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Introduction

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Introduction

JESSICA ENEVOLD *and*
ESTHER MACCALLUM-STEWART

Darling Sweetheart
My liking yearns for your heart
Yours beautifully, M.U.C.
—Ferranti Mark 1 computer, 1953

“Max. We gotta stop meeting like this”
—Mona Sax, *Max Payne 2003*

Do you wanna date my avatar?
—Felicia Day, 2009

I’m different from you.
This doesn’t make me love you any less.
It actually makes me love even more.
—Samantha, OS1, *Her*, 2013

A question that has repeatedly been posed in discussions of technology is whether the human capacity for thinking and feeling has been captured by machines. The human fascination with a potential emotional takeover by artificial intelligence has produced not only a wealth of science fiction literature but also films featuring robots and cyborgs, animated in increasingly complex ways, machines and software that emulate human behavior. Very early on, scientists like Joseph Weizenbaum learned to play with affection in this context, constructing devices like the world’s first chatterbot, Eliza, in 1966. Eliza’s “Doctor Script” caused what computer scientists called the Eliza-effect, namely that human-machine interaction, like play or dialogue, makes us feel the machine is intelligent (Murray 1997; Wardrip-Fruin 2007).

Between August 1953 and May 1954, some thirteen years before Eliza was created, a number of love letters mysteriously materialized on the noticeboard of Manchester University's Computer Department (M.U.C.) (Link 2011). The printed epistles were anonymously addressed to "Darling Love" and "Darling Sweetheart" and presumably "written" by the department's Ferranti Mark 1 computer. Sixty years later, media artist David Link reproduced these playful productions in his artwork *Love Letters_1.0*. (Link 2011), repeating again the question about humankind's machinic affiliations and the power of technology. The idea of the emotional machine keeps titillating gamemakers and filmmakers alike. At the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in 2012, David Cage, a designer and the co-founder of Quantic Dream, a company known for their vision to create emotional games, demonstrated their new game engine and motion-capture technology by showing a film featuring their latest cyborg heroine Kara. In the recent movie *Her* (Jonze 2013), the male protagonist, Theodore, falls in love with the operating system OS1 ("Samantha"), in the movie advertised as "not just an operating system" but "a consciousness."

It seems very fitting that computer programmers and creative artists have chosen to re-fashion their devices from processing missile trajectories into generating tokens of romance and into conversationalists like the chatterbot Eliza, imbuing them with humanlike qualities; that filmmakers make their characters approachable and affectionate, like Rachael in *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982), or the eponymous Terminator (Cameron 1984); and that game designers include romantic couples and their love stories as prime movers of action in games as varied as the *Super Mario* franchise (Nintendo 1985–), *Ico* (Team Ico 2001), *Shadow of the Colossus* (Team Ico 2005), *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog 2007), the *Final Fantasy* series (Square Enix 1987–), the *Prince of Persia* (Sony 1989–), *Max Payne II* (Rockstar Games 2003), the *Monkey Island* series (LucasArts 1990–2010), *Façade* (Mateas and Stern 2005) *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar 2010), and *To the Moon* (Freebird Games 2011). There is something magic and mysterious about love, and people look for it everywhere—at work, at school, in computers and their software, and in social media and digital interfaces of all kinds. The potential of interactivity with technological artifacts continues to enthrall, regardless of medium and platform, and the question of the ambiguous nature and outcomes of human-computer interaction seem to linger on. Even Sherry Turkle, often hailed as an early champion of computer technology, in her book *Alone Together* (2011) impels us to stop and think about what the proliferation of human-computer interactions does to us these days—considering our smart phone use, and the AI toys we use as company for children and for the elderly. As she told a reporter interviewing her for *The Guardian*, "people tell me they wish [iPhone companion] Siri were their best friend ... I am stunned." She

