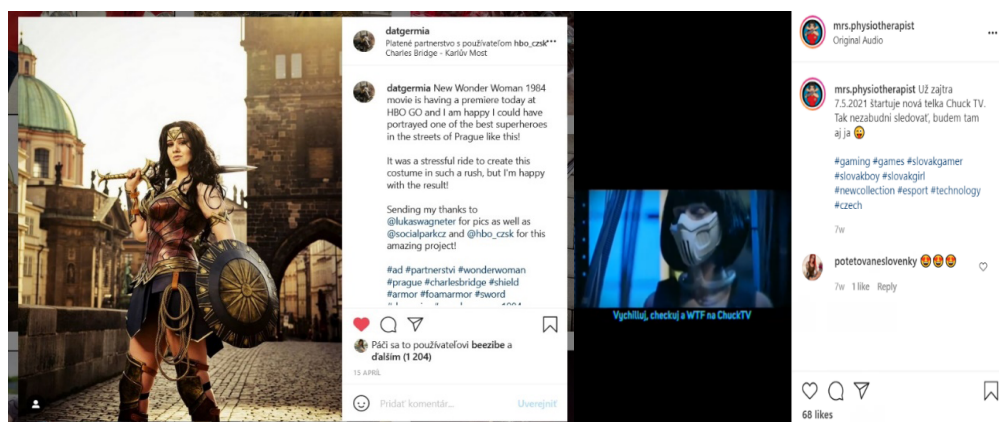
Picture 4: Cosplayer Datgermia promotes the film "Wonder Woman 1984" in collaboration with hbo_czsk and cosplayer Mrs.Physiotherapist promotes new TV station "Chuck TV"

Source: authors' screenshots; Post from Instagram profile @datgermia. Released on 15th April 2021. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNsbkcKDQTb/>.; Post from Instagram profile @mrs.physiotherapist. Released on 6th May 2021. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/COiRYzynLsi/>.
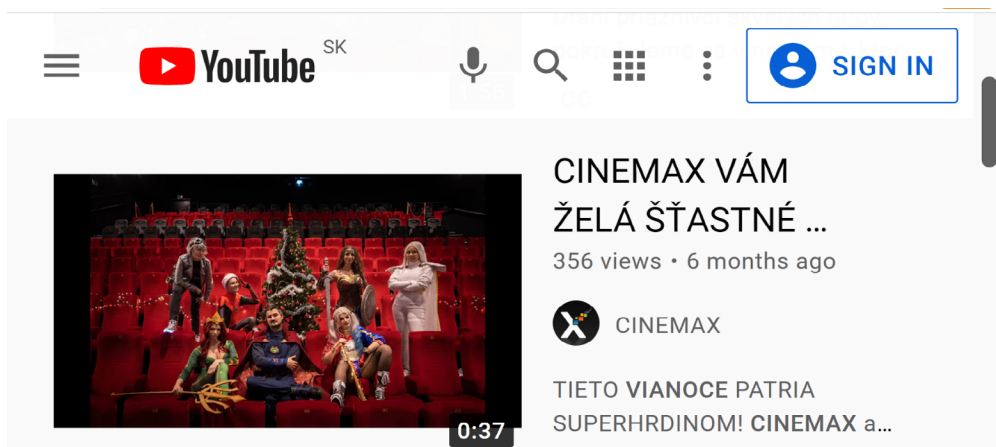
Picture 5: Christmas advertising spot of the cinema chain Cinemax 2020 in Slovakia

Source: authors' screenshot; Cinemax Vám želá šťastné a filmové Vianoce!. Released on 15th December 2020. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIbKl5bvIfo>.


Picture 6: Cooperation of the thematic shop "Nekonečno" with the Slovak cosplayer Kaminari Cosplay

Source: authors' screenshot; Post from Instagram profile @kaminaricosplay. Released on 18th August 2020. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CECdHkEDbgT/>.

The significant potential and overall attractiveness of cosplayers are increasingly realized by brands, which have been often associated with the field of fantasy or products of contemporary pop culture only marginally, or not at all. An example is the relatively current advertisement of *Slovenská sporiteľňa*, which used several Slovak cosplayers as part of its campaign.[57] Subsequently, we suggest to perceive the promotional activities

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57   For more information, see: *Slovenská sporiteľňa: Šťastie má 60 odtieňov.* Released on 1st July 2021. [online]. [2021-07-01]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-1vOl-rMLg>.

of the cosplayer as a brand on two basic levels: (1) cosplayer promotional activities direct-ly and primary connected with its own brand of cosplay products (ready-made costumes, tutorials, e-books, patterns, etc.) and (2) cosplayer promotional activities based on their personal brand with significant recognition and expertise in their niche community, which are carried out in cooperation with other brands, e.g. clothing, gaming, technological or other brands with even really weak connections to pop-culture. Although we have re-flected the above perspectives quite separately, it is important to emphasize the fact that overlap is not excluded, on the contrary – it is beneficial for both parties. An example is the German cosplay duo *Kamui Cosplay* with a follower base of over 1.1 million fans. This pair can be undoubtedly included in the world's most famous cosplayers dedicated to the so-called *manufacturing know-how.* Their last significant collaboration is the production of a costume for the game *Outriders*, which was still in the process of preparation at the time of cooperation. The pair were approached by the *Square Enix studio* itself to create a cos-tume from this game (Picture 7). *Kamui Cosplay* in this way basically promoted the game itself just by creating a unique costume from this game and by uploading videos about its production and sharing know-how materials and video tutorials.
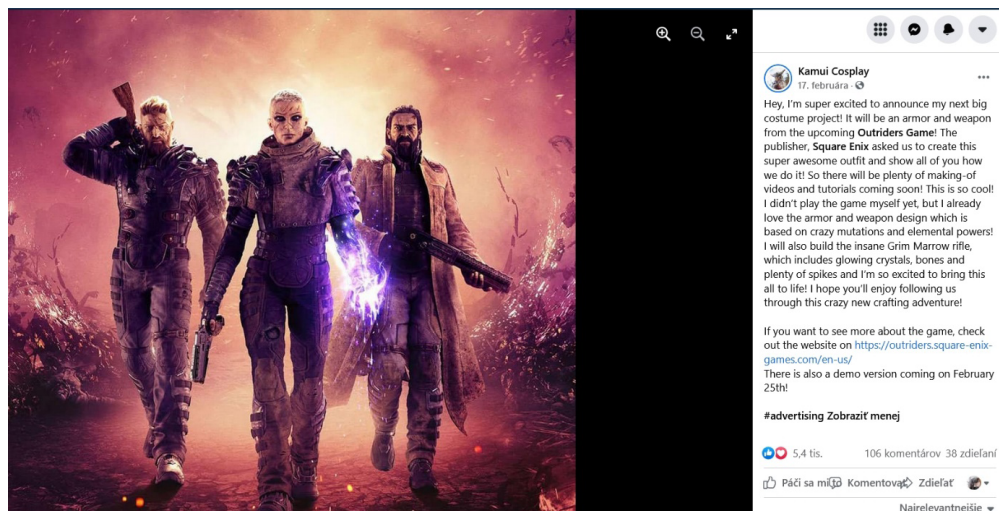
Picture 7: Announcement post about collaboration with Square Enix from Kamui Cosplay Facebook profile
Source: authors' screenshot; Post from Kamui cosplay Facebook profile. Released on 17th February 2021. [online]. [2021-06-24]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=268212844672962&set=pb.100044527445610.-2207520000..&type=3>.

However, it is really important to reflect on the potentially negative impact of co-operation, which may be reciprocal – just as the image of the presented brand may be affected in the case of an inappropriate choice of influencer-cosplayer, so the reputation of the cosplayer among their fans can also be affected. Therefore, it is very important that the cosplayer (or cosplay-artist) approach each collaboration and engagement responsi-bly and critically, with reflection of the given specifics of the community in which they act and have built a significant position.

Conclusion

The cosplay phenomenon can be viewed from several perspectives: as a specific social unit forming a unique subculture with its own rules and norms (so-called *niche community*); as a post-product of texts produced by modern popular culture; and last but not least as a form of specific and unique multivariate work of art. Although cosplay is perceived mainly as an element significantly associated with current popular culture and its roots are associated mainly with Japanese patterns such as anime or manga, the truth is that masquerades inspired by contemporary popular texts took place also in America before the popularization of the mentioned Japanese phenomena. On the other hand, at the same time, Japanese cultural patterns associated with the otaku culture, as an element of socialization and integration of Japanese young people into society, are coming to the fore.

In the present study, we focused on the cosplay phenomenon mainly from the point of view of art, and we clearly defined it as a form of popular visual performance art, offering at least two basic levels of product – *costume design* and *the performance by itself*, when the author presents themselves by exhibition (e.g., roleplay as part of cosplay competitions). Although, when analysing cosplayers' promotional activities, we can consider specialised festivals and competitions as primary promotional tools. However, they do not represent the only one opportunity for self-promotion and brand building of cosplayer. Nowadays, especially in the age of the Covid-19 pandemic, the important position played by online forms of presentation offered by online platforms or social media such as unique community sites and general used social networks is evident. From a marketing point of view, a cosplayer can be seen in this context as an artist whose cosplay name is also their personal brand. We also present examples of cosplayers' collaborations with various world brands (e.g. Xbox, HBO or PlayStation), which point to the growing popularity of the cosplay phenomenon not only globally, but also in the Czech-Slovak environment. In addition to the aforementioned collaborations, cosplayers often have the opportunity to be part of various festivals, events, even advertising campaigns for brands that may not always be directly linked to digital games, sci-fi movies or series. However, the thematic focus of these events and advertising campaigns may include elements of modern popular culture or refer to them, making cosplayers the ideal artistic element of any activity, which definitely contributes to the popularity and awareness of this phenomenon, as well as the brand of engaged cosplay itself.

