



Brought to you by the

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GAAC

Games As Art Center

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Introduction & Title Page

The Games As Art Center (GAAC) operates in Tampere, Finland. The GAAC seeks to promote artistic games. It is run by local game designers and researchers but relies on a wide network of societal actors and the participation of the public in events and in helping to shape the Center's activities.

We focus on three forms of game promotion: Embodied games, hosting playful communities, and games research.

HOW

We explore these artistic possibilities of games through three types of activities:

1. Reflection: talks, panels, assemblies, exhibitions...
2. Exploration: events in which games are played with various goals (education, entertainment, playtesting...).
3. Creation: design workshops and events.

These types can of course be hybridized (e.g., a talk that includes a small design exercise at the end).

WHY

- Tampere and the world have many actors working with games who may be interested in a space where their practice and research can be shown, discussed and developed further.
- We develop understandings and experiences that often stay at the academic level but may be interesting for a variety of audiences.
- We aim to disseminate and discuss a broader and deeper understanding of games.
- We would like to promote a participatory approach to meaning-making of/with games.
- Tampere lacks spaces where these kinds of activities can occur.

WHERE

You will find us at www.gamesasartcenter.com or info@gamesasartcenter.com.

Currently we schedule in person events with a variety of partners, including Tampere University, and the Vapriikki Museum Centre/Finnish Museum of Games. We have designed and presented games in Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Italy, and the

United States. We also run online events that you can find on our website.

CURRENT BOOK

This book is the culmination of two years of research talks from September 2023, given by 32 researchers, from all around the world. The pieces selected depict specific forms of expression that games have achieved. Questions around who plays games, where games should exist in society, and what impact games have are all asked within this curation. The curation is organized by topic. Each game set has an explanatory chapter start and then individual games are analyzed for their meaning.

We are grateful to all of the game designers who have made these beautiful games or thought about games in beautiful ways. There are always more games each year that push the boundary of the expressive, impactful, and structural capacities of games.

We are also deeply grateful to all of our curators, collaborators, researchers, and most of all, anyone who is interested in games as a form of art.
Leland, Daniel, & Antonio

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Artistic Games

Shouldn't we promote games that include the full range of human experiences?



Games As Art Center

Curator: Leland Masek

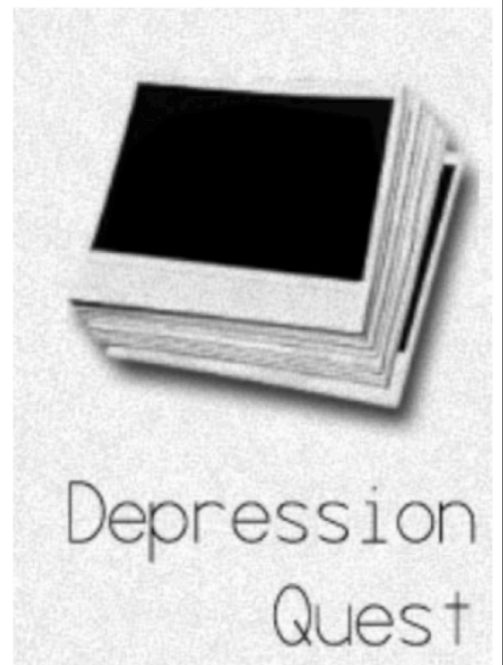
Artistic Intent: Reframing the Fiction

This is a curated selection of games that have an artistic intention. The exhibition games present fictions that reframe the traditional concepts often defining the medium. Whereas many game worlds focus upon player agency and power to claim victory and dominance, these instead focus upon an alternate type of fictional world; They present characters who lack agency, power, or certainty.

While it is common for artistic media such as film or literature to focus upon such complicated, maybe even painful components of the human experience, for video games this is quite a radical choice. Some critics may grow offended at certain topics being in a game at all, as represented by calls to “keep politics out.” These games embody a strong claim that games should not avoid such topics as suffering, being a refugee, or experiencing gender dysphoria, but should allow players to confront them using the medium of game design.

Depression Quest

Suffering from Severe Depression



A grey-tone aesthetic defines this game's somber mood.

Designer: Zoë Quinn, Patrick Lindsey 2013

Platform: Playable online at <http://www.depressionquest.com/>

Artistic Intent: This game simulates the experiences and limitations of living with depression. Notable for mechanics where players are notified of actions they can not take because of depressive symptoms, this game reframes assumptions of needing to provide players a sense of agency, victory, or joy as they play.

Play Here



"This game aims to show other sufferers of depression that they are not alone in their feelings, and to illustrate to people who may not understand the illness the depths of what it can do to people."^[1] This game was widely acclaimed and also controversial for some.

Zoë Quinn



Do you...

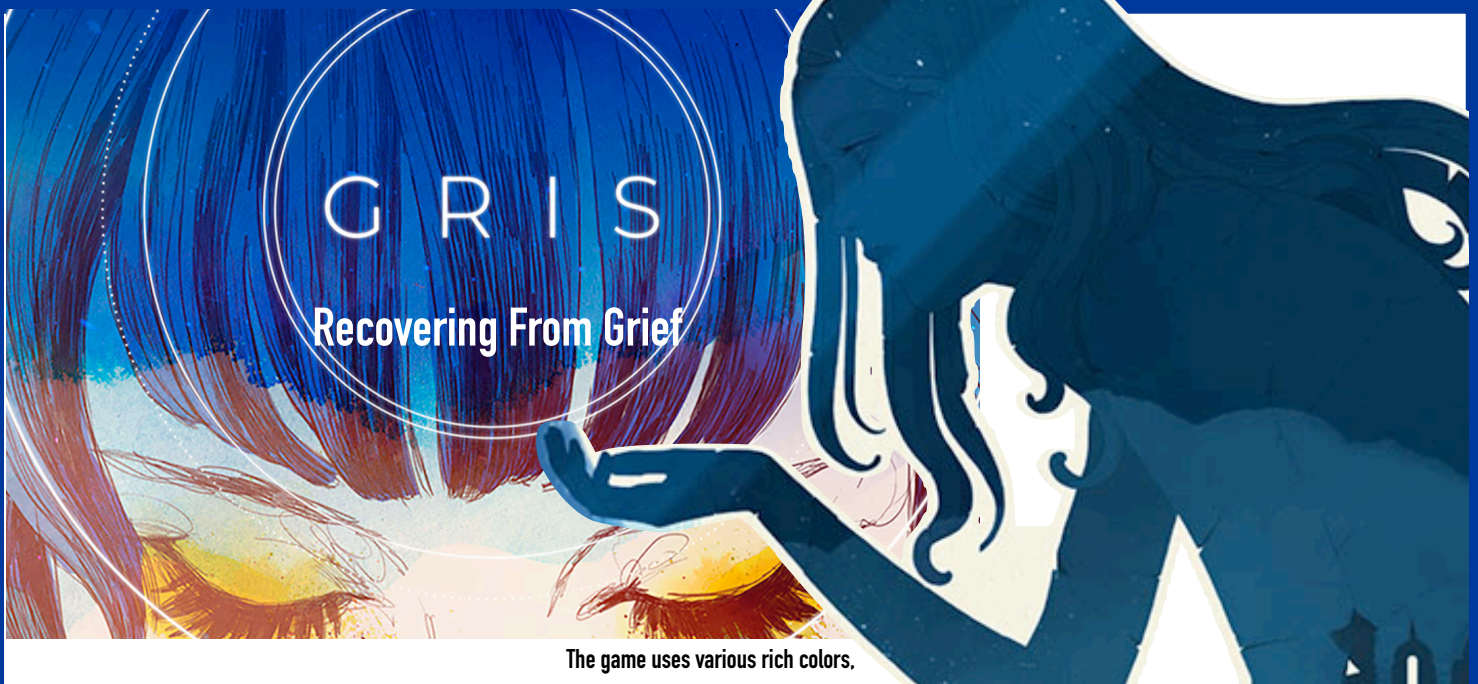
1. Order some food, grab a drink, and hunker down for a night of work.
2. Reluctantly sit down at your desk and try and make yourself do something
3. Turn on the TV, telling yourself you just need a quick half hour to unwind from work
4. Crawl into bed. You're so stressed and overwhelmed you couldn't possibly accomplish anything anyways.

You are depressed. Interaction is exhausting, and you are becoming more and more withdrawn.

You are not currently seeing a therapist.

You are not currently taking medication for depression.

The game presents several choices with options crossed out, metaphorically depicting how depression limits choices that people may want to be able to take.