goes on: some of our contemporary ways with technology might actually cause us to lose some of “the raw human part” of interaction (de Lange 2013). We do not wish to contest this; it may very well be true. But, with this collection focusing on love and affection in games and play, we wish to investigate and illustrate some of the loving bonds that humans create with their technological “toys.” The interactions created at this “robotic moment” in time (Turkle 2011) undoubtedly give rise to deep and intense human, computer-mediated, connections. What people do, and the loving links they forge, with technology, may, as in Turkle’s case, stun us, but in others they may enlighten, enliven, and pleasantly surprise us. Today, people happily answer, “yes!” to the question posed by Felicia Day and *The Guild* in the song “Do You Wanna Date My Avatar?” (2009), affirming the potential of machine-mediated affection. Human beings are extremely creative, and what they do within the medium of games and the realms of play is often fascinatingly unpredictable. Here we wish to explore this in terms of game love.

Games and play, which are in focus of this collection, are here understood as powerful mediators and generators of new associations, romantic love and friendships. This is perhaps particularly true for online games, for example Massively Multi-Player Online Role-Playing games (MMORPGs). As Bonnie Nardi states in her ethnographic monograph, “I believe *World of Warcraft* is an exemplar of a new means of forming and sustaining human relationships and collaborations through digital technology” (Nardi 2010: 5). MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) are places where people “fall in love” and forge romantic bonds (Yee 2003, 2009), and as several researchers have shown, constitute communities of complex interactions (Taylor 2006; Copier 2007; Humphreys 2009; Pearce 2009) which may not be that difficult to grasp, since where people interact, relations are bound to happen. However, games researchers have also begun appreciating the engaging aspects and emotional dynamics involved in other types of games and play, Live Action Role-Play (LARP) and pervasive gaming, for example (Montola 2010; Montola, Stenros and Waern 2009), and single-player games like *Tetris* (Leino 2007), *Mass Effect 2* and *Dragon Age* (Jørgensen 2010). Analyzing single-player games would seem to pose a challenge to defining game love, when looked at in ways that go beyond taking into account the existence of a romantic couple, as in the games mentioned above. Where does the player come into the analysis of game love in terms of single-player games? Annika Waern, Peter Kelly, Mitu Khandaker-Kokoris and Olli Tapio Leino provide interesting answers to that question in this collection.

We have also compiled this work to heed what we have perceived as a need for the research tradition of game studies to take measure of an emotional current sweeping through the gaming landscape over the past decade—notably within the game industry. That love has posed a problem for game designers

can be exemplified by the Game Developers Conference first design challenge in 2004, where the theme was love. Warren Spector, who made *Deus Ex* (Ion Storm 2000), competed against Will Wright, the originator of *The Sims* (Maxis 2000), and Raph Koster, designer of *Ultima Online* (Origin Systems 1997), to solve the problem of making “a *bona fide* game,” not an interactive narrative, as the session leader Eric Zimmerman formulated it (Koster et al. 2004). Koster made a multiplayer Regency romance novel game, more or less about characters in love. Wright won the challenge with his “First-Person-Kisser,” a game within a game (using *Battlefield 1942* as his example), which he called “Collateral Romance,” in which a man and a woman would try to get to one another from either side of the battlefield. Warren Spector, however, wanted to make a game about falling in love. In his presentation he declared:

while you can force players to respond to game challenges, you can never make them feel. ... love is very different for every individual—detecting what would make a player feel that impossible-to-define-emotion is itself impossible. And finally, the biggest obstacle is that players would know it isn't real [Spector in Koster et al. 2004].

Spector tried to solve it the hard way, by *not* making a multiplayer game, and instead grappling with figuring out how a player could “feel something akin to love for a virtual character” (Koster et al. 2004). Could the player experience all the stages of love, physiology and rituals of courting?, he asked himself. What was his response? He gave up. He later wrote on his blog, “I spent weeks thinking about how I'd make a love-sim, how I'd make a player truly feel love, even down to getting the same chemicals flowing through their bodies that would flow if they fell in love in the real world.... I was so overwhelmed by the limitations of our medium, I couldn't come up with a thing” (Spector 2007).