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"Table Talk": Defining Metadiscourse of Analog Games

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ABSTRACT:
This paper discusses the communication in tabletop role-playing games that we call metadiscourse. Prior study of gaming and the act of play prove that the space is inherently social. However, we speculate that, through metadiscourse, the social aspect of the tabletop role-playing game is central to group cohesion and perpetuation of the gaming subculture. Metadiscourse involves conversation not linked to the current game but could be cordial and relational, critical, or completely unrelated to the game. However, it is an informal conversation that would not occur if there was no game. In metadiscourse there are determinations of gaming capital, or elements of value. Participation in metadiscourse allows an individual to feel included in the game and gaming subculture. However, metadiscourse demonstrates a level of gaming capital through situatedness and affordances that can act as a gatekeeping function for individuals.

KEY WORDS:
discourse, game capital, popular culture, sociology, tabletop role-playing games.

Introduction

Discussion is critical for tabletop role-playing games. According to Montola, "as role-playing games are seen as communication constructs, information is the basic building block of the imaginary game world".[1] As an exercise of collaborative interaction, the discourse among participants becomes a key portion of the act of play, more so than digital games and board games. Several researchers have discussed issues surrounding the discourse that occurs in tabletop role-playing games.[2] However, there has yet to be an in-depth discussion regarding the structural impacts of communication that occur during a role-playing game session. The act of the role-playing game, as an extension of imagination and ingenuity, brings about a number of social interactions at the table. Because tabletop role-playing is an act of gaming, there is an interactional component that involves the players on at least three levels: (a) the players as game participants, (b) the players as their imaginary characters, and (c) the players as people who are engaged in a social activity with other people. It is the communication associated with this final category, which we refer to as metadiscourse, which will be theorized in this paper.

This theoretical idea builds heavily on the original framework of S. Q. Hendricks who was discussed the nature of discourses at the gaming table, in response to the work of G. A. Fine.[3] Ultimately, this takes the discussion begun by J. G. Cover and her expanded con-

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1   MONTOLA, M.: The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing: The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process. In *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 31.
2   For more information, see: COVER, J. G.: *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*. Jefferson : McFarland, 2014.; DASHIELL, S.: Hooligans at the Table: The Concept of Male Preserves in Tabletop Role-Playing Games. In *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 2020, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 26-39.; HENDRICKS, S. Q.: Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming. In HENDRICKS, S. Q., WINKLER, W. (eds.): *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games.* Jefferson : McFarland, 2006, p. 39-56.
3   See also: HENDRICKS, S. Q.: Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming. In HENDRICKS, S. Q., WINKLER, W. (eds.): *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games.* Jefferson : McFarland, 2006, p. 39-56.; FINE, G. A.: *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1983.

cept of 'off record speech' to flesh it out and place it more deeply into the social context of the magic circle and socio-structural issues of the gaming subculture. We seek to mesh components of P. Bourdieu's theory of practice with J. P. Gee's ideas about situated meanings and affordances in gaming to illustrate how the 'table talk' that is metadiscourse can seem superficial but serve as a gatekeeping mechanism in the tabletop role-playing subculture.

Background

As M. Consalvo states, "[g]ames are created through the act of gameplay, which is contingent on player acts".[4] Tabletop roleplaying games serve as collaborative narratives modified by player agency and a structure determined by the game master. A functional way to understand how tabletop role-playing games are formed is through the magic circle, a term coined by J. Huizinga in 1938, and adopted and expanded to game studies by K. Salen and E. Zimmerman.[5] In contemporary thought, there is a great deal of critique of the concept, but in the translation of imagination into a gamer space, as occurs in *Dungeons & Dragons* and other tabletop role-playing games, the model is apt. Note this interpretation as made by J. Huizinga: "All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the 'consecrated spot' cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e., forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart".[6]

In short, we must understand the distinction between the gaming space created by the efforts of players and the 'real world'. As M. Montola notes, "the idea that play is somehow differentiated from the rest of our social existence seems intuitively necessary for the study of play".[7] Discourse, then, makes that possible in tabletop role-playing games. According to D. Mackay, "the role-playing game exhibits a narrative, but this narrative does not exist until the actual performance".[8]

Discourse in Games

Discourse is an involved term; it is used in many ways in various disciplines. For the purpose of this research, we use the definition of linguist and games researcher J. P. Gee, who notes discourse as "a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so to take on a particular role that others will recognize".[9] This term is related to another in J. P. Gee's lexicon, social language, or "distinctive styles or varieties of language with which people enact specific

4   CONSALVO, M.: There Is No Magic Circle. In *Games and Culture*, 2009, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 408.
5   For example, see: SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Boston : MIT Press, 2004.
6   HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture.* New York : Random House, 1946, p. 10.
7   MONTOLA, M.: *On the Edge of the Magic Circle: Understanding Pervasive Games and Role-Playing*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Tampere : University of Tampere, 2012, p. 48.
8   MACKAY, D.: *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art.* Jefferson : McFarland & Company, 2001, p. 50.
9   GEE, J. P.: Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction. In *Journal of Education*, 2009, Vol. 171, No.1, p. 7.

socially recognizable identities and actions or activities".[10] The space of gaming, and particularly tabletop role-playing games, generate a specific type of discourse and social language, one that holds significance due to the significant role of speech acts in tabletop role-playing.

S. Q. Hendricks was one of the first researchers to examine discourse in games.[11] In analyzing the work of G. A. Fine, Hendricks discussed the nature of discourse in the fantasy frame, specifically the construction of a shared vision, which he defines as "a set of beliefs and understandings about a fantasy world that are shared among gamers during game play. These beliefs and understandings can refer to physical descriptions of objects and people, cultural norms, environmental effects, components of the fantasy".[12] S. Q. Hendricks goes on to discuss how players employ discourse around the table: "They are using discourse to create a shared culture or set of beliefs and understandings about the fantasy frame. The sets of beliefs and understandings that are included in each individual's frame are adjusted based on the discourse, and the intersection of the sets becomes closer to a single intersected fantasy frame that is shared by the participants. This emergent intersecting frame then impacts the actions taken by the gamers through the game, even as it is being developed by the gamers".[13]

S. Q. Hendricks theorized that players and game masters can move effortlessly through the game world and the real world discursively. In doing this, participants can employ pop culture references, or information outside the role-playing world. Hendricks, however, saw this as purposeful in terms of game realism, as "it strengthens the fantasy frame by creating an avenue by which a gamer can access the fantasy frame and allowing other players to elaborate on the fantasy frame so as to continue to narrow its possible variations".[14] Thus, S. Q. Hendricks understood the value of pop culture references not so much as social connection but emboldening the magic circle.

T. Fuist, in his consideration of an agentic imagination surrounding tabletop role-playing games, sees discourse as part of the binding ritual that links players together in a collective identity of gamers. "Someone who knows the jargon from books [...] understands the references in gaming narratives [...] and participates in the rituals [...] is able to understand and communicate effectively via the collective identity of role-playing".[15] T. Fuist recognizes the importance in the ability to communicate one's ability to recognize and participate in these rituals, and the discourses he describes occur in a liminal space between the game and the player. T. Fuists' interpretation of agentic play begins a conversation regarding specific communication as demonstrative of belonging. One cannot only interact with others at the gaming table, but using this shared language specific to the subculture, the player demonstrates they belong and have what T. Fuist relates as connectivity.

J. G. Cover designed a complex framework of the nature of narrative and discussion in the role-playing game, making a distinction between what she labels as high and low narrative.[16] At the social level of high narrative J. G. Cover discussed what she refers to as off record speech: "[...] off-record speech, which contributes the least to the narrative and is often everyday talk rather than part of the narrative. Off-record speech shows the players reacting

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10   GEE, J. P.: Discourse Versus Discourse. In CHAPELLE, C. A. (ed.): *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. Hoboken : John Wiley & Sons, 2012, p. 1961.

11   For more information, see: HENDRICKS, S. Q.: Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming. In HENDRICKS, S. Q., WINKLER, W. (eds.): *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games*. Jefferson : McFarland, 2006, p. 39-56.

12   Ibidem, p. 42.

13   Ibidem, p. 43.

14   Ibidem, p. 50.

15   FUIST, T.: The Agentic Imagination: Tabletop Role Playing Games as a Cultural Tool. In TORNER, E., WHITE, W. (eds.): *Immersive Gameplay: Essays on Participatory Media and Role-Playing*. Jefferson : McFarland, 2012, p. 112.

16   See also: COVER, J. G.: *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*. Jefferson : McFarland, 2014.

to the story as an audience by relating events to other cultural texts or making jokes about the actions and characters in the story [...]. Off-record speech may or may not be related to the game and narrative frames, but is clearly a part of the social frame [...]. While these pop culture references may actually add to the immersion in the storyworld by allowing players a common reference point, they can also branch into tangents that have little to do with anything other than maintaining the social atmosphere".[17] This interpretation by J. G. Cover is important because it repurposes off record speech in a way different than S. Q. Hendricks' assessment of popular culture references. Moreover, off record speech reinforces social connectedness, in that it involves humour and pop culture references to invite individuals into the discussion. J. G. Cover's work begins a discussion on the place of this style of communication, which she notes as indicative, but does not deeply engage with how important it is.

Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is best described as communication between players that is not critical to the game but would not occur if not for the gaming scenario. Unlike the two other types of communication, we mentioned above, metadiscourse is less related to game mechanics and speaks more to social connections between individuals. The concept of metadiscourse is highly related to what K. Bergström refers to as *non-diegetic non-activity related pose*, which "in most sessions is considered a disruption", while "in more casual sessions it is seen as a common feature".[18] We would argue while metadiscourse pulls away from the game or story, it is not disruptive but natural to the social language that occurs at the gaming time. Though the other types of communication operate on a stratification system enforced by the game (player and game master), metadiscourse assumes equanimity between all who participate in the game. However, as we will discuss, effective metadiscourse is linked to a cultural capital, and if individuals have less knowledge of the game system, cultural artifacts in the subculture, and weaker social bonds, they will have less involvement in metadiscourse, which could have impacts that bleed into other communication patterns that occur at the table. As discussed by S. Q. Hendricks, T. Fuist, and J. G. Cover, what makes up metadiscourse can manifest itself in gaming situations in a number of different ways (Picture 1).
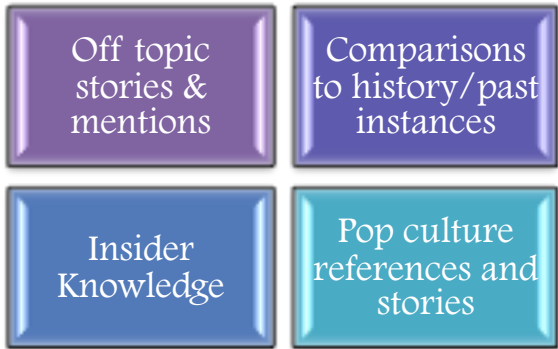
Picture 1: Metadiscourse topics

Source: own processing

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17   COVER, J. G.: *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*. Jefferson : McFarland, 2014, p. 97.
18   BERGSTRÖM, K: Framing Storytelling with Games. In MEI, S. et al. (eds.): *International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling.* Heidelberg : Springer, 2011, p. 176.

