pre publication proof version of

Fordyce, R. & Apperley, T. (2021). Exhausting choices: Bandersnatch and the future of our entertainment platforms. In J. Batten and G. A. Duarte (eds.). Reading Black Mirror: Insights into Technology and the Post-Media Condition (pp. tba). Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

This chapter interrogates the Netflix 'film' *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), written by Charlie Brooker and directed by David Slade, using a close reading approach informed by metaphorical and allegorical analysis of videogames (Begy, 2013; Bogost, 2006; Murray, 1997; Wark, 2007), and seeks to draw out how the film explores the gamified choice-driven systems of the purchase screens of entertainment platforms. We argue that *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (*Bandersnatch*, hereafter) engages in a well-crafted reference to its conditions of distribution by finding similarities between the branching nature of selection-based play in hypertext games and the selection-based mechanisms of contemporary streaming video services, such as Netflix. In order to engage in this analysis, this study will examine both formalist ludological and visual themes within *Bandersnatch* and explore how these elements draw out themes of entertainment, exhaustion, and boredom in a manner that approximates entertainment platforms.

Bandersnatch is an out-of-season production for the *Black Mirror* (2011-) series. Released on December 28th, 2018 via Netflix's digital distribution platform, the film contributes to the themes explored across the *Black Mirror* series through the presentation of anxiety, fears of new devices, paranoid inability to determine reality, and technology evolving beyond control. *Bandersnatch* is distinct from the rest of the series in terms of its interactivity: it is presented as a 'game.' In the game, you watch short sequences of filmed video about a young computer programmer, Stefan, and make a choice between two options about what happens in his life. Sometimes you issue commands for Stefan, sometimes you have control over the circumstances around him. As you play through, you unlock different options and get caught in causal loops that you must escape, à la *La Jetée* (Marker, 1962), *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993), and *Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo, 2000). Alongside this, Stefan gains increasing awareness of his lack of control, until he recognises the viewer as his antagonist. *Bandersnatch* doesn't operate like TV because it demands a different type of interactivity than Netflix usually provides. During the game, it remains

unclear as what or whose side the player is on. Accordingly, goals are ambiguous: is Stefan's survival optimal, should he be directed into murder or to succeed in his game? Or were we happy with him living a pretty normal life with a non-successful game release? *Bandersnatch* doesn't offer much choice to the player, as most games go, and if we leave it alone it will just make choices for us. But it does offer the ability to decide things, and this is what makes it unique from the other episodes that Netflix offers.

Bandersnatch is both a game and a film; it can be played, but it can also be left to proceed by itself. While in contemporary terms it is not much like the familiar games of the current era, such as action-packed *God of War* (Sony, 2018), multiplayer games such as *Apex Legends* (Respawn Entertainment, 2019), or frenetic games like *Candy Crush Saga* (King, 2015), it does harken back to earlier forms of gameplay. Its restricted multi-choice system of branching narrative moments directly recalls non-digital games and early videogaming, including 'gamebooks' such as Puffin Book's *Fighting Fantasy* (1982-1995) series, Scholastic's *Twistaplot* series, or Bantam Book's *Choose Your Own Adventure* (c.f. McSweeney and Joy, 2019, p. 271), and the late-70s, early-80s text-based adventure games such as the *Zork* (1977-1982) series and *Wizard and the Princess* (1980).[1] Indeed, the story of *Bandersnatch* is the story of the transmediation of a fictional gamebook adventure, titled 'Bandersnatch,' into a game for 1980s home computers, also 'Bandersnatch.' As with all parts of the *Black Mirror* series, the episode engages in a science fiction critique of our present moment. However, while the rest of *Black Mirror* looks to the future to model its critiques, *Bandersnatch* is mostly set in the past. Rather than acting as an attempt at a prophecy about future developments from present conditions, *Bandersnatch* instead draws a connection from the past to the present and critiques the limited set of predetermined choices we have in digital entertainment media.

From the perspective of trends in contemporary videogaming, *Bandersnatch* is highly conventional as videogames go, given its relatively simple game mechanic of having players choose between a few limited options. Yet *Bandersnatch* is worth singling out for its debut on Netflix; it is unique for a game to be released on a major international content delivery platform that is otherwise dedicated to television and film. It blurs the line between film and television.

---

[1] The trademark holders of Choose Your Own Adventure filed a lawsuit against Netflix (Gardner, 2019).