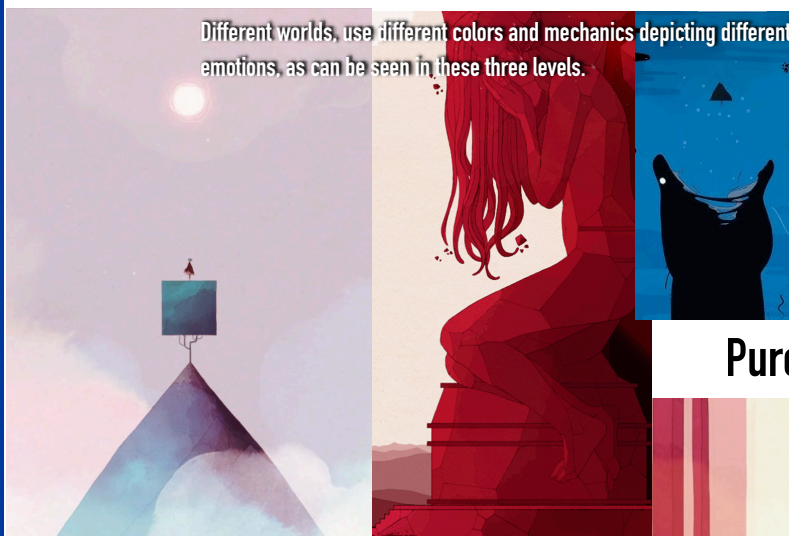
The game uses various rich colors.

Designer: Nomada Studio, 2019

Platform: Digitally available

The platformer often uses images of a woman as the environment, signaling a psychological landscape being traversed.

Artistic Intent: Gris depicts a female main character in a platformer game facing different metaphorical stages of grief. Every level offers new mechanics which grasp different elements of recovery and suffering, from friendship, anger, doubt, depression, and feeling helpless. Gris is notable for its visual beauty and easeful gameplay making an accessible and beautiful experience. It has won numerous awards for its visual style, its storytelling, and its ambitious aims.



Different worlds, use different colors and mechanics depicting different emotions, as can be seen in these three levels.

Purchasable Here:



"Gris is a hopeful young girl lost in her own world, dealing with a painful experience in her life. Her journey through sorrow is manifested in her dress, which grants new abilities to better navigate her faded reality. As the story unfolds, Gris will grow emotionally and see her world in a different way, revealing new paths to explore using her new abilities." [2]

-Nomada Studios

from <https://nomada.studio/gris-game/>



A friend appears in the game to aid mechanically, and metaphorically.

Black Trans Archive

THAT THIS IS A
PRO BLACK PRO
TRANS SPACE

Confrontations with Black-Trans Lived Experiences

Designer: Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, 2021

Platform: Playable online at <https://blacktransarchive.com/>

Artistic Intent: This work speaks to the nature of archiving stories, identities, and experiences. This interactive work moves beyond the goal of entertainment in video games to instead engage with the archival of Black trans experiences.

More information

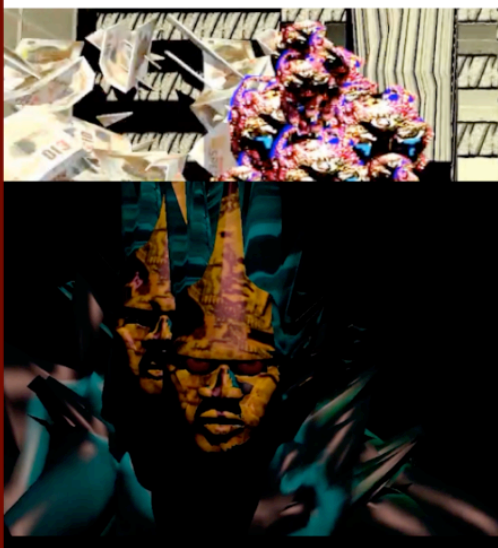


Play Here



"We're building a space... that centers Black trans people but doesn't lend itself to "trans tourism" or voyeuristic themes... I used to play a lot of video games, but never saw a representation of a Black trans person, and I wanted to change that" ^[3]

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley



My Child Lebensborn

Adoptive Parent of a Child Born of War



Designer: Sarepta Studio, 2022

Platform: Purchasable online at <https://mychildlebensborn.com//>

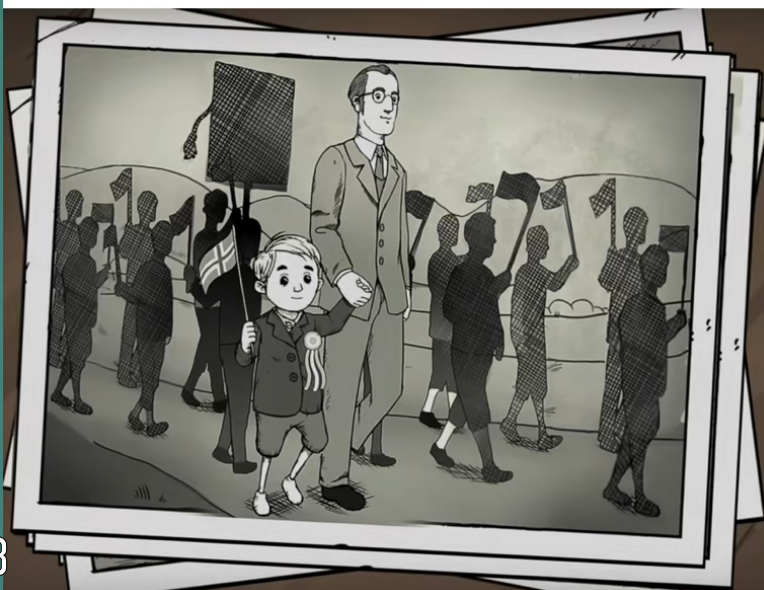
Artistic Intent: This game places the player as the adoptive caretaker of a “Child Born of War” between a Norwegian mother and a Nazi father. It deals heavily with themes of love, alienation, and exclusion. It reframes norms of games creating feelings of power and instead presents love and struggle.

Play Here



“The game is about Children Born of War, the children born during conflict with enemy soldiers as fathers. For the ‘German kids’ in Norway, Victory Day was the day their suffering began.” ^[4]

Development Team



Papers, Please



Migration-control officer in the Eastern Bloc

Designer: Lucas Pope, 2013

Platform: Purchasable online at <https://papersplea.se/>

Artistic Intent: This game puts the player as a migration officer in the fictional eastern Bloc-like country of Arstotzka. The player must check character's visas, find detail-oriented problems, and face moral dilemmas. The story reframes a normative priority of clarity in games instead focusing on a fiction of ambiguous moments of morality, technicality and authority.

"I wanted to show that in politics, all sides of any kind of issue have some justification. There's not just the good guys and the bad guys - even the bad guys have some justification for why they want to do something."^[5]

Play Here



Lucas Pope



Escape from Woomera

Modern Refugees in Australia



Designer: Katherine Neil and Collaborators, 2001

Platform: Never finished, Half-life 2 prototype downloadable at <https://www.moddb.com/mods/escape-from-woomera>

Artistic Intent: Escape from Woomera was a publicly funded game project by the Australian government to spread awareness of refugee experiences. It then became criticized by other governmental representatives for depicting law-breaking and criticizing refugee camps. The story reframes normal expectations of games as hopeful or empowering.

More Info



“As a detainee at the infamous Woomera Detention Centre, you have a limited period of time in which to try and gain asylum, or if all else fails, plan and execute your escape into an uncertain world beyond the razor-wire fence. Time, bureaucracy and the mind, body and spirit-sapping conditions of this harsh and unforgiving environment place are ranged against you. The only real weapon at your disposal is hope.”^[6]

Development Team

Elika, Why do you look so sad?

Elika:

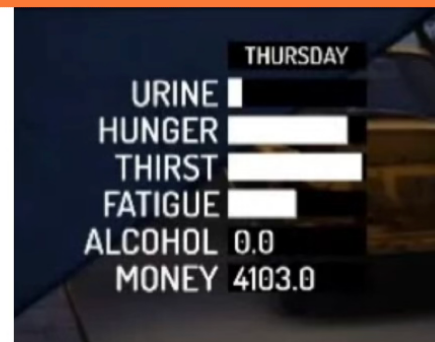
Oh, Mustafa! I was reading from the Koran just before, and one of the guards came up and demanded to look at it, when he finished leafing through the pages, he threw it on the ground instead of giving it back to me.

Press [1] What did you do?

Press [2] Well that's terrible, but only to be expected in this place.