While pop culture references are indeed a part of metadiscourse, there are other notable components. First, metadiscourse can involve off topic stories, which have little to do with the game or game system but might centre on the people at the table. This type of conversation, an across the table small talk, if you will, strengthens primary relationships while affirming the social nature of the game. This type of discourse can also be a valuable 'mood lightener' when there is a rules dispute that involves only a portion of the gaming group. Second, individuals at the table can engage in discussions of past actions and circumstances that might be like the current one. While this type of discourse is indeed about the game, it is no doubt unrelated to the current scenario, and speaks to a conversation between players with a shared history, rather than characters. Similar to off-topic stories, this type of metadiscourse has a direct function of strengthening social bonds, while denoting a level of gaming experience. Third is pop culture knowledge, which discusses references to television shows, movies, characters, and other cultural artifacts that have value in the gaming subculture. Knowing references to movies such as *The Princess Bride*[19], for example, and using those in comedic ways to reference game situations displays this form of metadiscourse. The last type of metadiscourse involves what we call insider knowledge, or information pertaining to tabletop role-playing subculture, such as information about conventions, sourcebook releases, etc. While this is off topic, it is specific to gaming knowledge, and serves a purpose of demonstrating how embedded an individual may be inside the subculture.

What all these forms of metadiscourse have in common is an underlying ability to bestow cultural capital onto the individual who employs them. As coined by P. Bourdieu, capital is "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated', embodied form) which, when appropriated [...] by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor".[20] More specifically, cultural capital "refers to specific repertoires of knowledge, tastes, dispositions and objects of desire that individuals within particular social spaces perceive and employ for status accumulation".[21] While P. Bourdieu notes three different forms that might exist, embodied (knowledges and mannerisms), objectified (items and things), and institutional (credentials), as a form of communication in the gaming subculture, metadiscourse only represents the embodied state. We would argue that metadiscourse can reflect fields of knowledge and familiarity that would commonly be available if one were firmly ensconced in the gamer subculture, and this membership can be transmitted through metadiscourse, as an indicator of one's embodied cultural capital.

Metadiscourse can be more deeply understood as a manifestation of capital given its importance to the game. While J. G. Cover saw off record speech, as she called it, as something ancillary to the actual game, she still recognized its importance. "Off-record speech is least likely to affect the narrative; this is particularly true of off-record speech that serves only as a bond within the social sphere. Yet, if this social sphere collapses, so does the narrative sphere".[22] Thereby, gaming must be understood as a social space, and metadiscourse serves an important function of social connectivity. But there is caution about importance of the social situation at any game table, as it forms its own microculture. M. Montola reminds us that "[t]he goals of the social level vary immensely from one gaming culture to another".[23] What one seeks to gain from the social connections at the table can be wide and varied. However, general norms involving an enjoyable, cohesive game with little meaningless conflict could be understood as somewhat universal, and metadiscourse helps to make this possible.

19   REINER, R. (Director): *The Princess Bride (20th Anniversary Edition)*. [DVD]. Burbank : Warner Home Video, 2007.
20   BOURDIEU, P.: The Forms of Capital. In RICHARDSON, J. (ed.): *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York : Greenwood, 1986, p. 241.
21   BRIDGES, T. S.: Gender Capital and Male Bodybuilders. In *Body & Society*, 2009, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 89.
22   COVER, J. G.: *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*. Jefferson : McFarland, 2014, p. 105.
23   MONTOLA, M.: The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing: The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process. In *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 26.

Situatedness and Affordances of Metadiscourse

As K. Bergström discussed concerns of the potentially disruptive and derivative nature of what this paper considers metadiscourse, a way to demonstrate the value of the interaction is to highlight the situatedness of metadiscourse in terms of the gaming subculture. Situatedness in games speaks to how individuals frame their shared practices in the social world. As S. Gherardi notes, "we can say that people share a practice if their actions are appropriately regarded as answerable to norms of correct or incorrect practice, to criteria of aesthetics taste, and to standards of fairness".[24] S. Lammes points out, in terms of gaming subculture, "situatedness enables an approach in which games are seen as an outcome of local cultural practices".[25]

J. P. Gee in his research on the discourse of games expanded on the concept of *situatedness*, linking it to *affordances*. For him, "[s]ituated meanings are determined by what speakers/writers and listeners/readers take as relevant aspects of context. Situated meanings are also determined by shared cultural knowledge".[26] Situated meanings speaks to a notion of applied relevance of a topic based on cultural applicability. Thereby, while popular movies, television shows, and game systems are brought up around the table, it is understood due to its appropriateness to the circumstance. Metadiscourse requires an ability to 'read the group' to understand what could be seen as appropriate in terms of off-topic references that will not disrupt the magic circle.

Moreover, a reference needs to be understood by the majority of the table. While it may seem like an individual practicing metadiscourse is gambling with the possibility of situatedness in any scenario, the more invested an individual is in the subculture, the greater the likelihood of the appropriateness of a comment. This awareness is more important given that a metadiscourse that is not situated could threaten the magic circle and result in negative sanctions from players or the game master. At its core, as S. Lammes notes, "situatedness is closely linked to what games are in essence about", as "situatedness secures that the local embodiment that is part of every game is put on the agenda".[27] A game is as much about its players and their shared experiences as an expression of culture, as it is about the game that is played.

With affordances, J. P. Gee is discussing "what things are good for, based on what a user can do with them".[28] He explains his idea of affordance more deeply: "In conversations with others, the other is the 'world' we are probing and we are in turn the other's world, since the other has goals as well when they respond to us and take their turn at talk. In conversations with others we seek affordances in their talk, attributes, abilities, desires, skills, character, and language resources for which we have the necessary effective abilities to use (yes, sometimes, manipulate) for our purposes (goals)".[29] J. Linderoth notes

24   GHERARDI, S.: Situated Knowledge and Situated Action: What Do Practice-Based Studies Promise?. In BARRY, D., HANSEN, H. (eds.): *The Sage Handbook in New Approaches to Management and Organization.* New York : Sage, 2008, p. 523.

25   LAMMES, S.: Approaching Game-Studies: Towards a Reflexive Methodology of Games as Situated Cultures. In BABA, A. (ed.): *Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play.* Tokyo : DiGRA, 2007, p. 29.

26   GEE, J. P.: Discourse Analysis of Games. In JONES, R., CHICK, A., HAFNER, C. (eds.): *Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age.* London : Routledge, 2015, p. 22.

27   LAMMES, S.: Approaching Game-Studies: Towards a Reflexive Methodology of Games as Situated Cultures. In BABA, A. (ed.): *Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play.* Tokyo : DiGRA, 2007, p. 29.

28   GEE, J. P.: Discourse Analysis of Games. In JONES, R., CHICK, A., HAFNER, C. (eds.): *Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age.* London : Routledge, 2015, p. 24.

29   Ibidem, p. 26.

that affordances are "affected by the use of tools", as tools "become an extension of our bodies, and we can do things we could not do without them".[30] Discourse, particularly at the gaming table, can be viewed as much as a tool as dice, paper, or laptops, given conversation can impact the agency and effectiveness of the participant.

In a conversation there is an assessment of what can be gained, and language becomes the vehicle, or tool, towards any possible gain. In terms of metadiscourse, there are affordances in the participation of topical discussion that is tangentially related to the game. Knowledge about pop culture, upcoming conferences, and the game industry inform about how involved one is in the gaming subculture, and how there might be the possibility for deeper conversation that extends beyond the game. If someone has no knowledge of these things, then they are not useful as a subculture member. It is important to note that someone could still be useful in the game, but someone who lacks the knowledge expressed in metadiscourse is assumed to be uninformed in matters of the gaming world, and then, by extension, unfamiliar with deeper intricacies of the game.

Thereby, while K. Bergström, G. A. Fine, and J. G. Cover saw metadiscourse as superficial and at times disruptive, we argue that the situatedness and affordances that are the result of engagement in metadiscourse are valuable. It is not only what one communicates in metadiscourse that cements one place in the microculture of the table. The ability to engage affirms that the discussant has certain amount of knowledges – about the game, about popular culture, and gaming as a larger and vibrant subculture. While the nature of metadiscourse may seem to take away from the game, it does the opposite. It demonstrates that a player is sufficiently knowledgeable about the gaming world and has adapted enough of the practices that are appreciated in gaming to communicate that the player understands what is valuable in the social space of the table, employing the social language embedded in metadiscourse to make this known.

Gamer Capital and Metadiscourse

As a reflection of cultural capital, metadiscourse echoes an important function at the table. While not key to the actual game, metadiscourse, as an exemplification of the social interaction that is adjacent to the game, reinforces components of what is prized in gamer subculture. As discussed before, metadiscourse can reflect an embodied cultural capital, demonstrating a command over knowledges and conversations that are valued in the gamer scenario. Metadiscourse can be seen to reinforce a gamer capital, identified by M. Consalvo as "a way to discuss the role knowledge, experience and skill have both for an individual, but also for the larger cultural and economical system that surrounds digital games".[31] H. L. Mello notes a player must "acquire social capital specific to the subculture, the 'social norms and skills, social networks, gaming lore and knowledge'".[32] All of these are reinforced by the cultural capital of discourse, giving players the ability to express this knowledge in an unobtrusive way, with valuable knowledge and command of structural knowledge embedded in talk unrelated to the game. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between social

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30   LINDEROTH, J.: Why Gamers Don't Learn More: An Ecological Approach to Games as Learning Environments. In *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds,* 2012, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 51.

