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"Gaming and the Arts of Storytelling" Introduction

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The title of this Special Issue of *Arts* makes use of some ambiguous terms: 'gaming' rather than 'videogames'; the plural 'arts' rather than the singular 'art'. Similarly, the concept of 'storytelling' has an ambiguous relation to the term 'narrative' which is far more commonly deployed in scholarly discussions of games. These ambiguities were designed to encourage interdisciplinary approaches which may be orthogonal to—while mindful of—the existing discourses. The issue's contributors have responded to this broad remit. Both the original symposium held at Abertay University in May 2018 and this Special Issue includes work from scholars in computer science, film studies, comics studies, cultural studies and game studies. The idea of 'storytelling' places emphasis on the process and performance, and, in their artful weaving together of domains, the articles comprising this Special Issue represent important responses to far-reaching transformations in contemporary storytelling practices.

In the opening piece, Goetz (2018) utilises the analogy of 'trellis and vine' in order to conceptualise the relationship between fictionality and game rules within a single framework that is oriented towards videogames' medium-specificity. Engaging with psychological research alongside the theory of play, Goetz's trellis and vine analogy conceptualises rule-bound and make-believe play as 'bipolar and synergistic'. This yields four schemes in which trellis and vine may be related, each of which captures a particular set of play situations.

Keogh and Jayemanne (2018) explore the remediation of the *Alien* films in videogames through a central question: what does it mean to look at the alien? Reading critical responses to both the film and videogame appearances, Keogh and Jayemanne note that the alien has completely inverted its affective and storytelling functions: what once repulsed the audience's gaze comes to focus the gun-player hybrid look of the first-person shooter. These dynamics are further traced to the more recent *Alien: Isolation*, where, through what the game's A.I. designer terms 'psychopathic serendipity', players are subject to the look of the alien being. The alien look emerges from these readings as an acute locus in which to trace storytelling transformations across eras and media forms, serving as the basis for a critique of 'ego-centric design' in digital games.

Summerley (2018) invokes John Carmack's dismissive equation of the value of stories in pornography and videogames, and proceeds to pursue the question in earnest. Reviewing some key academic discussions of musicals and pornography, Summerley explores how storytelling relates to the formal aspects of videogames. Considered formally, videogames, musicals and pornography alike often involve the punctuation of fictionality with other material—gameplay, musical numbers and explicit scenes respectively. Dyer's categories of integrated, separated and dissolved forms of the musical and Williams' application of the same to pornography are extended as a framework for videogame storytelling.

Pittner and Donald (2018) also pose the question of remediation with a focus on the influence of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* across games, film and comics. This complex draws together questions of adaptation and historical fact, where themes developed by Conrad after a visit to the Belgian Congo disseminate through media forms, time periods and storytelling functions. In *Far Cry 2* and *Spec Ops: The Line*, difficulty and frustration become game design methods through which videogames have taken up the storytelling dynamics and techniques which Conrad pursued in literary fiction.

Mawhorter et al. (2018) bring the concept of 'choice poetics' to bear on the question of videogame storytelling. Developed as support for a system for algorithmically generating interactive narrative choices, the adaptation of this vocabulary for critical appraisal of such choices represents a fruitful crossing between disciplines. Choice poetics consists of four steps: goal analysis, likelihood analysis, prospective analysis and retrospective analysis. Having described the method, the authors turn to two case studies taken from *Undertale* and *Papers, Please*. Each case represents a return by players to a decision framework which, through repetition, is formally similar but nevertheless poetically distinct. Mawhorter et al. demonstrate the utility of choice poetics through using the four steps to rigorously characterise how difference and repetition work in these choices.

Novitz (2018) explores the resonances, often noted by critics, between the videogame *Deadly Premonition* and the television show *Twin Peaks*. Both texts generate uncanny imagery and affect through storytelling techniques that invoke and subvert genre conventions, invoking tropes and states such as possession, twinned or mirrored characters, potentially animate objects and mystery narratives. *Deadly Premonition* expands the uncanny emphasis on the player–avatar relationship common to survival horror into many aspects of its design. Reading in this way allows Novitz to investigate gameplay itself as a storytelling strategy.

Koenitz (2018) provides a focused analysis of early influential research on the ontology of interactive narrative, identifying what he terms a 'foundational canon'. Many of these texts rely on different definitions of narrative, each of which necessarily influences its discussion of narrative in interactive texts. Rather than proposing another definition, Koenitz conducts a mapping of this foundational work, placing key texts on two axes: media specificity and user agency. The resulting framework and discussion are valuable both for specialists looking to take stock of the infrastructure of contemporary debates on interactive narrative, and those newer to the field who are interested in orienting their ideas in relation to existing positions.

Discussions of 'immersion' are very common in relation to videogames, but Kocurek's (2018) discussion of the topic begins from a distinctive intellectual touchstone: Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller". While contemporary action games pursue immersion through overstimulating players' sensory and cognitive capabilities, for Benjamin storytelling immerses us in the communication of experience and 'counsel'. Kocurek locates this form of storytelling in the rise of contemporary independent games, such as *Depression Quest* and *I Get This Call Every Day* which can be situated not only within videogame canons, but also in 'the broader cultural web of storytelling'.

Finally, Backe (2018) explores Machine Games' *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* through Bakhtin's notions of the carnivalesque and grotesque along with Haraway's cyborg. The game recapitulates the anti-fascist aesthetics of preceding *Wolfenstein* games, but in shifting its setting to an alternate reality mid-century United States, intensifies the politics of resistance with intersectional dynamics including themes of race, ability and gender. For Backe, the game's carnivalesque aesthetics and scenes are storytelling techniques that allow it to explore the subversive potentials of the cyborg that are inherent in, but disavowed by, gaming's technological assemblages.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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