My Summer Car

Teenage Finnish Car owner



**SUOMI FINLAND
SUMMER
1995**

Designer: Johannes and Kaarina Rojola, 2016

Platform: Purchasable online at <https://www.amistech.com/msc/>

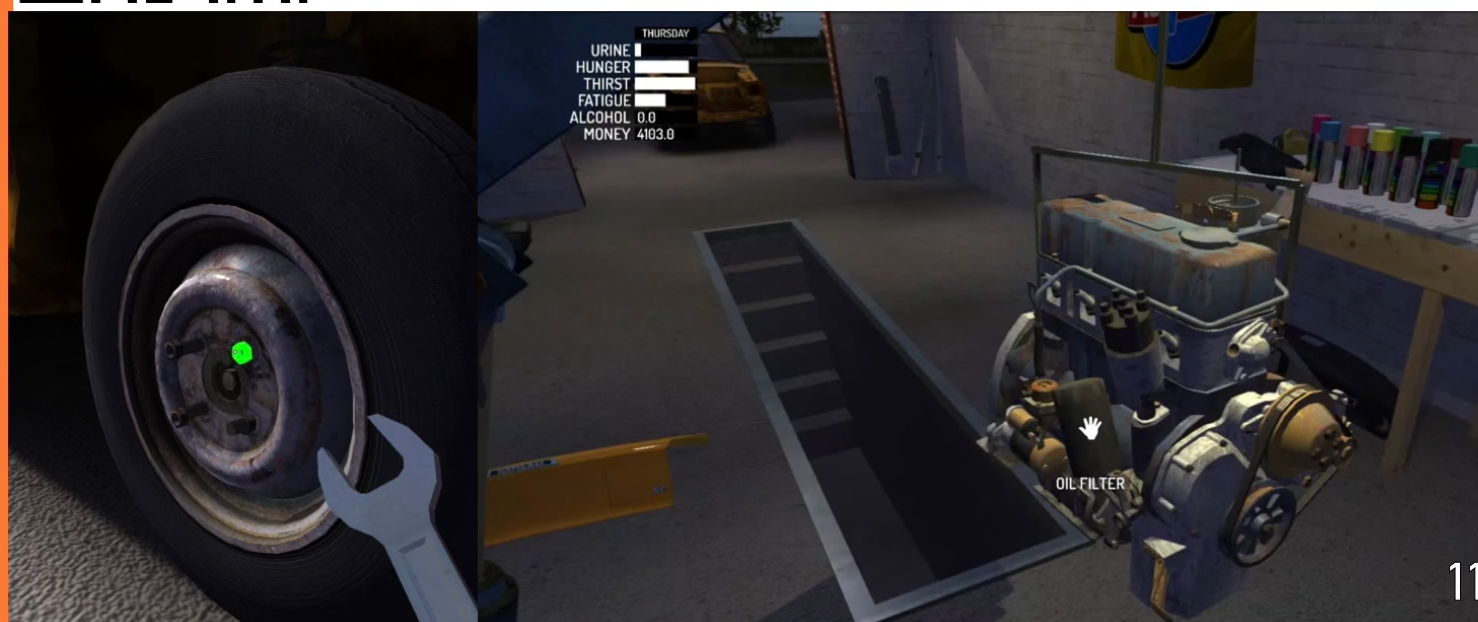
Artistic Intent: This is a difficult and confusing car simulator where players take on the role of a Finnish teenager trying to road trip with a broken car they must repair without any manuals or help. This game captures a highly detail-oriented, realistic recreation of mid-nineties Finland and refuses to simplify the often frustrating experience it simulates.

Play Here



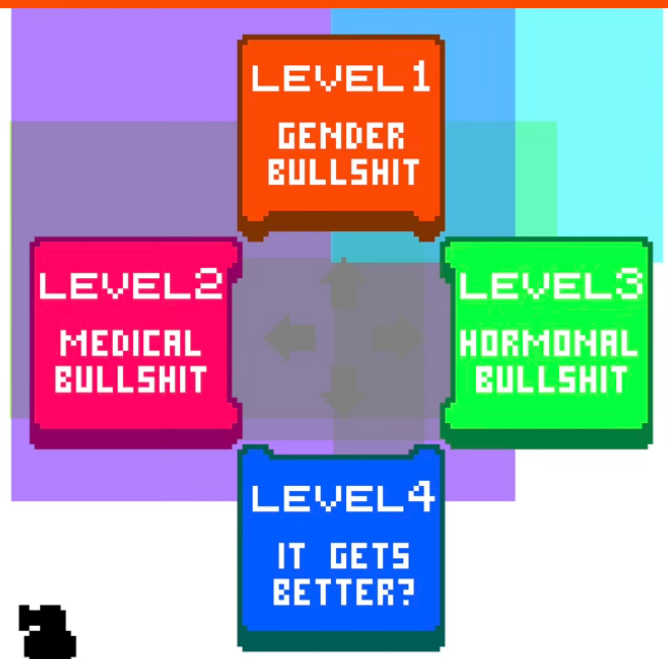
"I have been trying to make the game authentic as possible. And even though some of the people have thought that this would be some kind of joke it really isn't." [7]

Johannes Rojola



Dys-4-ia

Transitioning Gender



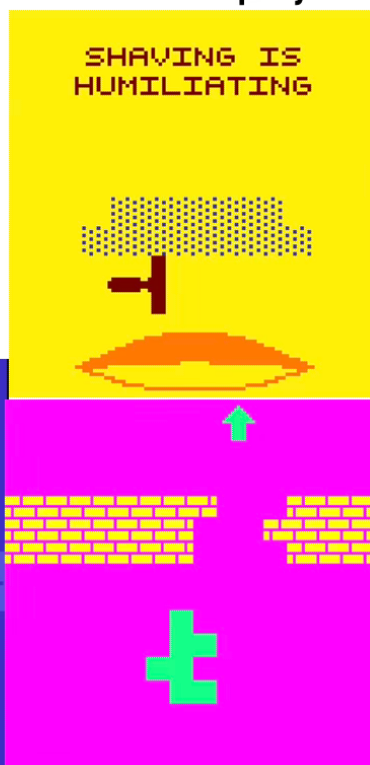
Designer: Anna Anthropy, 2012

Platform: Playable online at <https://freegames.org/dys4ia/>

Artistic Intent: This game is an autobiographical game about the experience of gender transitioning. It utilizes well known game references and subverts them to create various metaphors. It uses games as a medium of communication and rejects the idea that all games are meant to be playable.

"This was a story about frustration – in what other form do people complain as much about being frustrated? A video game lets you set up goals for the player and make her fail to achieve them. A reader can't fail a book. It's an entirely different level of empathy."^[8]

Play Here



Anna Anthropy



Phone Story

Owner of the iPhone Supply Chain

Designer: Molleindustria, 2011

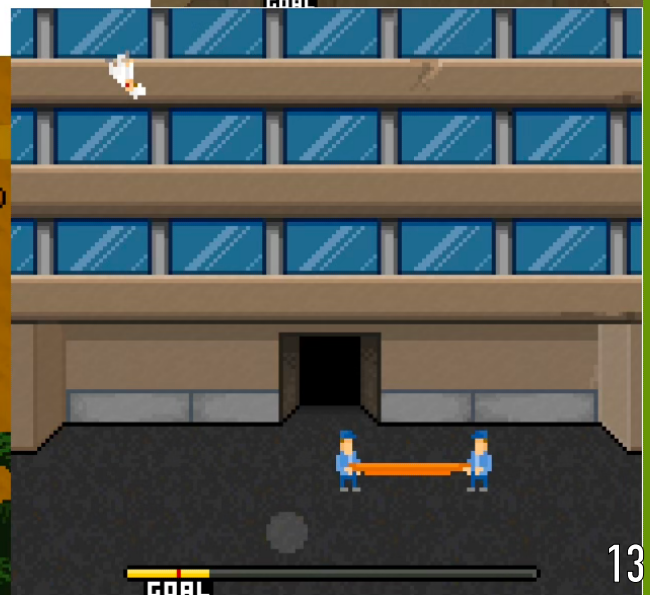
Platform: Online at <https://www.phonestory.org/>

Artistic Intent: This game criticizes the supply chain of smartphone production through small educational games. It is currently banned on the iPhone app store and rejects the goals of escapism to instead make players more self-aware of the harmful aspects of the platform they are playing on.

"Under the shiny surface of our electronic gadgets, behind its polished interface, hides the product of a troubling supply chain that stretches across the globe. Phone Story represents this process with four educational games that make the player symbolically complicit in coltan extraction in Congo, outsourced labor in China, e-waste in Pakistan and gadget consumerism in the West.^[9]

Development Team

Play Here



The Games Preserve

Games for fun: Art-Commune of Games

Designer: Bernard De Koven, 1971–1981

Platform: A barn providing a variety of playful experiences

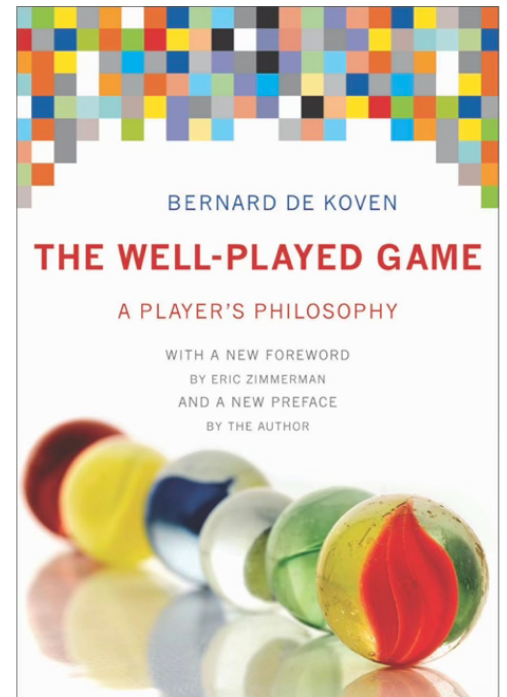
Artistic Intent: A representation of the work of Bernard De Koven. Author, designer and “Shaman of Play”. He lived onsite for a decade, holding hundreds of workshops and promotions of games and play as a legitimate and important medium. He never made money, and he stopped when the preserve went bankrupt. He subsequently directed the New

More information



Games Movement, helped create the largest game design education program in the world and is possibly one of the most influential game designers of the 20th–21st century.