31   MÄYRÄ, F.: Gaming Culture at the Boundaries of Play. In *Game Studies*, 2010, Vol. 10, No.1. [online]. [2021-07-05]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1001/articles/mayra>.

32   MELLO, H. L.: Invoking the Avatar: Gaming Skills as Cultural and Out-of-Game Capital. In HENDRICKS, S. Q., WINKLER, W. (eds.): *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games.* Jefferson : McFarland, 2006, p. 178.

connections and this gamer cultural capital. The only way one can gain greater knowledge and skill is through participation, and effective participation requires the social connections that are provided by metadiscourse.

Additionally, the conversations that form metadiscourse are, indirectly, impacting game capital given their occurrence at the gamer table. As S. M. Ortiz notes, the central element of game culture "is not about playing games, or even playing them well, but rather about knowledges...and the ability to share this information with other".[33] The connections forged between players, those who can freely engage in metadiscourse, hold the possibility of transference to other aspects of the game and wider subculture. A player with wider knowledge of inside jokes and game-related canon, as demonstrated through metadiscourse, might influence one player to have their character connect to another. Metadiscourse could be understood, then, as what F. Mäyrä sees as "the more invisible aspects of cultural bonds, including language, ritual and thought patterns".[34] These aspects of capital aren't easily visualized or transmitted, but it becomes evident when they aren't present. An individual who is unskilled or nonparticipatory in metadiscourse is likely to have a tenuous relationship with the gaming subculture; both at the table, and more generally. It is fair to say metadiscourse helps to reinforce the social order in the gamer subculture, helping to mark the difference between the experienced gamer and the 'noob' who cannot employ cultural capital and has weak social networks at the table.

It is important to note that metadiscourse has the ability of being transgressive and disruptive to play. There are times when the elements of metadiscourse are not helpful (or to be clear, capital-building), but are in fact an impediment. Thereby, during those times the game master is attempting to build the scene or there is a deep discussion about rules occurring, metadiscourse could be read as inappropriate. Being able to interpret when the different types of communication are necessary highlights an almost covert prestige in in gaming table discourse – a realization of when these seemingly informal conversations are appropriate versus disruptive.[35]

Gatekeeping Aspects of Metadiscourse

Beyond the structural function of metadiscourse in terms of gamer capital, there are other outcroppings based on the participation in this or any type of social interaction at the gamer table. S. Dashiell notes, "the discourse at the table discusses a world of fantasy, and as such, individuals may feel certain liberties and freedoms are afforded their characters regarding actions that might be deviant in the contemporary social world. However, considering there are multiple types of conversation occurring at the game table, these liberties may bleed into other discourses".[36] Metadiscourse is a blurry space between the imagined game world and the 'real' world and can then borrow on qualities from both. Like J. Stenros' interpretation of the magic circle, metadiscourse operates in "a special space with a porous boundary

33 ORTIZ, S. M.: The Meanings of Racist and Sexist Trash Talk for Men of Color: A Cultural Sociological Approach to Studying Gaming Culture. In *New Media & Society*, 2019, Vol. 21, No. 4, p. 881.
34 MÄYRÄ, F.: Gaming Culture at the Boundaries of Play. In *Game Studies*, 2010, Vol. 10, No.1. [online]. [2021-07-05]. Available at: <http://gamestudies.org/1001/articles/mayra>.
35 LABOV, W.: *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1966, p. 40-57.
36 DASHIELL, S.: Hooligans at the Table: The Concept of Male Preserves in Tabletop Role-Playing Games. In *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 2020, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 35.

is created though social negotiation [...]. It is also clearly separated from the mindset of the participant and the rules of a pre-existing arena".[37] As such, the norms and values that frown upon circumstances of sexist or racist discourse may occur in spaces of metadiscourse, given a belief that such concerns do not exist in the same fashion in the imagined game world.

The space of flipped norms can be disconcerting, notably for women, gamers of colour and sexual minority gamers. As E. Vossen notes, "we see a model where deviant behavior has been reversed and those of us drawing attention to sexism and racism within games and games culture are the ones that are considered deviant and disruptive to the established magic circle".[38] As gamer culture operates as a male preserve, there exists the likelihood of a more hooliganish style of discourse at the table. Thereby, it is possible for metadiscourse to be peppered with sexist, racist, or misogynist jokes as much as it can be pop culture references or more innocuous discussion. To call those issues out would be deemed as taking the conversation, and game, as 'too serious' or 'out of context'. Further, to be critical of this metadiscourse would hinder one's gamer capital.

K. Gray asserts that in gamer culture, "behaviors are identified as bad, undesirable, or unacceptable on the basis of rules made by those in positions of power".[39] As discussed before, holding power is not about being the game master or even an older player, but maintaining and asserting more game capital as a complex form of cultural capital. While this can be done at the table through discursive efforts such as rules lawyering, metadiscourse serves as another means of power demonstration.[40] Minority players are, then, provided three options when dealing with metadiscourse that could be offensive - leave the table, take no notice, or participate. This loaded choice serves as a gatekeeping method for a number of individuals who play, compounding how serious metadiscourse is.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have expanded on the ideas of J. G. Cover's original idea of off topic talk to develop the concept of metadiscourse. We discussed how the conversation, while seeming unrelated to the act of gameplay, is integral to the social connections of the table, and the affirmation of the magic circle. Additionally, we discuss how metadiscourse has elements of discursive power, offering affordances and to individuals who participate. Metadiscourse represents a form of cultural capital at the gaming table. Lastly, we discussed the implications of metadiscourse in terms of the broader gamer capital, and how it is used to reinforce power systems in the gaming subculture.

Both S. Q. Hendricks and J. G. Cover had early discussions about metadiscourse, with both seeing it as integral to the magic circle but in different ways. According to S. Q. Hendricks, what he calls pop culture references help to strengthen the magic circle through enhancing the fantasy elements of the game. J. G. Cover argues that off record speech supports the magic circle by encouraging social connectedness; people want to stay in the game because of the interactions. My interpretation of the more complex idea of metadiscourse

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37   STENROS, J.: In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play. In *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, 2014, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 176.

38   VOSSEN, E.: The Magic Circle and Consent in Gaming Practices. In GRAY, K., VORHEES, G., VOSSEN, E. (eds.): *Feminism in Play*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 214.

39   GRAY, K. L.: *Race, Gender, and Deviance in Xbox live: Theoretical Perspectives from the Virtual Margins*. London : Routledge, 2014, p. 36.

40   See: DASHIELL, S.: Rules Lawyering as Linguistic and Symbolic Capital. In *Analog Game Studies*, 2017, Vol. 4, No. 5. [online]. [2021-07-05]. Available at: <https://analoggamestudies.org/2017/11/rules-lawyering-as-symbolic-and-linguistic-capital/>.

acknowledges a purposeful role in the maintenance of the magic circle but expands out to the social connections and capital that exist in the subculture away from the gaming table.

Metadiscourse on its surface appears to be a very light, diversion-oriented style of discourse that would happen in the space of gaming, but it disguises its impact well. Within the act of engaging is a measure of cultural capital, which we discuss is highly related to gamer capital. Moreover, topical information involved in metadiscourse, and mechanisms of delivery, are recognizably more permissible from 'stereotypical' gamers – those who are white, male and heterosexual. It is then possible metadiscourse has a gatekeeping function, as the discourse might be scrutinized when it comes from diverse populations. Given the affordances of metadiscourse are inexorably linked to one's identity and interpretations of situated meanings, some populations could be at a natural disadvantage in their efforts to engage. This is what separates my interpretation of metadiscourse from previous works; metadiscourse implicitly reinforces the hierarchies of the subculture by serving as a form of gaming capital.

T. Fuist reminds us tabletop role-playing games "represent one of the few ways in which social groups come together to weave meaningful narratives through unfolding social interaction, allowing for the multi-directional processes of imagining into the shared imagined spaces and then imagining out into the larger gaming community or other fields within the real world".[41] In a gaming scenario where discourse and communication are key elements of gameplay, no conversation is without value. More than that, it is the conversations that seem the most trivial that might hide the power that results from social connections at the game table. Metadiscourse has a pervasive impact, which might be interpreted as negative, because it is reflective of hegemonic and patriarchal ideas that dominate the overarching social structure. However, metadiscourse more than anything is an expression of the formation of interactional bonds between people, and how homogamy manifests itself in the gaming space. A singular game, or a gaming campaign, is and of itself a social event. However, we must understand it merely as one piece of a puzzle in a more complex set of social practices in the gaming subculture. It is true that not all people are engaged or invested in tabletop role-playing subculture at the same level, but participation does mark a tacit level of inclusion. Metadiscourse exists as one marker that can embolden and inhibit how much any individual is involved in the tabletop gaming world; the easier metadiscourse is for an individual, the more gamer capital individuals can take to places other than the singular gaming table.