Bandersnatch allows for limited interactivity where users/viewers can select from a set of options about how to respond to a problem or crisis, and a time limit within which a choice must be made or else the game autonomously continues with one of the options. These limitations exist because the platform, Netflix, has an interface for users that is tightly controlled so that the platform can reliably operate across mobile, desktop, and television contexts. *Bandersnatch*'s interface works within this framework, hence the restricted parameters for play. Following *Black Mirror* logic, *Bandersnatch*'s reflexive commentary of civil society drives the plot; yet critics have suggested that this reflexivity is perhaps merely an extension of the limited nature of *Bandersnatch*'s interface (Hills 2019). The narrative conceit of *Bandersnatch* is that the plot revolves around the development of an interactive fiction game, also titled 'Bandersnatch,' which presents a recursive loop between the narrative and the form of play. The protagonist, Stefan, struggles both psychologically and metaphysically to convert the 'Bandersnatch' gamebook into a playable videogame. During *Bandersnatch*'s story, Stefan pursues the development of his game with substantial dedication before the structure of play overtakes the narrative of the world and begins to affect the protagonist's reality. Stefan becomes partly aware of the emerging game-like nature of his reality and seeks escape. In some cases, he escapes through suicide, while in other cases 'Bandersnatch' consumes him instead.

Bandersnatch's plot is branching; somewhat unlike other games, the individual explorations of the plot (sans repetitions) do not reconcile with the exploration of a single personal experience, instead they become increasingly divergent in their mapping of Stefan's reality. This can be explored through the various repetitions, deaths, and loops that occur within the plot. The core of the story that develops through different threads is the development of 'Bandersnatch,' in which it takes on a life of its own and starts to infect the world around it. As is standard with the *Black Mirror* series, the metareflexive aspects of the techno-plot start to overtake the reality of the world in which the protagonist lives. Stefan becomes infected by the paranoia of the development of the game and, in several endings, he dies, consumed by demons both real and imagined.

By teasing out the allegorical dimensions of *Bandersnatch* we identify two critical and related issues. Firstly, it provides an insight into the way that the breakdown of 'reality' suggests an allegorical connection between digital games and the mystery genre that highlights the

epistemological status of games. Secondly, as with all *Black Mirror* titles, there is commentary on contemporary society, and we argue that the commentary in *Bandersnatch* is allegorical and presents a parable of the nature of boredom in contemporary commercial media in which Netflix is exemplary.

Bandersnatch as interactive fiction

Bandersnatch has its roots in a gaming genre called 'interactive fiction,' a form of gameplay that is narrated through second or third person address, with players being able to guide the direction of the story.[2] Players make selections from a limited range of pre-given options that progress the story, potentially leading to success or death, and often involving loops or dead ends that the characters may have to escape from, tropes which *Bandersnatch* also employs.

The interactive fiction genre is comparatively old in terms of videogame genres. The genre's early development in the history of computer games is at least partly due to the computational overheads being relatively low; interactive fiction as a text-based genre with no complex programming requirements was also only a modest departure from existing media forms. The genre of interactive fiction is defined by narrative text formatted as a novel and few, if any, images; in those games that used any sort of spatial exploration system, movement was generally limited to the cardinal directions, and the games were often plagued by a lack of clarity about how to progress at any given moment. The shift from reading static digital works to reading interactive digital works was not nearly as radical as the first 3D worlds and did not require a new hermeneutics of interactivity beyond what computers already required. Indeed, Janet Murray argues that the existing framework of interaction had already been developed within tabletop roleplaying contexts, and that interactive fiction games acted as the 'dungeon master' for a single-player game (1997, pp. 74-75; c.f. Apperley, 2006, pp. 17-19).

One of the earliest successes in the interactive fiction genre was the game *Zork*.[3] Despite a fairly generic fantasy plot, *Zork* would set the standards for interactive fiction by providing users with

---

[2] In their essay on *Bandersnatch,* McSweeny and Joy (2019, p. 272) locate it in a history of interactive film.
[3] *Zork* was written by students at MIT in the late 70s and published commercially from 1980. It remains freely playable at TextAdventures.co.uk. See Montfort (2003) for an extensive discussion of the development of *Zork* and 'electronic literature.'

information, characters, and narrative that could be interacted with through a simple command line. Players would input commands into the command line and these would be parsed by an interpreter. Commands would be simple verb/noun combinations, such as "pull switch," "hit troll," "push button," and so on, with the interpreter capable of managing a few synonyms. Because this system historically allowed the pairing of incongruous verb/noun pairings, the genre has also developed a reputation for absurdist humour, due to the possibility of attempting to "pull dragon." Other works in the genre would simply provide the player with a few choices to decide between, as in a multichoice exam, and it is this second form of interactive fiction that *Bandersnatch* builds upon.

