Editorial

Editorial: Video Games as a Common Ground

This special issue Video Games as a Common Ground is the result of the international conference of the same name organized by the Department of English and the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology of the University of Zadar on September 2-3, 2022. The aim of the conference was to draw attention to the popularity of video games, which at the beginning of the 21st century have become increasingly diverse in terms of genres and stories, game mechanics, visual and artistic styles, hardware capacities, and sensory possibilities. After all, video games are now consumed en masse around the world and are easily accessible through everyday devices such as cell phones, tablets, as well as gaming consoles, and computers.

The conference was also about drawing attention not only to the popularity and diversity of video games but also to their scientific potential, positioning them as a common ground for scholars interested in exploring diverse topics and social issues. As a result, the conference welcomed thirty-three scholars from a wide range of social science and humanities disciplines who, in eleven sessions, addressed issues of gender and ethnicity representation and historical space-time, storytelling practices, game mechanics, game economics and the economic behavior of gamers, gaming cultures, social relationships, health effects of gaming, educational possibilities of video games, the politics of gaming and the virtual world, to name a few.

The special issue opens with Carmen Anne Abela's paper on Ghosts of Tsushima (2020), a historical video game that simultaneously imagines and reimagines 13th-century Japanese society during the Mongol invasion. Abel's analysis aims to examine a traditional Japanese performance, heikyoku, performed by a medieval storyteller, biwa hoshi, that appears in the Mythic Tales side quests of the game to analyse how this performance is translated into a videogame format and what historical and sociocultural understanding this translation process may reveal. To provide an in-depth analysis of one such performance, the second part of the paper focuses on "The Curse of

Uchitsune." It is divided into three parts and examines the audiovisual spectacle of the performance, the supernatural entities present in it, and offers an intertextual reading.

The issue continues with a contribution by Tânia Cerqueira that examines numerous Gothic fragments that permeate the atmosphere of Lost in Random (2021). The aim of the paper is to focus on well-established Gothic themes, such as transgression and subversion, which typically appear within uncontrollable, uncontainable and borderline spaces, places, bodies, and psychological states; the past, which refuses to remain buried but returns in its haunting capacity; and the archetypically anxiogenic existence of the double, i.e., the doppelgänger, in this nightmarish fairy-tale video game. Cerqueira examines the function of these themes by drawing on various scholars who have studied their presence in contemporary video games, such as Kirkland, Krzywinska, Taylor, and explores whether Lost in Random can be placed in Spooner's category of "happy Gothic."

One of the essential aspects that distinguishes video games from other literary and media forms, interactivity, is addressed in a paper by Kristina Šekrst, who considers video games as self-involving interactive fictions and examines how these types of fictions affect cognitive and language mechanisms as they conventionalize unconventional real-world utterances, for example, by referring to a player dying three times a day in the game world. Šekrst draws on Nichols' and Stich's theory of pretense in children's games and extends it to emphasize the high degree of pretense of reality in video games. She also draws on Walton's distinction between worlds of work and game worlds, the latter created by the player's engagement with a particular video game, to emphasize that different gameplays create different representations and may change over time depending on one's gameplay choices. These changes can also cause a change in the player's self-perception.

The paper by Hannes Rall and Emma Harper also addresses the issue of interactivity by offering an in-depth examination of their current project, which aims to transform Shakespeare's romance, Pericles, Prince of Tyre (1609), into a VR game. Its narrative versatility, the authors argue, offers rich potential for a gamified experience that draws on elements such as decision-making and subsequent problem-solving, the gradual process of self-discovery, and exploration of the world, since the romance is at its core a travel piece. The paper discusses the challenges of trying to

preserve the distinctive features of Shakespeare's romance, such as language and themes, and translate them into a VR game. The authors conclude that scholarly efforts and research, when paired with creative production, can produce an engaging game experience that presents often overlooked classic texts in a new light.

As always, [SIC] also emphasizes the relevance of book reviews as they report on significant and often ground-breaking publications in the humanities and bring them closer to scholars interested in the topics. In this issue, two of our conference participants contribute by reviewing important publications in the field of video game research. Biljana Mitrović introduces us to Videogames and Agency (2022) by author Bettina Bódi, while Kübra Aksay reviews Sonia Fizek's book Playing at a Distance: Borderlands of Video Game Aesthetic (2022). These two books will undoubtedly be important to scholars interested in video games and video game culture.

We would like to thank all of our contributors, both our book reviewers and the authors of the articles, who have provided new and relevant insights into this ever-growing and vibrant academic field. Ultimately, we hope to be a part of this academic journey with our journal, and this special issue marks the first step, to which we cordially invite you.

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