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Global Gam Jam: How Can Game Jams Benefit the Educational Process

Interview with Tarja PORKKA-KONTTURI

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Tarja Porkka-Kontturi is a games industry professional from northern Finland. She is the Director of Communications at Global Game Jam, Business Development Manager at The International Games Summit on Mental Health, Event Organizer at Nordic Game, and toys, games & tech PR and marketing specialist at PR Nordic. Porkka-Kontturi is a board member of We in Games Finland, and Diverse game developer mentor at IGDA. Her specialties are issues around and about diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

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Martina Kobetičová (M. K.): Global Game Jam (GGJ) is a worldwide event. It all started in 2009 with 53 sites. How did this idea of a global game jam occur?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: The following answer has been provided to me by Susan Gold, the principal founder of the Global Game Jam: I got the idea of jamming and how GGJ came together while I was at a conference in Gotland. I saw three games that were made at the Nordic Game Jam. I had never really heard of a game jam and I thought this would be a really good way to get my students (I am a professor) to make a game from start to finish. As in classes at the time, the most you would do was a level. (Remember we didn't have tools – students had to make their own engines...Unity really got a huge push from GGJ because David was a friend of Gorm's and GGJ distributed licenses for them.) But beyond just students making games, I had this idea, what if I could do a game jam that connected people? This was inspired by what at the time seemed new and novel, synchronous experiences, the example I was using was DJ's mixing music in Paris at a club while another DJ who was mixing in Montreal mixing with Paris – and I was listening and dancing in Chicago with my friends in London, Rio and LA. What I wanted to see happen was a global buzz of creativity. The idea comes all together in my head and I approached the Nordic Game people, I introduced myself (they were all outside smoking) and said I loved what they were doing. What if we did this globally? They kind of hemmed and hawed and dismissed me. Then about an hour later I saw Gorm and he said, he kind of liked the idea and let's talk. So, I came back to Chicago and called my friend Ian. I said, what if we did this huge jam, could he help me? He said, yes and then we talked with Gorm via Skype and we came up with the name, Global Game Jam. At the time I was the chair of the IGDA Education SIG. I asked if they could help me start this, I applied for a grant and got 500 USD. That was July 2008. I then approached Chris Hecker, Doug Church and Jonathan Blow to ask for advice on how to do a good jam. I then went to my own personal advisory board (yeah, I had amazing people... Eric Zimmerman, Katie Salen, Robin Hunicke, Mark DeLaura, Warren Spector, Kathrine Isbister) and talked about what outcomes we should aim for – they essentially were my support system in the beginning. In August of that year, I put together some postcards and went to SIGGRAPH in LA. I sat as the chair of game education there too and had access to educators around the world. I passed out the cards, I talked to everyone I could, desperately trying to get all of the continents covered. (Never have btw, we never got Antartica, we get as far south as Tierra del Fuego). I also pushed for the ISS – never been able to do that either, but I have spoken to NASA several times trying to jam at the ISS.

M. K.: What is your opinion on the integration of game jams in the educational process (e.g., at high schools, universities)? Do you have personal experience with this?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: Game jams are definitely something that can be integrated into the educational process, and I strongly believe it would benefit the students in various ways. Skills we need, use and build when developing a game are not only very important STEM skills, but also teamwork, creativity and social skills. *Global Game Jam NEXT* (https://ggjnext.org) is a game jam focusing on youth (12-17yos) and it's easily adaptable into schools' curricula. I teach game development for 10-15 years olds as part of their school club activities and I work with them very much in a game jam style, despite the fact that we have a longer time period to use. For university students, game jams are absolutely a great addition in the educational process, I studied game development in the jamming system in Centria GameLab: We had changing teams and roles, and we created 4 different games from scratch during one academic year. It was such a great and extremely valuable experience.

M. K.: Game jams are great way of learning new skills and also improving those one already has. How would you encourage someone that never tried jamming and is afraid because they may feel unskilled?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: There's nothing to be afraid of! For example, Global Game Jam is not a competition, it's for pushing your creativity, enjoying the process and developing new skills on top of the ones you already might have. It's for uniting in the game development process and having fun! There are no such things as unskilled in game jams; everyone can find a suitable role and test their boundaries while having fun.

M. K.: You've said that you work with 10-15 years olds and you work with them in a very much game jam like style, could you maybe describe this process a bit more?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: With children I let them figure out their team roles or teams, depending on how many they are, by themselves but of course I offer some guidance. Sometimes there are children who are very shy or insecure and others that are more extrovert and vocal – like in any group or community. Therefore, I try to gently guide the team forming process in a way that it truly leaves room for their independent decisions. I think it's extremely important to listen to the children and their wishes and feelings. The process is firmly based on game jam structure, but I give it checkpoints as I was working as senior producer. First comes the idea and genre of the game, which is naturally a bit limited by the possible engines and work flows we're able to use with the children. For example, creating a complicated RPG would be impossible, like it would be in a game jam also. After having a basic idea for the game that everyone (we cannot always reach the consensus of course) agrees on, I explain the process steps which roughly are a) creating art b) coding c) narrative design d) UX/UI e) sound design f) possible marketing side exercises. Not in that order, but overlapping, happening at the same time. It's important to keep things simple and achievable, every step has to have enough time spent on it. All the tasks and schedule have to be adjustable also, with children especially it has no positive outcome if we keep pushing too much and do not leave room for the wonderful creative process and blooming.

M. K.: Would you say that children respond better to this method? If so, in which way?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: I do believe and have seen it from my own experience that children do respond better to this method. There are so many things you can teach through game jam structure! While developing extremely important STEM skills, you also develop team working skills, empathy, patience, problem solving, and you can choose a theme that supports the topic of your wish! For example, today we kicked off the Cultural Heritage Game Jam at Global Game Jam, in collaboration with the State Department, and it encourages people to look into their cultural heritage, do research and teach others through their game! Isn't that amazing? Same thing works with children. You can make learning chemistry or biology or history so much more interesting by gamifying the learning experience – I just take it even step further by helping them to make the whole game and use that in educating themselves and others.

M. K.: Is it common to use game jams in the educational process in Finland?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: It's not common in Finland, but I wish it to be in the future! Coding is already used when teaching maths so why wouldn't we take it further? Today's children are very tech savvy, and many are interested in gaming. We could use this for every-

one's benefit and joy. Children have to do many group projects in school and the game jam structure would offer a different approach, and possibly a more motivating one.

M. K.: Would you say that game jams are great even for people, that have never tried game making, could it help them even if they don't plan to make games professionally?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: Absolutely. Game jam can be a fruitful experience for anyone and teach you new skills – or help you to discover skills. It's like a small intimate festival where you engage in co-creation and support each other.

M. K.: What would you advise newbies in jamming so they could take the most experiences from game jam?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: Be bold and open! Introduce yourself to other jammers and say what you are interested in and what possible skills you possess. Keep your mind and heart open to new areas and experiences, there's nothing to fear or be ashamed of. Keep some kind of diary of your experience so you can easily turn it into valuable portfolio material. Try to put yourself out there, I understand not all are extroverts, but try to communicate with other jammers as much as possible. Game jams are great places to find new friends and even colleagues.

M. K.: Do you think that the global pandemic has changed the way game jams are and will be organized in the future, or will jamming get back to full in-person events again?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: I believe we will go back to physical events soon, but I also believe and hope that the hybrid nature of events would become a norm. I see it as an accessibility issue and providing opportunities for jamming online offers so many jammers a way to participate. We have many game developers and other creative folks who can't participate in person, whether it's due to their financial situation, a disability or any other thing causing restrictions. My personal experience as a chronically ill and disabled person has been super positive due to online jams! And I've heard so many other positive and inspiring stories as well.

M. K.: Do you personally think that online (not in person) game jams can be as effective as those happening in person?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: I do personally think they can be as effective. I do not see a problem or less value in online jams. This is based on my own experiences as a disabled developer and digital event organizer.

M. K.: What do you see as the future of the game jams? And GGJ?

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: I believe game jams will be even greater in volume, and slowly become part of many educational processes and curriculums. GGJ is focusing on underrepresented people and areas that are often left in the shadows. We want to actively engage the folks that don't have access to game jams and such in general. I personally want to see game jams reaching all the regions and be truly something that brings people together, regardless of ethnicity, gender, disability, race, or any other factor.

M. K.: Some games that had their first ideas or prototypes at game jams became successful. Would you say it's coincidence or it's kind of expected that this may happen? Games like Surgeon Simulator, Home Improvisation or AVGM (Abusive Video Game Manipulation) were born at GGJ.

Tarja Porkka-Kontturi: I'd say it's expected! Game jams are like a cosy oven full of sweet buns of creativity, and the ideas are shared generously. People come from such a vast variety of backgrounds that it's inevitable to create something magnificent and spectacular at some point. The diversity of jams is their true richness, and the inclusive, supporting atmosphere boosts the creation of successful games.

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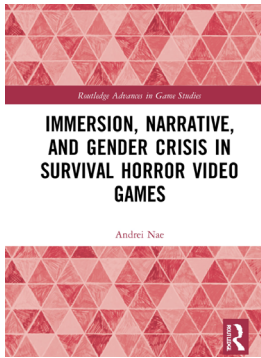
IMMERSION, NARRATIVE, AND GENDER CRISIS IN SURVIVAL HORROR VIDEO GAMES

NAE, A.: *Immersion, Narrative and Gender Crisis in Survival Horror Video Games.* London, New York : Routledge, 2022. 223 p. ISBN 978-1-003-01902-2.

Mária Koscelníková

In a world full of opportunities to spend free time, one can choose among activities or objects and fully immerse oneself into interaction, and if the activity or object does not possess enough trigger points of satisfaction, one can simply start doing a different activity or interact with a different object. When it comes to video games, this does not need to be the case as Andrei Nae successfully demonstrates. In his book *Immersion, Narrative and Gender Crisis in Survival Horror Video Games*, he offers a probe into the immersion occurring even when video games fail to provide players with functioning core mechanics, movement controls, combat or interactive elements.

The author discusses immersion based on the example of eight survival horror video games, and categorizes them into two groups: classical survival horror games and post-classical survival horror games. The author of the monograph provides in-depth analysis of eight of the most representative and successful survival horror games: *Resident Evil*[1], *Silent Hill 2*[2], *Fatal Frame*[3], *Forbidden Siren*[4], *Resident Evil 4*[5], *Condemned: Criminal Origins*[6], *Alien: Isolation*[7], and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*[8], looking at the immersive strategies employed in them.

The monograph consists of ten chapters divided into three parts, with each chapter being supported by rich bibliography and notes. The first part of the book elaborates on immersion and gender in action games considered as the genre to which survival horror video games belong. A. Nae introduces the reader into the issue of immersion as well as to the common ground for immersion analysed in further chapters: immediacy, interactivity and narrativity. While specifying degrees and criteria for achieving ideal immersion, the author offers a complex view of how a video game functions and how its functioning results in higher or lower degrees of immersion. Narrativity is also discussed. The author depicts three parts that contribute to its strong bond with immersion according to D. Herman: *sequentiality*, *world-making/world-distrupting* and *experientiality*.[9] Highlighting suspense as another factor contributing to obtaining a certain level of immersion as well as storytelling, debating ludic and narrative pleasures, the reader obtains a complex methodology subsequently present and followed in the next chapters.