One of the benefits of interactive fiction is that development is highly platform-independent; i.e. the code for an interactive fiction game can be converted to other platforms relatively easily. This is because both the interface and the story are presented almost entirely through text alone, thus games had relatively low demands in terms of porting the title from one hardware context to another. This is unlike graphically-intensive videogames wherein incidental decisions by operating system developers can affect how software must be programmed in order to make use of graphics cards and other computer hardware. This issue is compounded in desktop computing, where the software drivers for graphics cards can vary wildly. Interactive fiction can be developed in ways that are platform-interoperable, and we see the same technique developing in the way that *Bandersnatch* operates across a number of distribution contexts – TV, console, computer, mobile – all allowing effectively the same interaction.

Interactive fiction as a genre has subsequently influenced the development of the 'point and click genre,' which includes well-known titles such as *Monkey Island*, *Day of the Tentacle*, *The Dig*, *Discworld*, an *Indiana Jones* series of games, the *Leisure Suit Larry* series, *Broken Sword*, and many others (see: Reed et al., 2020). These games tend to have a mystery or crime theme and, like interactive fiction more generally, have included humour as a strong influence. These games have in turn influenced the development of other contemporary games in the exploration and mystery genres, including *Kentucky Route Zero* (Cardboard Computer, 2013) and *What Remains of Edith Finch* (Giant Sparrow, 2018).

While interactive fiction titles modelled on the original form have reduced in visibility in recent years, its core functionality remains in the dialogue trees of many high-profile narrative games such as *The Witcher III* (CD Projekt Red, 2015), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011), the *Mass Effect* series (BioWare, 2007-2017), *The Outer Worlds* (Obsidian Entertainment, 2019), *Walking Dead: The Game* (Telltale Games, 2012), *Game of Thrones* (Telltale Games, 2014), and many others.[4] Game development within the interactive fiction genre continues to be developed in amateur and community contexts; modern interpreters such as the Inform, ADRIFT, and TADS programming environments represent simplistic programming contexts that allow online communities to make and share verb/noun command line parsing games at a low cost. The application Twine allows for players to develop choice-based interactive fiction that can be loaded by modern HTML browsers, with one relatively high-profile game being "You are Jeff Bezos" (2018), the aim of which is to spend all of Jeff Bezos' billions of dollars.

Bandersnatch, in turn, is a step in the progression of the genre, presenting a different kind of interactivity in a different kind of context and, notably, a different category of spectatorship. *Bandersnatch* is played in a context that comes with a different type of shared experience than games usually do, with the prospect of being played in spaces with an audience of others. Because *Bandersnatch* is distributed on Netflix, it can be played in contexts that already have shared social experiences: namely Netflix's other film and television serials, as well as other platforms. This is different from an individual playing games on a mainframe in the late 1970s or reading gamebooks. Alongside this spectatorial approach to gameplay, it is intriguing that the player is not in direct control of Stefan; instead, the player subtly intervenes in the world around Stefan in a way that disestablishes a direct avatar-type relationship in the game. *Bandersnatch* presents a new kind of experience play for interactive fiction, departing from prior forms.

The mystery genre

The *Black Mirror* series uses a science fiction frame to explore horrors born from technology, bringing with it themes such as the unknown, and an idiosyncratic idea of human folly. At its core, *Black Mirror* presents an idea of a reality that exceeds the conventional, and this exceptional reality breaks through into the everyday through complex technology. The *Black Mirror* thesis of technology is that social reliance on increasingly complex technical devices leads to a point in

---

[4] Dialogue trees are discussed at length in Wardrip-Fruin (2009, 51-69).