Today, many game designers are endeavoring to create emotionally attractive games, or expressing the ambition to do so, and the game industry is hard at work designing games and characters with an increased capacity to engage the players. Conventions such as PAX, GDC and Worldcon are increasingly featuring panels in which the importance of love and games is at the forefront of discussions. The past fifteen years have seen an increase in improving user experience, so-called affective gaming (Hudlicka 2008), and a rise in the significance of emotion in making more engaging games (Becker et al. 2005, Gilleade, Dix and Allanson 2005). Human-Computer Interaction scholars have investigated what has been undertaken to accomplish designs for expressing love and intimacy between remotely located partners (Hassenzahl et al. 2012). A fair amount of literature on so-called game emotioneering, affective computing and creating game characters with more depth, falls within the realm of both scholarly (Eladhari and Lindley 2003; Eladhari and Sellers 2009; Isbister 2006, 2011;

Järvinen 2008; Yannakakis and Togelius 2011), and more business/practice-oriented game design studies (Freeman 2003; Lazzaro 2004; Bateman and Boon 2006). It should be noted that it is not the aim of this collection to try to understand the ramifications of games on the human psyche or body. Excitement, fear, wonder, bliss and disgust, which Bateman and Lazzaro include in their lists of potential player emotions, may certainly pertain to the experience of playing games, and be associated with the agony or ecstasy of romantic involvements or love, but our authors have not aspired to measuring or interviewing players about their emotional states, or breaking down love into calculable psychological units to be used for game design. With the exception of Mitu Khandaker-Kokoris and Ian Sturrock, the researchers in this collection are game scholars, not game designers, and we analyze game love from an academic humanities and social science perspective.

Neither is it our intention to define *love* in this collection: we have looked for and attempted to understand what *game* love may be—love in and for games—whether it be between players in the game or between players and their games. The conclusions about emotions connected to love here extend as far as our readings of texts, player interviews, and close playings of games can take us. Definitions of love must be left to others more adept at this—to theorists of affect, and to cultural historians and sociologists historicizing the origins of love and its ideological bases and developments over time. We do not claim to make a mark upon the tradition of cultural studies into affect (Williams 1977; Grossberg 1992; Ahmed 2004; Probyn 2005) although Nicole Lamerichs' essay makes a useful incursion into the field. The disciplinary takes on love and affect are numerous (Foucault 1978, 1984a, 1984b; Barthes 1979; Hoschild 1983, 2003; Sternberg 1986, 1988; Kristeva 1987; Giddens 1992; Kern 1992; Berlant 1998; Bauman 2003; Pettman 2006; Gregg and Seighworth 2010, Oord 2010; Kaufmann 2011), and subsequently the literature is as vast as the subject is complicated. Centuries of book and film production alone attest to this. Our focus therefore is *game* love, and we use love as a productive lens to understand games and play as significant meaning-making phenomena and activities.

Here, it should be mentioned that the urge to define game love initially grew out of an attempt at working out an ontology of how love in games could be analyzed. The multidisciplinary field of game studies incorporates a line of research into game ontologies. That is, analytical systems of what games structurally consist of. A game ontology is used to categorize game elements, in order to compare and sort games (Konzack 2002; Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå 2003; Elverdam and Aarseth 2007; Zagal et al. 2005; Zagal and Mateas 2010; Aarseth 2012).

In 2008, a tentative model was proposed at an advanced researchers' sem-

inar at the Umeå University HumLab in an attempt to answer the question: “Games: What’s Love Gotta Do with Them?” (Enevold 2008a). The presentation and model aimed at prying open what at the time was a largely unexplored section of gaming research. This attempt ran parallel to the incipient diversification of the gamer audience and fast-paced growth of online gaming. Some answers were articulated, but the possibilities seemed limitless and just waiting to be filled with results from the developing field of game studies. The project was conceived as analogous with stabs at defining games according to genres or reading games for violence; why not look for love as a defining element?