1   CAPCOM: *Resident Evil*. [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 1996.
2   TEAM SILENT: *Silent Hill 2*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Konami, 2001.
3   TECMO: *Fatal Frame*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Tecmo, 2001.
4   PROJECT SIREN: *Forbidden Siren*. [digital game]. Tokyo, San Mateo, CA : Sony Computer Entertainment 2003.
5   CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4: *Resident Evil 4*. [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 2005.
6   MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS: *Condemned: Criminal Origins*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2005.
7   CREATIVE ASSEM-BLY: *Alien: Isolation*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 2014.
8   NINJA THEORY: *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*. [digital game]. Cambridge : Ninja Theory, 2017.
9   For more information, see: HERMAN, D.: *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Chichester : Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

In terms of gender, the author elaborates on storyworlds adopting established certain ideological positions concerning gender. Emerging from the premise that action games are strongly linked to patriarchy and boyhood, the author lays the ground for the analysis of gender present in the further researched video games, while he also observes the stereotype of white dominant male as a strong character saving a damsel-in-distress, and female passive characters being vulnerable, usually in need of rescue and serving as the subject of male gaze. Arguing that video games establish which social identities are acceptable and which are not, the author points out how researched video games grasped gender ideology within their narratives and whether they strive for more diverse approaches towards gender, continue supporting the adopted idea of hypermasculinity, promote masculinity as a standard, masculinize female characters, or opt for different and more culturally diverse approaches towards these stereotypes.

The following parts of the book provide in-depth analysis of classical and postclassical survival horror video games. In the second part of the book, the author analyses Resident Evil, Silent Hill 2, Fatal Frame and Forbidden Siren, representative classical survival horror video games. Each chapter not only provides exploration of the given video games from the viewpoint of immersion, but also discusses cultural backgrounds behind the given genres represented in the narratives of the chosen video games. Each chapter contains an interdisciplinary context behind the given narrative. A reader obtains theoretical frameworks from film and literary studies (filmic irony and heteroglossia, Japanese horror cinema), or history and sociology (Japanese Edo period and *ie* ideology). The second part of the book points out how classical survival horror games engender a hypermedial gameplay buttressed by cumbersome mechanics, controls difficult to learn and use or a fragmentary representation of game space resulting in the vulnerability of a character, while despite these shortcomings they are able to immerse players in storyworlds challenging the gender status quo supported by white male supremacy and its videogame champion, the hypermale playable character. The author concludes by stating that classical survival horror games command disbelief in normative gender constructs.

The third part of the book analyses the postclassical survival horror games Resident Evil 4, Condemned: Criminal Origins, Alien: Isolation, and Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice. The author again provides rich interdisciplinary context from film studies (noir films), colonial studies (English colonialism) or psychology (psychosis). The third part of the book points out how postclassical survival horror games offer a more player-friendly experience, while the characters are not as vulnerable as their predecessors in classical survival horror games, yet they oscillate between vulnerability and hypermasculinity, while aided by conventional immersion strategies, they vacillate between contestation and confirmation of the gender status quo.

A. Nae's monograph demonstrates the immersion strategies present in survival horror video games, in which rather cumbersome controls or fragmentary gameplay should supposedly discourage players from continuing in their gaming experience. These action games ostensibly fulfilling ludic purposes contain narratives that compensates for their shortcomings. From the example of eight representative survival horror video games, A. Nae shows the narrative aspect of video games as an important strategy not just to engender immersion, but also to challenge gender ideology, namely patriarchy set as a standard in action genre where the researched games belong. It is an important ludonarrative probe into the world of the survival horror genre and a must-read for every video game researcher, since it not just provides interesting video games worth playing and studying, but also broadens one's horizons on an interdisciplinary level.

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FREE GUY: A FILM PORTRAIT OF A DIGITAL-GAMING PRESENCE

LEVY, S. (Director): *Free Guy.* [DVD]. Los Angeles, CA : 20th Century Studios, 2021.

Juraj Malíček

The most interesting thing about those really good Hollywood blockbusters is how they enter into the collective memory and free themselves, breaking out of their transience. Movies become classics not because they make a lot of money in cinemas during their premiere, but because viewers accept them as their own and like to return to them even years later. After decades, when they look old, even seem archaic, in very close connection with how quickly and dramatically film language changes, their viewers do not mind, because what enters the collective memory is not the visuality of such movies, but the story carried by that visuality.

The stories do not age, nor do the thoughts contained in them, even though they may not surprise us anymore, the form ages and it matters much less, although it may be that first attraction. *Free Guy*, this year's surprising summer movie hit produced by one of the biggest contemporary Hollywood giants, Disney, will set an example. Not today, nor tomorrow, but ten, fifteen, twenty years later, when we return to it as a movie that very accurately and sophisticatedly illustrates the relationship between the two currently strongest pop-culture fields – cinematography and digital games, whereas it does not have to be necessarily about their internal relations and contexts, but about the external.

However, in the end, as we like to return to movies that have not aged other than formally, we return to digital games. It is not about nostalgia or retro, but about essence, about the experience of playing, about the notorious gameplay that separates the wheat from the chaff. What Free Guy offers at first look is a seemingly very simple to conventional, and at its core, romantic story, set in the visually attractive environment of a fictional digital-gaming sandbox. Such *GTA*[1] online combined with *Fortnite*[2], called *Free City*, represents an open online digital-gaming world. At its core, it is an action piece with MMORPG elements, a straightforward, fun game whose basic attraction model is the absence of a moral imperative. The world, which is attractive because in it, *don't kill* does not apply. If the viewer has not been acquainted with the plot in advance via the reception code widely distributed through the PR campaign, they will understand the basic mechanism relatively soon, but differently, as usual. The main character is not the viewer-player, but the viewer-viewer personified in a non-playable character. The main character is the NPC, not the player who enters the game from the outside, but the game itself represented by just one of its non-playable characters. Here begins the relatively conventional story of awakening, of taking responsibility, or rather that although circumstances may be convincing us of something else, we are all the main characters of our own lives.

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1   ROCKSTAR NORTH et al.: *Grand Theft Auto (series).* [digital game]. New York : Rockstar Games, 1997-2021.
2   EPIC GAMES: *Fortnite Battle Royale*. [digital game]. Cary, NC : Epic Games, 2017.

Somewhere here, in a story that bears all the obvious external features of simple straightforward cinematic entertainment, starts to appear the undercurrent, the second and the third layers, those in which both the relationship between the creator and the created and the process of self-awareness as the process of continuous emergence of self-learning artificial intelligence are thematised. The conventional clichés associated with the operation of the digital-gaming industry are thematised a bit banally, when independent game developers represent some imaginary good, and a multinational digital-gaming corporation, a large company that concerns nothing but profit, represents evil. And of course, in addition, there is also a motive of love and its creative power – that fairy-tale kiss that awakens life.

Free Guy is simply a multi-layered film, but its highest quality remains the internal order and clarity with which the creators managed to maintain the original genre definition. Despite all its sophistication, it still remains an action romantic comedy. So, we have a film that can entertain in at least two ways – the simple one, in which catharsis is conditioned only by enjoying the action sequences and keeping our fingers crossed for the protagonist as he experiences his adventure, and the more complicated one in which we feel catharsis and satisfaction because we think about what we see. And we can go really deep, to places where the interpretation smoothly passes to overinterpretation, meaning to places where every viewer has to deal with the film for themselves and all (over)interpretations are correct. Free Guy thus portrays the digital game world not only from the outside, but also from the inside, because it simulates the ways in which we play games, or how we approach them.

What can be considered as the most important is the dimension of the film, in which Free Guy becomes a generational bridge and a unique statement of the first generation of gamers – today's players and creators of pop culture content, who quite naturally sophisticate their life experience. Film director, Shawn Levy, and his screenwriters, Matt Lieberman and Zak Penn, are plus or minus their fifties, successful Hollywood filmmakers who already have something behind them and do not have to prove anything to anyone. Maybe only to themselves. Free Guy is just such a balance, and its leitmotif is that they have already grown with digital games and, in fact, thanks to them, they did not have to grow up quite well. In their case, digital games are even an element of personal constitution, they have become who they are thanks to digital games – or because the games in their case are no longer a life phase which gets overcome by growing up, but also remain a continuous part of their lives today. Free Guy is a psychoanalytic portrait of that experience.

The film, which can serve as a popularizing example pars pro toto in interpreting several current theoretical concepts, from the causally intertwined relationship between *simulacra* and *simulation*,[3] as considered by Jean Baudrillard, through the metaphor of pop culture as a perfectly user-friendly housing estate, in which its inhabitants will, nevertheless, tread their own paths, used by John Fiske to think about how to understand it (popular culture)[4] up to Henry Jenkins' concept of *'poaching' participatory culture*.[5] Of course, it cannot be said that the screenwriters of Free Guy know these theories and consciously work with them, rather in a different form – an artwork, thematising the same and similar things as Baudrillard, Fiske, and Jenkins in their theories. There could be also more of those big, resonant names, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, even Umberto Eco, however, in their case it applies as well that in relation to the film Free Guy, they can actually represent its parallel, theoretical knowledge.

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3   For more information, see: BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Simulacra and Simulation.* Ann Arbor, MI : University of Michigan Press, 1994.
4   See also: FISKE, J.: *Jak rozumět populární kultuře*. Prague : Akropolis, 2017.
5   For example, see: JENKINS, H.: *Pytláci textů.* Prague : Akropolis, 2019.

In general, there are various theoretical keys through which to analyse and interpret this film. Particularly, it is so because we can say about the director, screenwriter, and producer Zak Penn, based on his previous work (*Ready Player One*[6], *Atari: Game Over*[7]), that he has got practical pop culture experience and therefore naturally understands it at least as well as the mentioned 'big names'. Zak Penn is a professional geek at first and then everything else, and Free Guy illustrates this extremely convincingly. Like a big Hollywood spectacle, a film – an attraction, not to freely forget about it, but mainly as a movie based on a perfect, internally absolutely coherent screenplay, in which no motif is just hanging in the air, and everything has its own meaning and significance.