which the techno-social system is so complex in its interactions that social reality can no longer be properly grasped by people. Within this complexity, some sort of 'evil' (a deliberately vague term) enters into the world leading to individual ruin but, crucially, the evil techno-social system remains in operation, presumably to consume more individuals in the future. This evil might take the form of robots with terrifying predatory intelligence, or it might be an irreversible upload of one's brain into a simulation, or an absurdist scopophilic punishment on live television, or the misery of a technological solution being worse than the problem. As such, the series has an overwhelmingly paranoid feeling; not dissimilar to Cold War era spy films. For *Bandersnatch*, the narrative complexity of the various paths that one can go down creates a system of reasonable complexity, and it is in Stefan's attempt to understand and produce a meaningful game experience that leads us to the evil technology. In *Bandersnatch*, however, this complexity is exacerbated because not only is Stefan struggling to understand the mystery of both the book he is transmediating and the game he is creating, he is also wrapped up in a crisis about the real. Stefan's exploration of his world is one that can be understood through reference to the mystery genre; in particular *Bandersnatch* parallels the experiences of the author turned private investigator in Paul Auster's "City of Glass" (1990). Both stories present a character exploring their reality, with a conflicted relationship between the author/character in "City of Glass" that mimics the player/character in *Bandersnatch*. Both stories begin with a conceit (investigation/programming) that eventually disappears as the terms of reference or borders of reality crumble away.

Gilles Deleuze and Luc Boltanski have both presented accounts of the nature of the mystery/detective genre. Deleuze's "The Philosophy of Crime Novels" (2004), originally published in 1966, explores the way that such mystery stories represent a form of fiction that focuses on the discovery of the truth independent from any individual – i.e. a scientific truth that exists independent of any perspective that is founded in an exploration of the world rather than relying on hearsay or interpretation. This truth cannot be immediately known however, it must be arrived at. Deleuze describes the detective novel as a device that can have two sides or perspectives. The first is the side of the detective who hunts a criminal, and by mirroring it we come to the second, the criminal who eludes the detective. Neither, Deleuze suggests, are especially remarkable relative to the other – or at least the genre works best when there is a relatively even pairing. Yet *Bandersnatch* loses sense of a proper antagonist part-way through the

story with the exception, perhaps, of the player themselves. For Deleuze, the 'philosophy' of crime novels is that the detective in the story themselves (as distinct from the police of the real world) is a philosopher of sorts, who explores the world and tries to capture all its dynamics. The truth that they seek isn't a truth of relations between objects and events that can be found in the world, but rather a desire to understand the rules of the reality that they occupy. This is experienced in a profound way by Stefan, as some paths lead to him becoming aware of the nature of his loop and the influence of the player. What Delezue's observation makes clear is that both Stefan and the player's relationship to traditional narrative is opaque but also that the search for truth is constantly frustrated, producing an anxious paranoia in Stefan. In *Bandersnatch*, however, the exploration of the world would appear to not be about discovering the rules that order the diegesis, but about discovering how quickly the rules fall away. As the episode progresses, the simple choices offered to the player lead to a dissolution of structure rather than its establishment. Because he lives in the world of *Black Mirror*, all Stefan can do is progressively develop a more paranoid knowledge that reality is more complex that he can comprehend, and begin to grasp the horror of the evil that lies behind it.

Boltanski, too, describes a similar account to Deleuze's detective in the mystery novel. Boltanski's *Mysteries & Conspiracies* (2014) outlines another theory related to the genre of mystery. Within the mystery genre we find the thriller, the war story, the conspiracy/spy story, and the crime/police detective story. The mystery is distinguished from genres such as science fiction and fantasy in the way that they ground themselves in a real – or at least with regards to the genres that Boltanski focuses on. Mystery sits on a continuum between the real and the impossible, being very much concerned with unusual events. Mysteries are couched within a commitment to a real world, but continue by revealing unusual, complex, inexplicable, exotic, monstrous, or otherwise less-than-apparent aspects of the world in which the story takes place. To understand the nature of mysteries, Boltanski argues that a mystery suggests that there is a distinction between the perceived state of affairs and the real state of affairs, but that crucially this gap between perception and reality must be signaled in order to generate the process of discovery or unravelling that comprises the nature of the genre. Boltanski argues that the various genres can be identified not by the nature of their hero, or aesthetic tropes, or even the general uncovering of the plot, but rather by the thing that is unsettled in the course of examination. For instance, the spy film is often centred on identifying