Bernard De Koven



This is a place where anybody can find a game, so that, if we want to play, if we only want to play, we'll be able to find something we'd want to play with right here... Think about the educational validity of the ultimate play community. [10]

DEEP fun 
With Bernard De Koven

Train

Games for Metaphor: Art Installation Game

Designer: Brenda Romero, 2009

Platform: Board game, more info at <http://brenda.games/train>

Artistic Intent: This controversial game was an interactive art exhibit meant to depict deportation in the Holocaust. Players are provided highly ambiguous rules including “Train ends when it ends”, little explanation of the goals, and a rule against seeing the destinations of trains that players fill with meeples. Design choices directly reference SS practices during WW2 and speak to how or whether games can be used as effective metaphors.^[11]

More Info

“The game takes place on a window which is smashed... the rules are typed on a Nazi SS typewriter... you're basically transporting Jews to Concentration Camps... This is not even close to another video game. The rules deliberately allow for that form of procedural rhetoric that people can interpret them as they like... Some people play to save everyone, and the rules allow that.”^[12] Brenda Romero



Exquisite Corpse

Game for prompting Irrationality
Fine Art Games



Designer: Yves Tanguy, Jacques Prévert, André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. 1925

Platform: An Artistic Game of Drawing and Writing

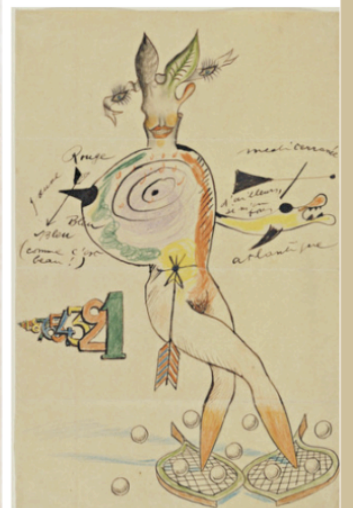
Artistic Intent: A creativity exercise used by Surrealists and Dadaists in the 1920's it was meant to violate the norms of rationality in order to enable a deeper sense of creativity. One artist would draw a picture, the next would only see a portion of the picture and continue the drawing. This game was meant to reject the very concept of intentionality

in art ^[13]

More Info

"Why do we have to be so uniform? When I order a grilled lobster in a restaurant, why doesn't anyone bring me a cooked telephone?" ^[14]

Salvador Dali



Meow

Wolf

Games for Maximalist
Collaborative
Environments

Art-Museum Games



Designer: Meow Wolf Artist Collective

Platform: In person in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Artistic Intent: A ticketed museum where interactive art rooms delve into the realm of interactive storytelling, goal-seeking, secret discovering and transgressive surprise. Influenced by Alternate Reality Games this company is now known for its immersive environments and mysterious storytelling. ^[15]

Website:



THE REAL
UNREAL

GRAPEVINE, TX



CONVERGENCE
STATION

DENVER, CO



HOUSE OF
ETERNAL RETURN

SANTA FE, NM



OMEGA MART

LAS VEGAS, NV

Yoko Ono

One-Woman Show

Games for Disruption
Conceptual Participatory Art Game



YOKO ONO

ONE
WOMAN
SHOW

1960–1971

Designer: Yoko Ono 1960–1971

Platform: Museum exhibitions around the world

Artistic Intent: Yoko Ono's participatory art is considered to be among the pioneers of the genre. She took interactive media and games and used them in a museum setting to criticize, clarify and present philosophical aspects of humanity and culture. Most famously, she created an all-white chess set for individuals to play on called "White Chess Set". She also created the participatory "Cut Piece" where audience members were instructed to use scissors and cut off a piece of her clothes to keep. The intent was a Buddhist-exercise of unconditional giving, however, the resulting images of the audience, especially men, delighting in boldly and violently stripping her made it an iconic, yet unintentional, feminist art piece.

Yoko Ono

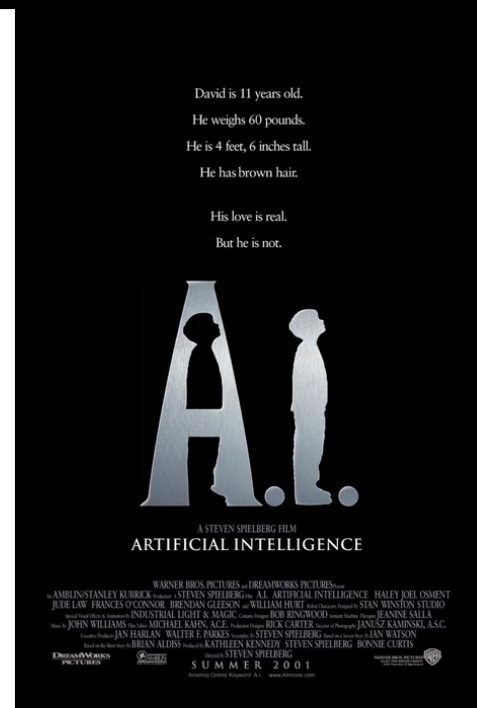
"Light a match and watch it burn down." [16]



What happens is in the beginning it's all right, when you're winning; but when you're losing they start to say, "Oh, isn't that mine?" ... "No, no. That's mine," you know, and trying to sort of con each other. And you can play on it. It's a very interesting game because it starts to tickle you a little, you know? The result is fun and laughter. Not serious at all – and that's how life is, you know? [about playing White Chess Set] [17]

More Info





Designer: Elan Lee lead designer, Microsoft 2001

Platform: Alternate Reality Game with puzzles in advertisements online, phone messages and paper advertisements.

Artistic Intent: This game is one of the clearest beginnings of the genre of the Alternate Reality Game, where a game's aesthetics deny the fact that they are a game and instead present a narrative of a conspiracy-level murder mystery played out over hundreds of websites, email messages, faxes, fake ads, and voicemail messages. This is possibly one of the largest ARGs played, with 4,000–5,000 members in their website, and up to 25 million hits a day. This game advertised the 2001 Hollywood movie Artificial Intelligence, but it quickly grew beyond expectations and become its own phenomenon. [18]

"We put up a series of hundreds of websites, and phone numbers and we hired actors and everything was ready to go.... Then over night we went from twenty friends playing it to close to two million people playing it"

Elan Lee

More Info



Gender & Games

How have games intersected with, resisted, and expressed gender identities?



Curator: Mark Maletka, Aasa Timonen, Enni Eerikäinen

Artistic Intent: Presenting a variety of perspectives where game design is connected with gender identity.

This is a curated selection of games that are connected to expressions of gender identity. The work includes games with non-binary and gender-diverse characters, games with active trans communities as players, and games where player gender is a sight of conflict and resistance. The conclusion of this work is that games are a critical location where gender expression is actively negotiated.

Five games are presented in the collection by three important scholars of the field. Gender expression occurs within game spaces, game communities, and within sites of oppression. Ultimately the work asks the viewer the critical question:

How do games connect with gender expression? How could gender and games intersect in the future?

Hello Charlotte

video game series

by etherane



etherane itch.io

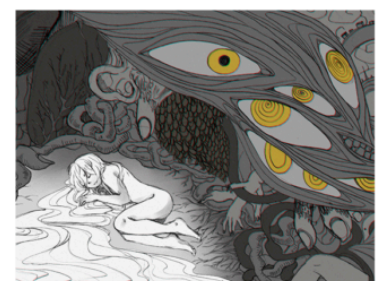
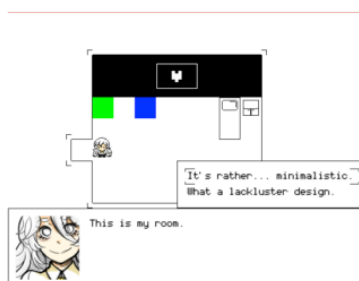


Hello, new Puppeteer!

Meet Charlotte — a Puppet you will control.
Meet her alien friends, maggot cat and a certain Observer.

As a game developer, etherane always picks controversial topics to add into the game worlds. Death of humanity, world of psychopaths or complete loneliness, crossing borders and emotional starvation... Hello Charlotte series unwraps main character's genderfluidity rather around the game, and not simply within its plot. All the hints left to the protagonist by their internal self can be found only after the story ends - and only then the player can see that nothing is a coincidence or negligence of the developer.