In conclusion, Free Guy is an extraordinarily convincing and multi-layered portrait of pop culture, a film about which it would not be a problem to either lecture or write theoretical books. Basically, all you have to do is watch it and think about it. The theory is always secondary.

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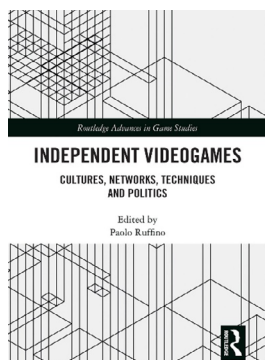*Štefániková 67*
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6   SPIELBERG, S. (Director): *Ready Player One*. [DVD]. Burbank, CA : Warner Bros. Pictures, 2018.
7   PENN, Z. (Director): *Atari: Game Over*. [DVD]. Redmond, WA : Microsoft, 2014.

INDEPENDENT VIDEOGAMES:
CULTURES, NETWORKS, TECHNIQUES AND POLITICS

Juraj Kovalčík

The collective volume Independent Videogames: Culture, Networks, Techniques and Politics is the newest addition to the Routledge Advances in Game Studies series. It is edited by Paolo Ruffino, author of *Future Gaming: Creative Interventions in Video Game Culture* (Goldsmiths and MIT Press, 2018), whose research focuses on independent game development, the automation of play, and contemporary practices and technologies of gamification and quantification of the self.

The volume collects research into independent videogames in North and Central America, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia over a period of more than a decade. Case studies and theoretical investigations are divided into five sections – cultures, networks, techniques, politics and local indie game studies.

Independent or 'indie' videogames are commonly understood as games produced by individuals or small companies outside of the mainstream AAA studios. Any attempt at the serious investigation of the topic will reveal that this simplistic view is far from problematic. In the introductory chapter "After independence", P. Ruffino provides an overview of the research on independent videogames and highlights various issues related to the phenomenon. According to P. Ruffino, the notion of independence is rooted in "a struggle to find alternative modalities to make, play, and distribute videogames" (p. 4). These modalities are now an integral part of the global game industry to the point that independence "is now considered the most common type of employment in the videogame industry" (p. 5). It also requires an understanding of other creative contexts (like cinema, music, fashion) where the notion of independence has been debated for much longer and although it is a common thread across game development in different world regions, local specifics cannot be ignored. P. Ruffino summarizes various accounts that problematized the definition of independence, such as Maria B. Garda and Paweł Grabarczyk's argument that there is independence in terms of creativity, distribution, or financing and these areas do not have to overlap. Therefore, if the meaning of independence depends on geographical and historical specificities, P. Ruffino argues that this volume tries to build a structure for an investigation of various discursive performances and practices around independent videogames by organizing the chapters around specific analytical contexts.

Although such organization is desirable and should provide readers with useful benchmarks in the diverse material, it is questionable if specific chapters are grouped in sections according to completely transparent criteria, given how much their authors' focus and approaches differ from one chapter to another. For example, the first part "Cultures" couples Aphra Kerr's empirical study of Irish game jams with Bonnie Ruberg's article challenging the very notion of independent games via the 'queer games avant-garde' and Paweł Grabarczyk's investigation of characteristics of indie games development for VR. Typically, individual chapters are illuminating. Whether their organization in this volume helps to create "a strategic mapping of the notion of independence" (p. 4), is less conclusive.

When I say typically, I mean that although some contributions may bring valuable content on their own, they rather blur the overall picture than contribute to the legible map. Ruberg's chapter fails to outline her notion of 'queer games avant-garde' succinctly and sometimes reads more like a promotion or invitation to read her upcoming book on the subject (understandably, but also somewhat unsatisfactorily). Patrick Crogan's chapter on "The conditions of videogame production" may be too hard to swallow for readers not familiar with philosopher Bernard Stiegler's theory of technics, the main problem not being the focus of Stiegler's philosophical project, but rather its terminology. Casey O'Donnell's chapter on "Game production studies" or 'studio studies' feels a bit out of place, as it is the only article in the volume focusing on research theory and methodology.

However, most contributions serve the mapping ambition of the volume very well, especially the last section "Local indie game studies" containing accounts of indie scenes in Latin America, Australia, Finland, USA, UK and Canada. Additionally, Celia Pearce's "Strange bedfellows: indie games and academia", three case studies examining "the complex and often invisible entanglements" (p. 106) between academic and indie games environments, should be of particular interest to academic researchers such as my colleagues in the department of digital games and myself.

Overall, the volume supplies a robust and vital body of investigative work to anyone interested in the independent game industry and development. Especially so if we consider that these days, independent games are hardly positioned on the sidelines of the industry (as they perhaps were in the 2000s and early 2010s), but rather being the dominant mode of game production.

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Netflix Games: Streaming Giant Expands to Gaming

Adam Kysler

On July 20, 2021, Netflix, in their shareholder letter, claimed that they are in the early stages of further expanding into digital games. For Netflix, it is one of many ways to extend the number of subscribers to include gamers. The global pandemic brought to Netflix a higher increase in revenue during 2020, that slowed in Q2 2021 after the unusual pandemic year. The competition also grew and new rivals arose, like Apple TV, HBO Max, Disney+ and Amazon Prime. To maintain a dominant position in the market, Netflix must bring new content and formats and the rapidly growing digital-gaming industry seems to be the best choice.

Netflix started to produce interactive entertainment back in 2017 with kids shows. In 2018, the first interactive adult movie *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* came out. A big step towards expanding into games was when the company hired Mike Verdu, ex-video game executive from Facebook, in July 2021. Verdu had worked for gaming companies such as Atari, Zynga, and Electronic Arts since the 1990s.

At this time Netflix had already published *Stranger Things 3: The Game* in 2019, a game based on one of its most successful original series which was delisted from Steam, GOG and Epic Games Store two years after its release on August 31, 2021 in order to take control over the games' distribution via their own app extended by the Games section a few days before in Poland. The first two available titles were *The Stranger Things* games.

After Netflix launched the Games section in Spain and Italy on September 28, three more games were added. On the same day Netflix also acquired Night School Studio, a game developer that worked on titles such as *OXENFREE* and *Afterlife*, knowing that owning a studio is crucial to build up a collection of their own exclusive games.

Since November, Netflix games have been available globally for all Android and iOS users with active subscriptions at no additional costs. However, some subscribers are sceptical about this policy. They are afraid that in the future Netflix will raise the price of the membership because of added games.

There are several rivals in the field of game-on-demand services, like Xbox Game Pass with 18 million members in January 2021, according to Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella.[1] However, Netflix focuses on mobile games for Android and iOS, these systems also have their own subscription services – Google Play Pass with over 170 games,[2] and Apple Arcade with more than 220 mobile games.[3] The only service that offers movies and games in one place is Amazon with its Prime. Amazon Prime Gaming is part of the standard Prime subscription with no additional costs just like the current Netflix policy and gives their paid members not only movies and game titles, but also in-game content and free subscription to Twitch.tv.

1   NADELLA, S.: *Microsoft Corporation's (MSFT) CEO Satya Nadella on Q2 2021 Results – Earnings Call Transcript.* Released on 26th January 2021. [online]. [2021-11-22]. Available at: <https://seekingalpha.com/article/4401205-microsoft-corporations-msft-ceo-nadella-on-q2-2021-results-earnings-call-transcript>.

2   WANG, J.: *Here are 824 apps and games available on Google Play Pass right now.* Released on 27th July 2021. [online]. [2021-11-22]. Available at: <https://www.androidpolice.com/2021/07/27/google-play-pass-apps-games-list/>.

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We can assume the target group for Netflix games will particularly be casual players with high interest in movies. Company should take advantage of their licences like they did with The Stranger Things games. If Netflix was able to manage this gaming extension and attract more paid members, it seems likely that other video-on-demand services will just follow their path.

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"Sorry Guys, I Can't Play with You Anymore": Regulations of Online Gaming of Minors in China

Miroslav Macák

The Chinese market has been an enticing target for digital games producers for quite some time. With an enormous potential player base and the Chinese government opening up to more digital game releases in the country, producing games with demographic and regional restrictions in mind could be seen as a potential boost to sales and revenues. Some companies have already been criticised for overly focusing on the Chinese market, and, more importantly, for complying with its strict regulations. Activision Blizzard's *Hearthstone*[1] has had its share of controversy seemingly connected to abiding by China's rules, from altering artwork of certain cards to not include blood or scantily clad women, to suspending professional player Blitzchung for voicing his opinion about 'freeing Hong Kong' during a streaming event. However, with the new regulations of online gaming that have been recently pushed through in China, the market may no longer be as financially attractive as it used to be.

In August 2021, new rules prohibiting minors from playing online digital games were established. This new set of limitations adjusts the time underage players can play online to only Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.[2] That is a total of three hours

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1   BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *Hearthstone*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2014.
2   ZHAI, K.: *China Limits Online Videogames to Three Hours a Week for Young People*. Released on 31st August 2021. [online]. [2021-11-30]. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-sets-new-rules-for-youth-no-more-videogames-during-the-school-week-11630325781>.

of online gaming per week, bound to very specific timetables. The regulations of online playing have been strict before, with the 2019 restrictions concerning minors allowing an hour and half per weekday and three hours of daily playtime on holidays.[3] Before that, the allotted time for online games was three hours daily.

This massive change did not come unexpectedly. Reuters reports that approximately a month prior to the playtime change, a state media article described online games as 'spiritual opium'. The original piece further elaborates the topic by claiming that "'spiritual opium' has grown into an industry worth hundreds of billions," and "no industry, no sport, can be allowed to develop in a way that will destroy a generation," singling out one of the most popular games in China, *Honor of Kings*[4].[5]

Even though the new regulations are supposed to protect Chinese children from becoming addicted and having their healthy growth endangered by excessive gaming, it is more likely that this will only push them to find more creative workarounds to 'cheat the system'. It is known that to play online in China, a player has to log in using their personal ID. Even before the stricter regulations were enforced, children had already been abusing the system flaws by purchasing adult credentials. Moreover, some digital games had been accessible based on fake ID numbers. Children will surely be resourceful enough to circumvent these new restrictions. But will the companies trying to sell their online games on the Chinese market be as clever as well?