One way of approaching the problem in accordance with game ontological research principles would be to investigate what kind of affordances for love that games supplied; were there specific game love mechanics? Other questions would of course be of an ideological nature; what kind of perspectives on love were given or represented within the limits of the graphics, the interface and the code? A synoptic model for categorizing game love was proposed, sketching an exploratory and provisional ontology, defining game love by trying to include some basic elements and potential research foci that could help make sense of it. The basic model stated that the subject of game love contains at least three angles or categories, which are determined by, or congruent with, game types: 1) The game “itself”—love as communicated by game semiotics or mechanics; 2) player-generated love—love as social process; 3) game discourse—here conceived as the view, mostly of the second kind of game love, which is constituted in public discourse and mainly then the popular mass-medial construction of what “virtual love” means. Then a supplementary category was added: 4) love *for* games or “ludic affection” which may be understood as a term to describe game-related emotion, and can range from *ludophobia* to *ludophilia* or *ludomania* (Enevold 2008a, Enevold 2008b). When love could be singled out as a feature, most games seemed dominated by an old-fashioned discourse of love or at least traditional heterosexual relations (*Max Payne* Rockstar Games 2001; *The Witcher* CD Project RED 2007). The presentation concluded that there were games that offered an opportunity for identification counter to tradition (e.g., *The Sims*, Maxis 2000) but doing so was optional—a player choice (Consalvo 2003). Online games seemed to offer quite different love opportunities (Yee 2003, 2009; Humphreys 2009). Bracketing relationships between NPCs (Non-Playing Characters) played out in quest scenarios, love was possible to define as mainly emerging as player-generated content that could either be strictly game-dependent (as in heavy role-playing) or “paraludic” (communication or behavior not dictated by or influencing the game). In any case, game type seemed important to take into consideration; for example, *Counter-Strike* (Valve 1999) might be said to offer other game love affordances than the MMO *R.O.S.E.* (Gravity Corpora-

tion 2005), when looking at chat functions, avatar representation, emoting-options, game goals, etc. (Enevold 2008a). The presentation concluded that at the time the research on game love was scarce and the need for more research vast. More was to come, but not very much.

Other researchers have looked for love in gameplay, but in different terms and with less focus on the actual theme of love, feelings or affections. *The Pleasures of Computer Gaming*, edited by Melanie Swalwell and Jason Wilson (2008) collected eight essays on a variety of pleasurable facets of gaming and gameplay, dealing with aspects such as cheating (Kücklich), enjoyable affordances of movement and action (Giddings and Kennedy) and what differentiates game addiction from other addictions (Goggins). “Pleasure” in Swalwell and Wilson (2008) is loosely defined and serves to unite a broad spectrum of activities associated with gameplay. In a similar vein, this collection investigates games and play by offering a theme which bridges a number of interpretations of games, gamers and gaming. However, our theme of *love* adheres more expressly to love itself, and treats it less metaphorically. All essays in this collection deal with love in terms of affections and romantic love and its associated symbols, expressed for games and in games, and between players.