Charlotte turned out to be... [19]



Trigger Warning!
The game contains violence, suicide portrayal and unpleasant visuals



Hello Charlotte EP1



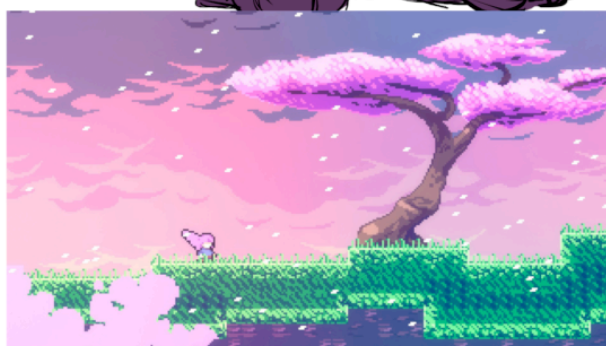


Description: Help Madeline survive her inner demons on her journey to the top of Celeste Mountain, in this super-tight platformer from the creators of TowerFall. Brave hundreds of hand-crafted challenges, uncover devious secrets, and piece together the mystery of the mountain.

Celeste is one of the video games trans and nonbinary players mention as similar one to the gender transition process in terms of gameplay. You see the mountain, you need to climb to the top. You can mostly rely on yourself. It will be difficult. It will be insane. But you will do it.

Celeste was not created directly to show all the toughness of gender transitioning – and was still read this way by many players. It left a footprint on one of the developers as well, and several years after the game was finished they came out as trans.

This is it, Madeline. Just breathe. You can do this. [20]



PLAY DELTARUNE



PLAY UNDERTALE



deltarune AND UNDERTALE

WELCOME TO UNDERTALE. IN THIS RPG, YOU CONTROL A HUMAN WHO FALLS UNDERGROUND INTO THE WORLD OF MONSTERS. NOW YOU MUST FIND YOUR WAY OUT... OR STAY TRAPPED FOREVER. [21]



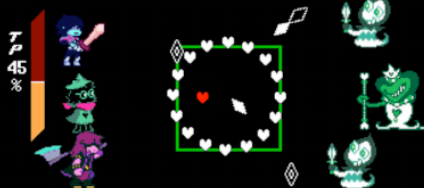
UNDERTALE AND DELTARUNE, UNDERTALE'S PARALLEL STORY, BOTH ARE REMARKABLE WITH THEIR NONBINARY PROTAGONISTS AND HUGE GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY AMONG BOTH PLAYABLE CHARACTERS AND NPCs, NATURALLY INTEGRATED IN BOTH STORY AND GAMEPLAY.



* Loox and co. decided to pick on you!

CHARA LV 2 HP 15 / 24

FIGHT ACT ITEM MERCY



KRIS HP 40 / 40 PARSET HP 10 / 10 SUSIE HP 10 / 110



* ...th- thanks for putting up with me.

SUSTAINABILITY AND GAMES

Curators: Laura Cosio, Daniel Fernández Galeote, and Dr. Velvet Spors

This exhibition asks the question—what can we learn from and notice in how sustainability is represented and engaged with in games?

Traditionally, the ways of representing the world in most successful digital games seem far from sustainable. Human conflict is usually addressed in violent ways, and the environment is either a resource to exploit, an obstacle to overcome and obliterate, a background to admire or, at best, a storytelling device. Shooting is the default verb in games, and the virtual world a sandbox for us to conquer and wreak havoc in, but can we expect something else? Or even worse: Are we even able to imagine something else happening in games?

Hundreds of games have questioned this narrative, and their number and significance continue to grow. For playing with sustainability, games can become frames of a different type—truly complex ecosystems in which to learn and experiment, where the processes of nature are shown and interacted with in all their relationships and variability. They can make us relate to space and time in ways that go beyond our everyday life, and inherent human perspective—from the macro to the micro, and from microseconds to millions of years.

Far from the image of the player as the powerful dominator of the digital world, sustainability stories have shown how game characters can turn players into anonymous citizens, heroes and decision-makers working for a better future, or allow them to witness the difficulties of survival in an inhospitable world. Beyond the human perspective, games allow us to play at being the more-than-human, from mushrooms to galaxies.

In games, we can explore different futures and alternative pathways to get to them, from collapses to utopias and dystopias and anything in-between. Technical developments such as virtual and augmented reality can bring these possibilities closer, while the gamification of real-world behavior can push the present towards better futures.

From the researcher's point of view, it does not quite matter whether games intend to depict, engage with, or "sell" sustainability ideas—the ecocritical perspective can make any cultural artifact quite revealing. From traditional power fantasies to socialist cozy games, almost any game reveals a wealth of cultural assumptions, values, and ideologies.

These games propose different ways of looking at sustainability. They question who we can become, how we can relate to life on Earth, and what we can do for a more livable world.

"Games lend themselves to the representation and exploratory manipulation of simulated ecological functions, and they seem especially well equipped to remedy the common difficulties faced by environmental educators and activists—including the question of how to successfully render the scope and urgency of global environmental change in less didactic or declamatory and more dynamic and intrinsically engaging forms." [22]

—Alenda Chang, *Playing Nature*, 2019



Terra Nil challenges players to restore degraded environments so that they can support healthy ecosystems.

Free Lives 2023

In *Terra Nil*, players transform a desolate landscape into an ecological haven by strategically placing buildings. Unlike traditional city-building games that encourage resource consumption, *Terra Nil* draws inspiration from the rewilding movement and the climate crisis, emphasizing the restoration of nature over exploitation.

Gameplay involves placing buildings to terraform the land, utilizing wind turbines on stone tiles for power, toxin scrubbers to prepare the soil, and water pumps to refill dried riverbeds. Points are earned for each converted wasteland tile, allowing players to unlock more buildings and upgrades. As the game progresses, players can upgrade existing structures to create diverse biomes like wetlands, meadows, and forests. These biomes attract wildlife, including deer, birds, fish, and bears, enriching the rewilded environment.

Terra Nil explores ecological and environmental sustainability from the point of restoration: Instead of extracting resources and leaving your mark on the world, it encourages players to recycle their buildings at the end, and leave behind a traceless, rewilded paradise—a symbolic departure reflecting the game's core theme of environmental restoration.



The game includes renewable energy technologies such as wind turbines.



Players may terraform using controlled burns. Forests can grow from the ashes.



Players can pump water into dry riverbeds.

THE GUNK

Image & Form Games
2022

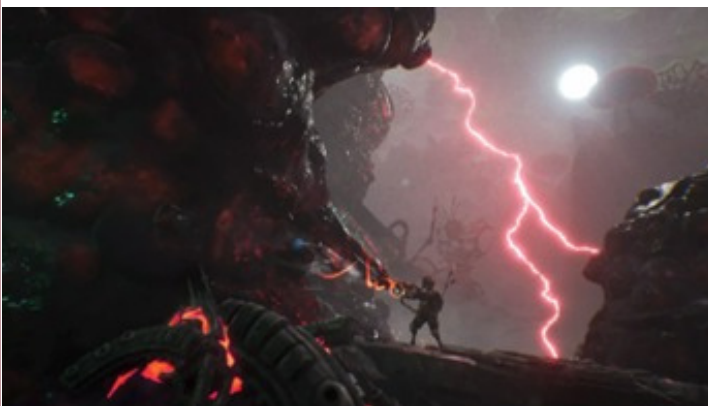
The Gunk intricately blends the concept of environmental sustainability into its core gameplay and narrative. Set on an alien planet, the game centers around the player's mission to cleanse the environment of a harmful substance, aptly named 'The Gunk'.

This central theme of environmental restoration is portrayed vividly as players clear *The Gunk*, transforming desolate landscapes into thriving ecosystems. This visual transformation not only engages but also powerfully conveys the positive impact of ecological rehabilitation and the resilience of nature.

As the story unfolds, players uncover the history of the planet and its past civilization. These discoveries reveal how previous inhabitants interacted with their environment, often highlighting the lasting consequences of neglect and the critical need for sustainable practices.

The Gunk goes beyond mere gameplay; it serves as a metaphor for environmental stewardship and the challenges our world faces. It encourages players to reflect on the importance of their actions in preserving natural habitats and promotes a message of hope – that individual efforts can lead to significant environmental recovery.