So far, 'no' seems to be the answer. The first casualty surfaced just a few days after the news on these changes. On 15th November 2021, the shutdown of *Fortnite*[6] for China was announced. The Chinese Fortnite client has been running since 2018 and was altered to comply with the government regulations. Some notable changes were the omission of microtransactions, removal of all skulls visible in-game, an alternative way of winning besides eliminating all other players and story changes that imply the enemies are holograms in a simulation and the player's goal is to 'disconnect them'. While it has not been explicitly stated that the server shutdown is connected to the new regulations, the timing of both announcements seems to heavily imply so. Chinese companies are impacted by these changes as well, with *Tencent* losing over 11% of its stock value and falling out of the top 10 global digital games companies[7] after the article comparing online games to 'opium' was released.

Even though the Chinese government became more open to officially licensing digital games, their new approach to online gaming in relation to minors may deter some developers from the arduous process of localising their games for China. While those who are focused on producing single player games may not be affected by these changes as significantly, most of the recently released AAA digital games include multiplayer elements to increase the 'life cycle' of the product or to simply allow additional monetisation. China distancing itself from the world of online gaming and enforcing strict Internet regulations in the country thus makes it even harder to academically examine the digital games market on a global scale.

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Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: What the Recent Lawsuit against Activision Blizzard Tells Us about the State of the Industry

Alexandra Kukumbergová

The digital-gaming industry is a place notorious for two problems: crunches and ever-present sexism. In this context, it seems that 2021 has not been kind to Activision Blizzard, or at least to its top representatives, although Activision Blizzard is not the only name shaken by accusations of macho culture, a toxic environment, or sex-based discrimination. But why is it so important? Firstly, this case includes every infamous trope that we know. It is a display window into misogyny in the digital-gaming industry containing dangerous and tragic behaviour extending to the highest places. Let's take a look at the events leading up to this moment in a simplified factual timeline:

- *2019-2021:* Two years of investigation by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) that ends in a 7 pages long complaint against Activision Blizzard. An investigation was initiated into allegations of allowing and encouraging sexual misconduct towards female employees, allegation of frat boy culture and sex-based discrimination.[1]

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1   For more information, see: WIPPER, J. L. et al.: *Department of Fair Employment and Housing v. Activision Blizzard Inc.* Los Angeles, CA : Superior Court of California, 2021. [online]. [2021-12-08]. Available at: <https://aboutblaw.com/YJw>.

- *July 20, 2021:* The State of California files a lawsuit against Activision Blizzard. The next day, Blizzard publishes a statement in which it denies the allegations and calls the report distorted and, in many cases, false. Blizzard also claims that the report does not represent the present-day workplace.[2] This statement is criticized to the point that over 2000 Blizzard employees sign an open letter condemning it. They ask for immediate corrections that would hold abusers accountable and create a safe environment.[3] The letter is sent on *July 26.*
- *July 22, 2021:* Blizzard President J. Allen Brack sends an email to staff in which he addresses the lawsuit. Shortly after, more apologies come from former or current Blizzard representatives and executives. The staff also receives an email from Chief Compliance Officer Fran Townsend, which is less apologetic. According to Townsend, the lawsuit presents „a distorted and untrue picture of our company".[4]
- IGN sources claim that it was Townsend's response that sparked the initiative to organize a walkout that happened on *July 27* and *28, 2021*. Employees get support from the videogame industry (from Ubisoft, per se) and they present a list of demands.[5]
- *August 2021:* Blizzard President J. Allen Brack steps down and is replaced by both Jen Oneal and Mike Ybarra. Amid this, some senior developers depart from the firm without official reasons – other high-profile departures follow. HR is accused of shredding documents.[6]
- *September 2021:* Blizzard settles another lawsuit, filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) for 18 million dollars; this is later objected to by the DFEH, for it could seal evidence and cause harm to their lawsuit against the company.[7]
- *October 2021:* BlizzConline is cancelled. Some of the departed colleagues around Chris Kaileki form a new company, Notorious Studios. The new company is safe from sexual harassment allegations, as no women are hired. The only female staffer is a dog named Ellie.[8]
- *November 2, 2021:* Jen Oneal steps down from the position of co-president – three months after taking the position. Revelations by the Wall Street Journal say that just one month into the job, Oneal wrote to Blizzard's legal team that she had been sexually harassed while at the company and that she was being paid less than Ybarra, while holding the same position. "I have been tokenized, marginalized, and discriminated

2   CARPENTER, N.: *Activision Blizzard sued by California over widespread sexism, sexual harassment.* Released on 22nd July 2021. [online]. [2021-12-08]. Available at: <https://polygon.com/22588407/activision-blizzard-sexual-harassment-sexism-california-lawsuit>.

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against",[9] says Oneal. It is not a good look for the company, and two months later, she steps down from the position. Her message is rather positive; "I am doing this not because I am without hope for Blizzard, quite the opposite".[10]

- *November 16, 2021:* A report by the Wall Street Journal says that Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick not only knew about harassment and rape within the company for years and did not inform its board of directors; but also his own past behaviours and actions are being questioned; it seems like the so-called frat boy culture extends to the highest places.[11]
- *November 18th:* Over 1000 Activision Blizzard employees from various studios react with a petition for the removal of Bobby Kotick. Another walkout is held. "Bobby Kotick has proved that he does not care about his employees, and that he is not fit to be the CEO of Activision Blizzard. This petition will not guarantee his removal, but it will show him that we are not okay with him blatantly ignoring the cries of his employees".[12]
- *December 2021:* Kotick has not stepped down and his resignation is demanded not only by a segment of employees, but by a group of Activision Blizzard shareholders as well. Jessica Gonzales, organizer of the walkouts, is resigning from the company: "It's been a long and exhausting road for change, but it isn't over".[13]

But so far, it doesn't seem like it will continue to a just end. There are voices calling for a watershed, claiming that the tide is turning; but until today, this story has not reached a satisfying conclusion. Seven years after *Gamergate*, this story is sad rather than cathartic; voices are heard, but perpetrators, accomplices and enablers are not held accountable. It is a story of manifesting rape culture (how else to see jokes about 'Cosby Suit'), stories about tokenization (Oneal is an Asian-American lesbian), about exploitation and abuse. Whatever appalling concept or trope imaginable, it is there, somewhere within the report by the DFEH or during later events.

Could Blizzard's unfolding crisis be a purgative moment, another reality check that the industry so desperately needs? Or as Renee Gittens, executive director of the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) puts it: is it just a tip of the iceberg, or "another example of a chronic problem that we (as a videogame game industry) face"?[14]

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In Memory of
Masayuki Uemura

ACTA LUDOLOGICA

"Die Monster! You Don't Belong in this World": The Spectre of Genocide in Japanese Digital Games

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Castlevania[1], the Japanese action-adventure digital games series developed by Konami, has enjoyed an exceptional status since its debut in 1986. From early consoles to OTT platforms, the franchise has been widely adapted. The 2017 Netflix adaptation of the third Nintendo version and the sixth instalment in the series, *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*[2] teleports us to a medieval world that is threatened by Count Dracula and his minions. The latest Netflix adaptation of *Castlevania*[3] marks the global prominence of the digital game, thereby transcending the particular to the universal.

Perhaps the most striking yet under-researched aspect of the digital game series is its obvious allusion to the Holocaust. Although Castlevania is set against a medieval backdrop, it is also a product of a post-Holocaust perception of history, which is why its representation and interpretation is informed by the rhetoric of Nazism and Fascism. One can indeed find a series of uncanny thematic and contextual parallels between Castlevania and the Holocaust.

Few such parallels are discussed in this essay. Firstly, the very name Castlevania, with all its gothic and vampirish elements, alludes to the Nazi-occupied Romanian town of Transylvania which has its own history of Jewish memory. Elie Wiesel, the widely celebrated writer and a Holocaust survivor, locates his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize winning memoir *Night*[4] in the small town of Sighet in Transylvania, then a part of Hungary, during the Second World War. Secondly, the evil lord, Count Dracula Vlad Țepeș of Castlevania shares the attributes of a Nietzschean Ubermensch as was clearly embodied and asserted by Adolf Hitler himself. Count Dracula's indomitable desire to annihilate humanity, for personal vengeance and for the sake of upholding the vampiric race, parallels Hitler's antisemitic worldview to purify the Aryan race and make Germany *Judenfrei*, through extermination of the entire Jewish community. Thirdly, Count Dracula's War Council, much like the 'Hitler Cabinet', consists of his henchmen, or the Devil's disciples, who were instrumental in designing and implementing the genocide. The names of Count Dracula's men, Hector and Godbrand evoke an uncanny similarity with Hitler's right-hand men, Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Göring. Also, the bloodthirsty beasts of Hell, the army of the dead, called upon and unleashed by Count Dracula to destroy mankind, find parallel in the notorious Nazi Waffen-SS who were trained to be monsters. Fourthly, the internment camps in Castlevania where humans are treated as livestock for feeding the vampires, is an unmistakable allusion to the infamous Nazi concentration camps. Fifthly, the Belmont clan of vampire hunters evoke the Red Army and the entire episode of Liberation where Russians and Americans emerge as the liberators of the camps and the saviours the of Jewish victims. Lastly, the language and vocabulary used in Castlevania is uncannily informed by the Nazi rhetoric of the Final solution. The repeated references, for instance, the obvious invocation of 'genocide' by Dracula's son, Alucard, cannot be overlooked. The question of theological intervention is also noteworthy since both the timelines exist in a Godless world where there is no hope for humans.

This article, by tracing such parallels between the historical world of the Holocaust and the mythical universe of Castlevania, addresses the transnational discourse of the Holocaust that is perhaps disseminated through Digital Games. Such an approach, I hope, would critique and expand the existing scholarship on both the Holocaust and Digital Games.

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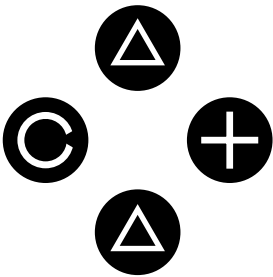**Text format** (unless specified otherwise in brackets below):
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