exactly how contingent and precarious the otherwise colossal edifice of the late-20th Century nation state is. So too is the detective novel often defined by the legal system, where without its heroes, criminals would pervert the order of capitalist property rights. Under what he calls the "reality of reality" (2014, p. 15), Boltanski suggests that what is being uncovered or unsettled is not a shared reality, but rather a complex account of "what is at stake" (2014, p. 18). 'Reality' in this context is a presentation of the world that we occupy, in the sense that the representations are, or at least describe, phenomena in our world that might conceivably exist in a way that we would accept it, and where the boundaries between the possible, the impossible, and the unlikely are all managed and known through their correspondence to the world around us. The extent to which we accept these representations as representations of reality come down, apparently, to the degree to which we are prepared to accept the backdrop of reality as the frame under which events take place. In this sense, Boltanski's account of reality as a frame shares some key characteristics that Johan Huizinga (1949) attributes to play. Huizinga's 'magic circle' is a much-maligned cliché in game studies, but it does convey the important notion that play is a lesser reality or world of its own, with its clearly constructed and arbitrary rules.

However, Huizinga's (1949, p. 10) bounded play-world creates order. Just as for Boltanski 'the real' is not equivalent to reality because the real operates with its own set of rules that are independent from the rules and order of reality. For instance, the way that fantasy envisions an array of fantastic peoples, magic, dragons, etc, but conventionally avoids the inclusion of laser rifles and space ships; for Boltanski, this is situation wherein a set of events and actors are "attached to the particular events through which they manifest themselves and to the situations that these events bring about" (2014, p. 9). It is this sensibility that is being 'detected' in the model of detective fiction, which is why fantasy-crime works such as Jean-Luc Godard's (1965) *Alphaville*, and Phillip K. Dick's (1968) *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* can incorporate detective fiction so seamlessly into novels about fictional worlds. The process of detection is about exploring the parameters of the world itself, not solely the nature of the truth of a singular crime. Thus, the process of detection evaluates the internal consistency of reality, in a similar way that the rules of the game—for Huizinga—create and order the world.

Allegories of boredom

In *Gamer Theory*, McKenzie Wark details what she sees as the particular mediatory quality of digital games, in terms of how digital games present their allegorical relationship to meaning. Inasmuch as the plot of a novel presents allegory through text, the game presents its allegories through its algorithmic processes (2007. p. 59). It is no accident that *Bandersnatch* is controlled by the very means that one scrolls through the apparently infinite but very much circulatory experience of Netflix (Fordyce, 2019). The act is very familiar, sorting through line upon line of familiar titles. Each line presents a familiar line-up of thumbnails, but as the descriptions and covers bleed into a unified aesthetic grammar the ability to distinguish each visual experience from what you've already seen before becomes difficult. The variation and repetition of the line-ups complicates this further. Scrolling vertically and horizontally, you can search through a range of experiences, hoping to find one that is unique or different, or at the very least is perhaps forgotten. The algorithmic allegory of *Bandersnatch* is the repetition of Netflix with a small range of choices.

In *Bandersnatch* choice and boredom intertwine. The Netflix user is caught between boredom and the possibility of finding something to watch that alleviates their boredom. Netflix always has something to watch, it is just a question of finding the right series that staves off the boredom just enough to prevent the user from opening Amazon Prime, Disney+, or HBO apps (or even worse, leaving the app space completely). The narrative of *Bandersnatch* offers both trivial and significant choices: what tape should Stefan listen to on the bus? Should he murder his father? But the mode of playing through *Bandersnatch*, which encourages Netflix users to explore every pathway, makes these choices banal. The morality of the choices is not significant as users are expected to choose all options during the course of playing, in stark contrast to the 'dialogue trees' mentioned earlier, where choices are made once and then impact the rest of the game (and in the case of Bioware's *Mass* Effect (2007-) series, cascade over the remaining games in the series, should the player import their character into subsequent games). *Bandersnatch* requires an exhaustion of possibilities, but it differs from Netflix in that there is no 'hidden gems' to find which may distract users from the search. It stages the search itself with the possibility of fruitful discovery, only to tell the user explicitly with meta-reflexive irony that, like Stefan, they are trapped in Netflix. In this sense, the film follows the typical *Black Mirror* dystopian commentary: imagine a Netflix that you could not simply leave. A media world of the infinite scroll wherein the user is always *almost* one click ahead of boredom.