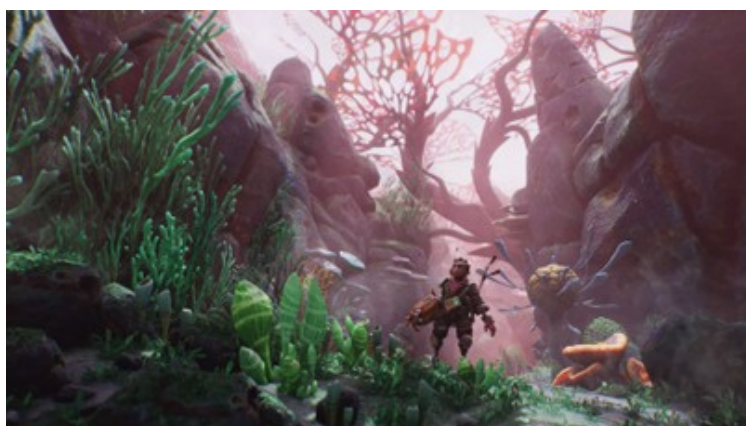
In blending entertainment with environmental education, *The Gunk* stands out as an engaging and enlightening experience. It is a testament to the power of video games in communicating important themes of ecological care and the collective responsibility we share in protecting our planet.



Players will find desolate landscapes.



The game explores interpersonal relationships as well as the planet itself.



Players can use the restored vegetation to explore further.

OUTER WILDS

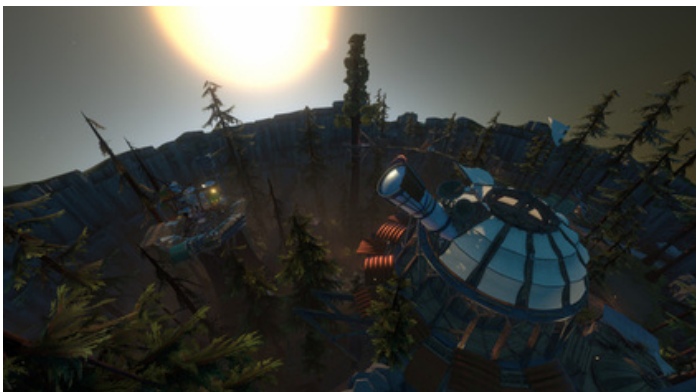
Mobius Digital
2020

Outer Wilds presents a unique exploration experience, seamlessly weaving sustainability themes into its cosmic narrative. Set within a solar system caught in an endless time loop, the game offers players a profound exploration of the cyclical nature of ecosystems and emphasizes the importance of respecting natural cycles.

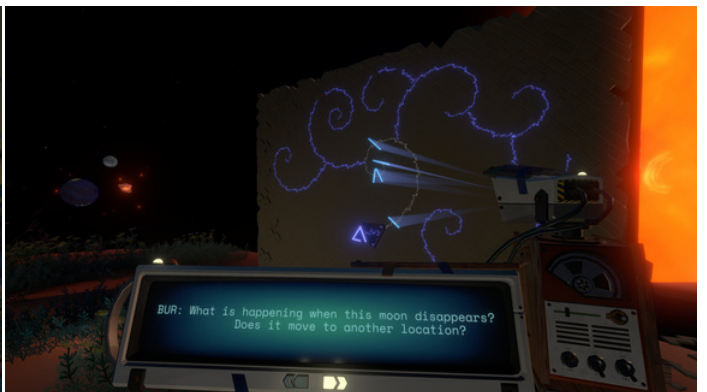
Through the exploration of this perpetually evolving universe, players unveil the chronicles of bygone civilizations. These revelations frequently underscore the enduring ramifications of environmental choices implemented by these civilizations. This method deftly incorporates a sustainability narrative, demonstrating how previous actions can determine the fate of an entire ecosystem.

The game's central mechanic, the time loop, acts as a powerful metaphor for ecological renewal and the resilience of nature. It beautifully illustrates the concept that sustainability is deeply intertwined with understanding and aligning with natural cycles.

A discreet yet impactful way in which *Outer Wilds* imparts knowledge on ecological and environmental concepts is through its immersive gameplay and narrative-driven exploration. This game exemplifies the capacity of video games to effectively and imaginatively communicate significant messages pertaining to environmental stewardship and sustainability, all while situated within a captivating and meticulously designed celestial setting.



Players explore an entire evolving solar system.



Mysterious locations change with the passage of time.



Players can use the restored vegetation to explore further.



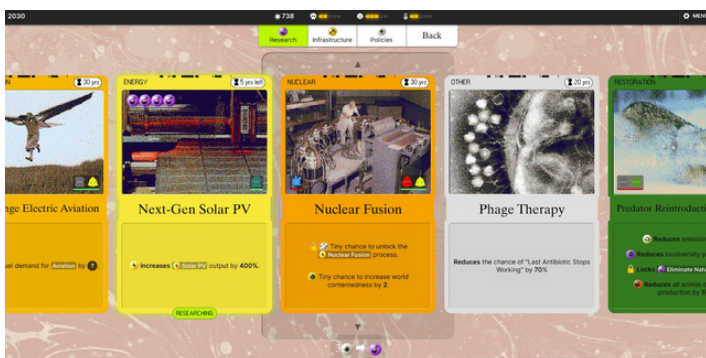
Francis Tseng (Jain Family Institute), Son La Pham (TRUST), and others, 2022

A companion game to the book of the same title, both published in 2022, *Half-Earth Socialism* turns players into global planners who can attempt many different policies and technologies to try to steer the world away from ecological disaster. To act effectively, the player must form a coalition in a parliament composed of nine factions, from the ecofeminists to the accelerationists and the consumerists, all while keeping the world population satisfied.

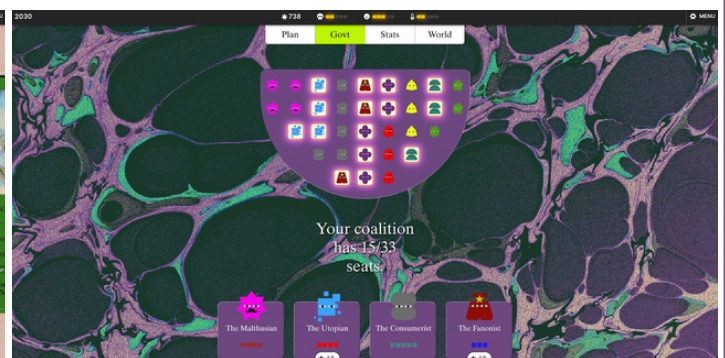
The game joins a wealth of “sustainability world planner” games, together with titles such as *Fate of the World* (Red Redemption, 2011), *Beecarbonize* (Charles Games, 2023), *The Climate Game* (Financial Times, 2022) or, at a US level, *Green New Deal Simulator* (Molleindustria, 2023). While these games exhibit different values and sensitivities in how a sustainability transition should be handled, it is revealing that they all paint the player as a central authority, even though they must often deal with other stakeholders. Is this substantial agency necessary for an engaging sustainability strategy game?

“Surprisingly for games coming from different political perspectives, both [Half-Earth Socialism and The Climate Game] suggest that an effective solution to the climate crisis requires handing political power to an autocrat with the power to make the decisions nations have not been able to do individually.” [23]

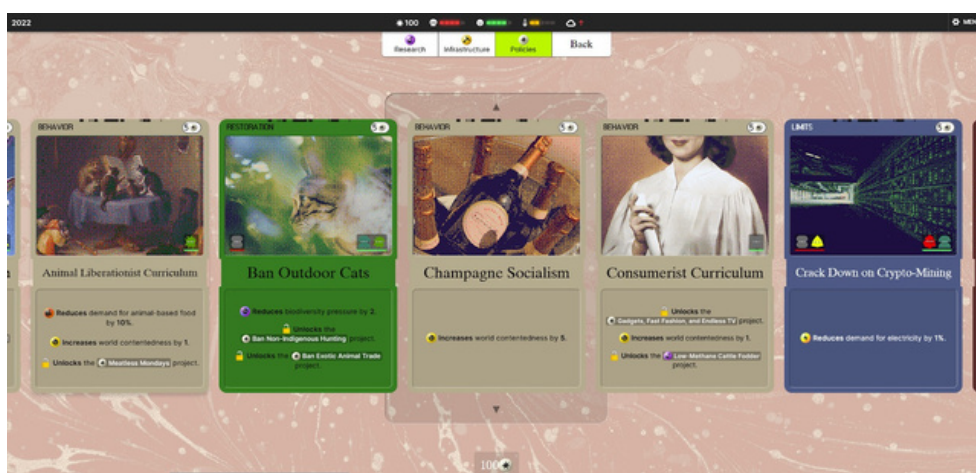
—Jonne Arjoranta, University of Jyväskylä



Players can start multiple lines of research, but resources are limited.



Players seek support from ideologically diverse, and sometimes opposed, factions.



The choice of policies reflect the leader's approach to ecological crisis.



ustwo Games, 2020

“Even the smallest person can make a big difference” is the first sentence in *Alba: A Wildlife Adventure*’s Steam page. Alba, a child who is visiting her grandparents during her vacation, plans to spend her stay playing with her friend and taking pictures and cataloging wild animals around a Spanish Mediterranean island. However, soon Alba discovers that a massive hotel construction project threatens the island’s ecosystem, so she starts an activist movement and sets out to collect enough signatures from the island’s inhabitants to stop the project.