If we were to speak about love in terms of engagement more broadly, we would need to situate our collection also within game studies of immersion (Murray 1997; Ryan 2001; McMahan 2003; Ermi and Mäyrä 2005; Thon 2008), “digital involvement” or “incorporation” (Calleja 2011), but this is not where this collection primarily wants to take its readers. The closely related term of “bleed” in role-playing (Montola 2010) figures in our flavor piece by Annika Waern in her personal narrative about her “pixel crush” on Alistair the Grey Warden in *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), and her and others’ deep “feelings for” this character, an affection that might be called “imaginative immersion” (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005). Another delimitation of the collection is that we do not wish to enter the field of research into sex in online environments. We want to focus on game *love*, rather than “pleasures” or “passion”—two terms very closely related to theories of sex and desire (Wilson and Swalwell 2008; Sundén and Svenningsson 2012)—because much has already been written in this field. It is of course possible to trace online passion as far back as the “Victorian Internet,” when reportedly “romances blossomed over the wires,” that is, the telegraph, sometimes called the first electronic highway (Standage 1998), and obviously it has continued to do so. There is an abundance of Internet research that covers different aspects of online sex and dating patterns (Couch and Liamputtong 2008; Gibbs, Ellison and Chih-Hui Lai 2011), and includes studies of the Gaydar community (Light 2007), apps like Grindr (Mowlabowcus 2010), Facebook friendships (Vitak et al. 2012) and the influence of playing Facebook games on

the initiation and maintenance of relationships (Wohn et al. 2011). People even meet romantic partners playing random opponents on smart phone apps like the Scrabble-type games *WordFeud* (Maline Josefine 2014) and *Words with Friends* (Miles 2014). However, these types of encounters, media or software, although interesting, fall outside of the scope of this collection. Sex has of course also gained attention from game scholars, among them Sherry Turkle, whose study of TinySex in *Life on the Screen* (Turkle 1996) prefigured many of the debates around love and sex, and their violent representation within games. Brenda Brathwaite (2007) continued the debate with *Sex in Games*. Mia Consalvo's 2003 analysis of *The Sims* (Maxis 2000) and *Final Fantasy IX* (Square Enix 2000) showed how the games presume heterosexuality as the norm, even if they present options for breaking with the heterosexual matrix. Later, working out a model for analyzing games in an ontological vein, Consalvo and Nathan Dutton (2006) sought to explain how sexuality was expressed in the three expansion packs to *The Sims: Livin' Large* (Maxis 2000), *House Party* (Maxis 2001) and *Hot Date* (Maxis 2001). They showed how objects that can be acquired by the player, the interface, and the afforded avatar interactions and dialogues, and the construction of the game world, indicated how sexuality was constructed, or could be constructed by the player (Consalvo and Dutton 2006). Although primarily on sexuality, their article also included notes on romance, and concluded that when the "Sims" have successfully initiated a sexual relationship, romance ensues. The analysis shows that the ideology underlying the game design has indeed changed over time, as it was no longer limited by marriage, gender or race. In later versions of the Sims, male characters can become pregnant, albeit after having been abducted by aliens (Maxis 2004). A later investigation, Jenny Sundén and Malin Svenningsson's *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Culture: Passionate Play* (Sundén and Svenningsson 2012), is written from the perspective of queer theory and is a twin ethnography in which the researchers analyze others' and their own experiences as gendered, sexualized players/researchers in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard 2004–present).

As Consalvo's (2004) and Consalvo and Dutton's (2006) studies showed, keeping love and sex apart is not easy, if at all possible, and admittedly our collection does touch on sexuality and the erotic, as Peter Kelly's and Ashley Brown's essays will show. Still, it has been our intention to bring game *love*, rather than *sex* to the reader's attention. One type of love that this collection does deal with more extensively, is that of players as fans, which necessarily links this collection to fan studies. Here, as in Ian Sturrock's study of tabletop games, the collection also departs from the virtual realm, and in Nicolle Lamerichs' essay, enters the arena of cosplay, where fans dress up as their most loved game characters.

To date, the only other previous studies to have dealt so explicitly with

game love have been “The Impossible Romance,” part of Nick Yee’s *Deadalus* project, one of whose surveys accumulated statistics about the forging of romantic relationships in MMOs and asked how dating somebody one had met in an MMO differed from similar face-to-face experiences (Yee 2003), and the *Well Played* issue edited by Jane Pinckard on the subject of romance in games (Pinckard 2012). These are the only studies in the field of game studies at this time that are dedicated to game love, although there are love stories and accounts of relationships and flirting included in some of the previously mentioned MMO studies (e.g., Humphreys 2009; Nardi 2010).