Netflix appears to infinitely defer boredom through its constantly updated and expansive library with customized suggestions offered based on viewing history and likes. In this deferral it captures attention, and by adding 'games' to its stable of content it gestures towards a possibility of absorbing and integrating a threat to that attention, the digital game. *Bandersnatch* was not the first interactive programming that Netflix published, just weeks earlier on November 18th, 2018 they had republished a simplified version of Telltale Games' *Minecraft: Story Mode* customized for the platform.[5] The five chapters of content followed Telltale's critically acclaimed and commercially successful formula of elaborate 'point-and-click' decisions with significant moral choices that impacted later choices. They ended up on Netflix despite Telltales' acrimonious closure during 2018 (Lanier, 2018). It transpired that Telltale Games' winning formula could not overcome problems caused by "nonstop crunch culture, toxic management, and … creative stagnation" (Farokhmanesh, 2018). In this respect, although ambitious, *Bandersnatch* is much smaller in scale than *Minecraft: Story Mode*, and simulates a translation of mediums from book to computer to Netflix, rather than being a literal translation of the original *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011) into the Telltale Games engine, into the Netflix app. Subsequently, Netflix has released a couple of other pieces of interactive programming, but has mainly relied on traditional programming, even in later seasons of *Black Mirror*. Again, in the dystopian visions of *Black Mirror*, *Bandersnatch* gestures towards a future wherein all media has been translated into a single platform.

Wark (2007, 70) argues that the role of digital games is to capture boredom. Play was captured by the rise of the digital game, which responds to the boredom of the player with endless rounds of repetition, level after level of difference as more of the same (2007, p. 16). Her analysis of the game *State of Emergency* (VIS Games 2002) describes how games operate to displace boredom by constantly 'making-over' the game (2007, p. 161). The game changes the terms of play constantly, by opening up new spaces to the player and changing the level of control the player has over that space. The exploration of videogames is an alignment with the exploration of Plato's cave. The argument is thus: upon realizing that one is stuck in the cave – perhaps like the

---

[5] The Netflix edition was customized to be played using a TV remote and thus many of the interactive situations were reduced to a yes/no, while other versions made full use of the range of options available with complex hand-held controllers.

protagonist, Stefan – one's goal becomes to account for the cave itself (Wark, 2007, pp. 6-8, 59-61, 210). The hope is that there is some threshold to the system of play, a new order to be found, or at least some sense of escape. This threshold is explored by a process Wark describes as 'trifling.' In the process of finding the limits of a game, the player tests those limits. Trifling with games can often lead to programmed novelty, described by Aarseth (1999) as epiphanies, which allow players to access a new area or engage differently with one they are already familiar with. But it can also lead to counterplay (Apperley, 2010; Meades, 2013) where elements of the game are recombined in unexpected ways by players, the classic example being rocket jumping in *Quake III Arena* (Lederle-Ensign & Wardrip-Fruin, 2016). In this respect, contemporary games offer players a great deal of space and control over that space, which gives it a quantitatively different capacity to alleviate boredom. However, for Wark, boredom has a critical capacity, as it is the starting point for understanding the game as an algorithm (2007, p.33). She uses the concept of 'trifling' to conceptualize this new relationship with the algorithm (see: Suits, 1978); the trifler 'struggles to escape boredom and produce difference' (Wark 2007, p. 40). The interactive fiction of *Bandersnatch* on the Netflix platform creates a game wherein the difference between playing and trifling is erased as there is no end point that can be reached. Or at least there may be an endpoint to *Bandersnatch*, but there is no conceivable end to Netflix, which on the completion of *Bandersnatch* is already offering players links to new content.

Conclusion

In *Bandersnatch* what is 'at stake' is not the resolution of a mystery, but the form of entertainment. Netflix as a platform is both questioned and reestablished in the form of an interactive story-game that incorporates, but confuses, the protagonist and the viewer, while also emptying out the structure or meaning of the form of the game. The experience of playing *Bandersnatch* is much less about the following of a particularly special plot, but rather the uncovering of a set of rules that organize the world. These rules cannot be simply explained but must be personally experienced through mediated but physically-initiated feedback between person and software platform. There is something of a mystery of play to any game that cannot be prefigured prior to the moment of engagement: a game can be described, strategies can be detailed, a narrative recounted, and a difficulty outlined, but the actual experience of gameplay remains elusive and not

readily transmediated into other contexts. All games hold within them an element of mystery that exceeds simple description.