Apart from being “a feel-good game about running around and doing good deeds,” as the developers put it, *Alba* is also a reminder that beyond an individual’s heroism, a whole community’s coordinated action can be an effective tool against unbridled capitalism and political corruption.

“Alba [is] a game about nature conservation, about communities and about how even the smallest person can make a difference. Alba is such a hopeful, sunny game – just what we need in the face of climate doom and gloom.” ^[24]

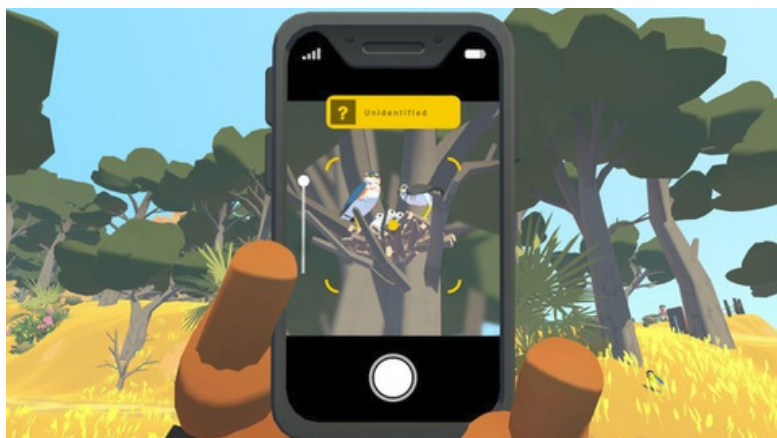
—Jennifer Estaris, ustwo Games



In the game, Alba explores a variety of ecosystems around the village.



Alba meets a variety of local characters, some more inclined to help than others.



Players take pictures to identify local species.



Strange Loop Games, 2018

Eco is a single-player and online multiplayer sandbox game. The default game mode tasks players with developing their society and technology to stop a meteorite that will collide with the planet in 30 days. However, there is a catch: unlike in other games such as *Minecraft*, certain activities are harmful for the environment and can seriously disrupt the ecosystems on which players rely for multiple services.

In this game, players adopt an empowered individual identity, a sort of supercharged hybrid between a traditional citizen and a decision-maker. Players may have, for example, private property and needs that they satisfy through consumption, but they also engage in productive activity and make political decisions that influence community life. Selfishness in production and consumption, and lack of cooperation, can lead to impacts such as rising sea levels and other impacts, such as ecosystem deterioration, which stall player progress and ultimately lead to pyrrhic victories.

The normative frame, which encourages a balance between the individual, the community, and their environment, is largely procedural—the game allows unsustainable actions, but they lead to undesirable consequences (including between-player punishment mechanisms).

“It made me realize that games are actually crucial for understanding our relationship to all kinds of natural and man-made systems. The thing that gives me chills is that I think it is only in games that we can play with economic systems. And I walked away from my experience in *Eco* feeling like I learned so much even though we had no instructor. No one was connecting the dots for us. We simply learned through play.” [25]

—Jeff Grubb, *Venture Beat*



Players harvest and use resources to develop their society and economy.



Collaboration is a strong component of the game.



As the comet approaches, players can achieve high degrees of sophistication.



The game offers a wealth of data about the world that players inhabit.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION II

Rockstar Games, 2019

Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2) adeptly blends the exhilaration of frontier America with profound observations on the subject of sustainability. Positioned during the early 1900s, this game presents a thought-provoking examination of the ecological consequences that arise as a result of human activities.

Employing its vast and intricately designed world, *RDR2* physically illustrates the repercussions of overhunting. For instance, players will observe a population decline in buffalos if they engage in excessive hunting of them which can even cause their disappearance from the game, thereby illustrating the practical application of wildlife management and conservation.

Through its depiction of the advent of industrialization, the game vividly illustrates the societal and environmental consequences of rapid industrial expansion. The text astutely examines the challenges faced by Native American communities, shedding light on long-standing disputes concerning environmental preservation and land ownership.

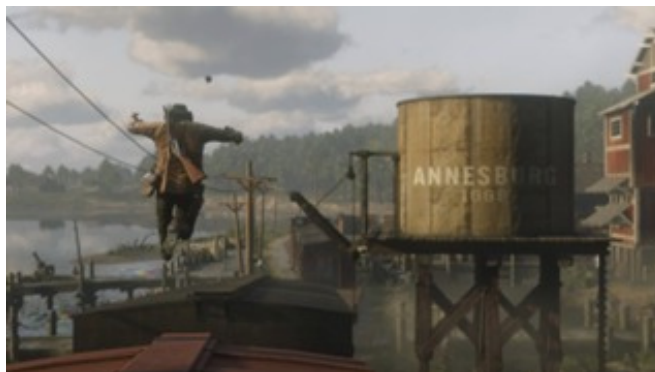
Furthermore, *RDR2* integrates conservation-oriented initiatives, including activities like foiling poachers and capturing wildlife on camera, to underscore the importance of safeguarding natural ecosystems. Through its authentic portrayal of the natural world and the ecological obstacles encountered during the early 1900s, the game serves as an evocative reminder of the perpetual significance of sustainable methodologies and the imperative to strike a harmonious equilibrium between human progress and ecological preservation.



In the game, Alba explores a variety of ecosystems around the village.



The game's environments offer a high degree of visual fidelity.



The game depicts rapid industrial development at the turn of the 20th century.

SILENT HILL 2

Team Silent

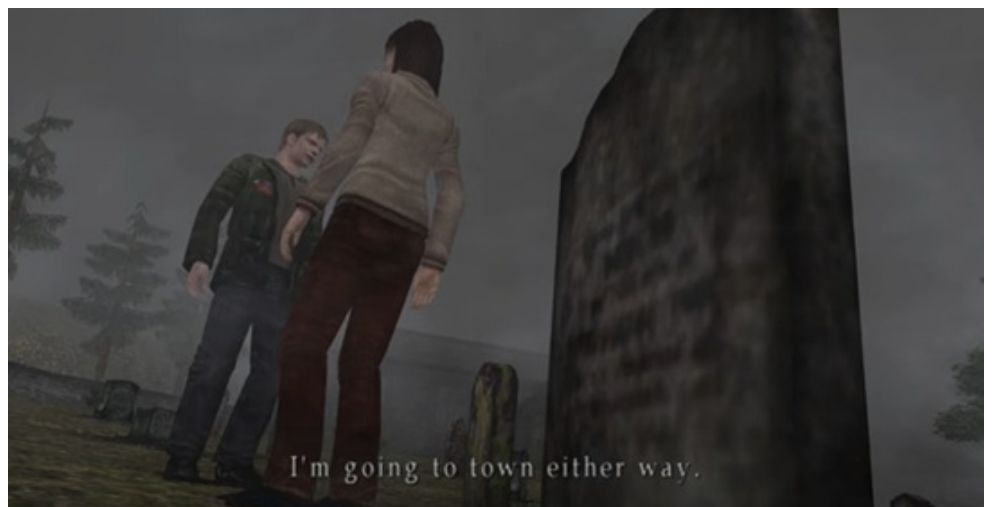
2001

Silent Hill 2 follows widower James Sunderland as he responds to a letter from his deceased wife, Mary, urging him to meet her in the mysterious town of Silent Hill. James encounters enigmatic characters like Angela, Eddie, Maria, and Laura, all haunted by their pasts. As the story unfolds, James faces symbolic manifestations of guilt, along with other monsters reflecting his troubled psyche. The game's narrative explores themes of grief, guilt, and punishment, and continuously wrestles with complicated, difficult topics like mental distress, lust, abuse, love and violence.

Within the game, the environment and dwellers of Silent Hill become important signifiers to make sense of James' state of mind, and to unravel his history. Silent Hill 2 explores what relational ties we are sustaining in our own lives, and how we think, act, and handle our connections to other people, non-human life and ourselves. How do we treat others? Who or what do we consider to be an "other"? And how do we justify our actions, influence and power over others to ourselves?



Upon his return,
James finds a
ghost town.



Silent Hill's fog
is the town's most popular
environmental element.

Games and Loss

How do games represent loss?
What can they show us about our
own experiences with it?



Curators: Diego Mejía-Alandia, Julián Carrera

Artistic Intent: Exploring games that deal with loss in different forms, whether the experience of bereavement or the loss of a world.

The experience of loss is an inevitable part of our human condition. It manifests in different ways in our lives, but we must all contend with the finality of things and the knowledge that they may never be as they were. We can think of loss as the grief and bereavement of losing a loved one. But loss can present itself in wider contexts that relate to our self-understanding, both individually and socially: The loss of one's home, country or culture, the loss of our past, or the fear of a future loss.