Our collection thus investigates how games can be read for love by examining those images and perspectives of love that games are capable of illustrating. If, as we believe, the complexities inherent within games already generate debate in terms of violence, time consumption and obsession, for instance, it becomes particularly interesting to appreciate how the topics of affection, love, passion and intimacy are currently being articulated by scholars and players, as the combination of games and love already encounters resistance and prejudice in public discourse. We ask what feelings may games convey and foster? What does it mean to love games and what kind of love is practiced in and through games and play? What does it mean to be playing with affection, that is, with games and with other players through games? There are many ways to understand and interpret this. We also seek to fill a gap in the games research literature, investigating game love under a broad notion of love and in a wide range of games and game cultural practices. We analyze digital games, MMOs, single-player games, tabletop role-playing games, live role-play, cosplay, media images, and fan/player practices through playing analyses, ethnographic research and philosophical investigations. We delve into relations between game players and the ideologies of love in the games they play, with an awareness that loving a character or game can lead to the adoption of varied sexual and/or gendered positions, and Hanna Wirman and Peter Kelly both examine different fan responses to games and their subsequent representation as a result of this. We pay attention to symbols and metaphors associated with love employed in games, from what a heart means, which is dealt with by Shira Chess; to how a game semiotically and mechanically stages marriage, analyzed here by Sebastian Möring; to what game rules are implemented to enact romance, as shown by Ian Sturrock. We attend to what game designers might take into consideration when considering love as part of the game system, which is the topic of Mitu Khandaker-Kokoris’s essay. We analyze players’ attachments to games and gaming as fans in the essay by Emily Flynn-Jones, and players’ love for their avatars, a theme brought up by Hanna Wirman, Annika Waern, and Olli Tapio Leino, while Tom Apperley and Nicole Heber extend the discussion to game pets. Finally, we account for how

the scientific literature has understood and conceptualized loving games too much in Rune Kristian Lundedal Nielsen's essay that teases out what we call game addiction.

As Hanna Wirman argues in this collection, we seem to be able to form intense bonds with game characters that might appear only as ciphers—the princess in the pink dress who needs rescuing is such an archetype of powerless womanhood that we should be enraged, and yet we smile at Princess Peach's squeaky voice and cover the internet in thousands of pictures of her. Similarly, the love and passion for games sometimes leads to extreme behavior—staying up all night to complete that one last level and inventing complex, in-depth stories to personify avatars further or to discuss them with other people in forums, or through fan fiction and *YouTube* webcasts. There are plenty of people who love games, who love to play, and sometimes, it is noticeable that games make people think about love in different ways. Our aim with this collection of essays on game love is to provide a wide breadth of theoretical discussion, teasing out the intricacies of games as mediating and generating various expressions of love, and in so doing, ask *what games actually can be and what it actually means to play games*.

Summary of Essays

Experiencing and Creating Love in Games

No mage I know has ever dared to fall in love. This
is the rule I will most cherish breaking.

—Anders: *Dragon Age 2* (BioWare 2011)

We begin this collection with the games themselves. This first section investigates how developers try to encode love into their games as dramatic devices, objects and rule systems, and the resultant effects on the player. Frequently, love is presented in an orderly manner in games; codified by rules and ludic structures that, as our authors all observe, must fall short of the “real thing.” There is, however, an over-riding desire in games at present to produce realistic, engaging characters and narratives with which the player identifies, and simulating love seems a natural corollary to this. However, representing love through icons or by rolling die is a problematic way to synthesize something that is traditionally seen as spontaneous and unpredictable. Here, our authors examine some of these representations, and methods such as the courtship systems in adventure RPGs are also subjected to scrutiny. The authors find that ludic structures fall short—are sexist or homophobic, or direct love toward shallow actions—as a means to engender affection. Although players are encouraged to care about their love