References:

Apperley, T. (2006). Genre and Game Studies: Towards a Critical Approach to Vide Game Genres. *Simulation & Gaming* 37(1), 6-23. DOI: 10.1177/1046878105282278

Apperley, T. (2010). *Gaming Rhythms: Play and Counterplay from the Local to the Global*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

Auster, P. (1990) "The City of Glass" in *The New York Trilogy*. New York: Penguin Books.

Begy, J. (2013). Experiential Metaphors in Abstract Games. *ToDiGRA: Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* 1 (1), http://todigra.org/index.php/todigra/article/download/3/96

Bogost, I. (2006). *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Boltanski, L. (2014) *Mysteries & Conspiracies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Deleuze, G. (2004) "The Philosophy of Crime Novels". In *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Dick, P. K. (1968) *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. New York: Del Rey Books.

Farokhmanesh, M. (4 October, 2018). The Tragic End of Telltale Games. *The Verge*. Accessed 6 March, 2020, from: https://www.theverge.com/2018/10/4/17934166/telltale-games-studio-closed-layoffs-end-the-walking-dead

Fordyce, R. (2019) 'Bandersnatch': that game we all played. *Overland*. Accessed 5 February, 2019 from: https://overland.org.au/2019/02/bandersnatch-that-game-we-all-played/

Godard, J-L. (1965) *Alphaville*. Athos Films.

Hills, M. (2019) 'Black Mirror: Bandersnatch' and 'The Affair' of Re-Narration In (Gendered TV) Taste Cultures. CST Online. Accessed 9 February, 2020 from: https://cstonline.net/black-mirror-bandersnatch-and-the-affair-of-re-narration-in-gendered-tv-taste-cultures-by-matt-hills/

Lanier, L. (21 September, 2018). 'The Walking Dead' Game Developer Hit With 90% Staff Layoffs as 225 Are Let Go. *Variety*. Accessed 6 March 2020, from: https://variety.com/2018/gaming/news/walking-dead-game-developer-hit-staff-layoffs-1202952915/

Lederle-Ensign, D. & Wardrip-Fruin, N. (2016). What is Strafe Jumping? idTech3 and the Game Engine as Software Platform. *ToDiGRA: Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* 2(2) http://todigra.org/index.php/todigra/article/view/35

Meades, A. (2013). *Understanding Counterplay in Video Games*. London: Routledge.

McSweeney, T. & Joy, S. (2019). Change Your Past, Your Present, Your Future? Interactive Narratives and Trauma in Bandersnatch. In T. McSweeney & S. Joy (eds.). *Through the Black Mirror: Deconstructing the Side Effects of the Digital Age* (271-284). London: Palgrave.

Montfort, N. (2003). *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Murray, J. (1997). *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Reed, A., Murray, J. & Salter, A. (2020). *Adventure Games: Playing the Outsider*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Slade, D. (2018) *Bandersnatch.* Netflix.

Suits, B. (1978). *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Wardrup-Fruin, N. (2009). *Expressive Processing: Digital Fictions, Computer Games, and Software Studies.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Wark, M. (2007). *Gamer Theory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Games Cited:

Apex Legends (2019) Electronic Arts.

Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars (1996) Virgin Interactive Entertainment.

Candy Crush Saga (2015) King.

Day of the Tentacle (1993) LucasArts.

Discworld (1995) Psygnosis.

God of War (2018) Sony Entertainment.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989) Lucasfilm Games.

Kentucky Route Zero (2020) Steam.

Leisure Suit Larry series (1987-2009) Sierra Entertainment.

Mass Effect series (2007-2017) Bioware.

Minecraft Story Mode (2015-2016) Telltale Games.

Monkey Island series (1990-2010) LucasArts.

Quake III Arena (1999) Activision.

State of Emergency (2002) Vis Games.

The Dig (1995) LucasArts.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (2011) Bethseda Softworks.

The Outer Worlds (2019) Obsidian Entertainment.

What Remains of Edith Finch (2017) Annapurna Interactive.

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt (2015) CD Projekt Red

Wizard and the Princess (1980) On-Line Systems.

You are Jeff Bezos (2018) - https://direkris.itch.io/you-are-jeff-bezos

Zork (1977) Infocom.