How does loss manifest in our lives? How do we find ways to move on after loss? Much like other artistic mediums, games provide a way to give shape to our experiences and emotions surrounding loss. They give us ways to process it, to remember, and to find meaning in what comes after. Games can provide powerful experiences that put players in the center, taking an active position in figuring out how to deal with a tough emotional situation.

Through the games in this exhibition, we ask how we deal with the loss of a previous world, what we miss and wish we could bring back from it. We also find in them the exploration of loss of loved ones, and the processes of coming to terms with them. We can also think of loss in games, and of losing the space for games as life goes on, or whether we experience a small form of loss when we complete a game that has accompanied us through a period of our lives.

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Developed By: Rose Engine

Platforms: PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch

"After a crash in a desolate planet, Elster, an android made in the image of a person that no longer exists, finds herself alone in her spaceship. Her copilot, a woman she seems to misremember, is nowhere to be found. The search to find her takes her to an abandoned mine that is not as abandoned as it seems, a place where memories and the lingering shadows of the past exist and mingle with a disease that disfigures the bodies and minds of the androids.

"I'm more concerned with atmosphere, symbolism, and character than with scaring the players. For me, the horror in SIGNALIS comes mostly from the oppressive systems and mechanics of old-school survival horror, which allows the story to be concerned with more personal themes." [26]

Yuri Stern, rose-engine

The game's survival horror mechanics link the player's struggle to beat the game with Elster's struggle to find her copilot. Faced with loss, hardship, and the weight of a tragic promise, Elster pushes through the horrors of the abandoned mine. SIGNALIS deals with loss of self, loss of memory, loss of identity, loss of loved ones, and, crucially, keeping hope that one can push through loss.



GAMES
AND
LOSS

Spiritfarer[®]

Developed By: Thunder Lotus Games

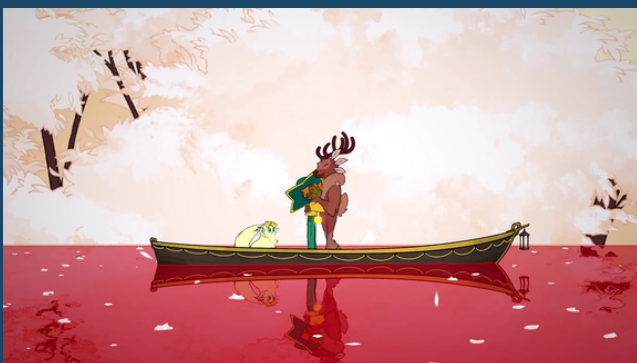
Platforms: PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch

“Although happening all the time in games, death as a topic is almost never seriously approached. Interacting with systems and experiencing them firsthand is unique to our interactive medium, and facing the concept of passing away head-on, of actually losing something, is rather interesting.” ^[27]

Nicolas Guérin, creative director, Thunder Lotus Games

In Spiritfarer, players control Stella, a Charon-like character whose purpose is ferrying the dead to the afterlife. Rather than just picking them up and taking them to the afterlife, however, the player must care for them before they are ready to depart: feeding them, talking to them, and hugging them. In doing so, the characters open up about their lives, what they were like, how they came to pass on, as well as any unfinished business they would like to deal with.

By letting characters be so open about death and what it feels like to let go, the game offers a way to think about grief through care. How do we make peace with the dead? How do we make sure we are satisfied before letting go? Through its focus on mechanics similar to those found in farming simulators, as well as bright and colourful art, Spiritfarer provides a way to process grief by adding hope that it is possible to be satisfied before passing on.



GAMES
AND
LOSS

Developed by: Stage 2 Studios (2014-2018)

Platforms: PC, Mac, Linux, PlayStation, Xbox, Switch



The sole survivor of a human mission trying to find a new home for humanity reaches a distant planet scientists thought to be a thriving Earth-like paradise, only to find instead a barren wasteland product of a secret Soviet colonization carried out during the 1970s, thanks to the discovery of alien technology on Russian soil. This planetary colonization reflects on Soviet environmental policies, while the game's narrative explores current capitalist policies of human and environmental exploitation, following a journey that mixes nostalgia with loss, past ideologies, transhumanism, and lost futures.

"When I tried to imagine the strangest thing to discover on an exoplanet, it wasn't some weird alien life but rather...humans! I like the irony that one would travel all that distance from Earth only to discover evidence of humankind" ^[28]

David Board, Stage 2 Studios (one person studio)



**GAMES
AND
LOSS**



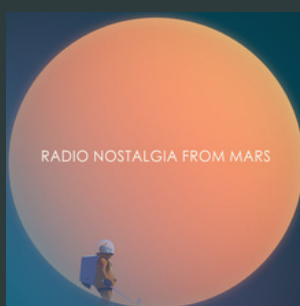


Golf Club Nostalgia is set in an undefined post-apocalyptic future around the 2040s. In this future, a Great Ecological Catastrophe has forced the big corporations to migrate to Tesla City—on Mars—abandoning the rest of the humanity to their fate. Now, among the limited pleasures the hostile Red Planet offers, the new Martian citizens can take space flights to Earth in their leisure time and enjoy a round of golf among the toxic ruins of human civilization—suddenly turned into a post-apocalyptic playground for the ultra-rich.

"We create digital content for a generation that will live to witness the end times"

^[29] **Igor Simić**, Creative Director & CEO, Demagog Studio

Golf Club Nostalgia's environmental narrative satirizes the meme, Internet politics, and Silicon Valley's cultures while inadvertently links the game to the developers' experience of former Yugoslavian politics and aesthetics. Using golf gameplay mechanics and a unique soundtrack as vehicles to talk about loss, ecology, loneliness, and post-humanism, *Golf Club Nostalgia* plays with the power of memory and music as an *interactive radio-drama*.



GAMES AND LOSS



Games and Crisis

What do games show us about how we contend with crisis?



Curators: Rainforest Scully-Blaker, Aska Mayer & Antonio Pomposini

Artistic Intent: Thinking of ways to traverse, avoid and come to terms with crisis through games.

Crises come in many shapes. There are crises in government, environmental crises, (inter)personal crises, the crises of capitalism, etc. However, these are never clear and distinct. When crisis comes, various forms of crisis tend to blend into and incite each other. As we live in a world that increasingly feels like it's drifting towards crisis after crisis, games, both as expression and lived experience, can give us ways to understand and navigate the world that lies ahead.

Games can give us a way to deal with crisis, through the contrast of our uncertain life situation and the stability and abundance they provide. *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, for example, gave many a world to retreat to and recover, while the world was undergoing a global health crisis.

Other games in this exhibition deal with the representations and understandings of crisis, how we can create forms of resistance against crisis, our own complicity in the creation of crisis, ways to remember the world that crisis leaves behind and ways to start anew.

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BASTION



Developed By: Supergiant Games

Platforms: PC, PlayStation, Xbox, Switch, iOS

Bastion is a game that confronts the player with the aftermath of crisis, asking the question “where do we go after this?”. Waking up after a cataclysmic event, the player goes on an adventure to try and rebuild a world lost, contending with the past and uncovering what led to the “calamity”.

Through its reflexive narration, the game thoughtfully engages players with themes of environmental and political crisis. As players learn more about the roots of this tragedy, they have to contend with their own complicity in it. As we rebuild the world, should we try to recover the one that has been lost and risk committing the same mistakes? Or should we move on to something radically new? Grief, regret and hope are at play as one navigates the floating islands that remain.

“Bastion's gameworld is intended to be all about contrasts. On the one hand you have this beautiful, colourful storybook world, meant to evoke a sense of wonder. And on the other hand, it's a world that's been afflicted by a terrible catastrophe.” ^[30]

– **Greg Kasavin, Supergiant Games**



GAMES
AND
CRISIS





Developed By: Scavengers Studio

Platforms: PC, PlayStation

As one era ends, another begins...

"Leave home for the first time to collect memories before a mysterious cataclysm washes everything away. Ride, record, meet people, and unravel the strange world around you in this third-person meditative exploration game."^[31]

In *Season: A Letter to the Future*, players take on the role of Estelle, a young woman from a reclusive mountain village who has been tasked with heading out into the world to document the sights, sounds, and stories of a dying age. The player has full control over what is added into Estelle's journal - what will you remember and what will you allow to be forgotten?

History is not one uninterrupted flow here - it is rather made of distinct eras which have set beginnings and ends, though many of the precise details have fallen out of the collective memory. It is up to Estelle to document the final days of her current era before the next one takes hold. Through its world and its characters, *Season* suggests that endings are inevitable. All we can control is what we remember and how we grieve for what we leave behind.



GAMES
AND
CRISIS

A PLAGUE TALE

INNOCENCE

Developed By: Asobo Studio

Platforms: PS4, Windows, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, PS5

Year: 2019

"1348. The plague ravages the Kingdom of France. Amicia and her younger brother Hugo are pursued by the Inquisition through villages devastated by the disease. On their way, they will have to join forces with other children, and evade swarms of rats using fire and light. Aided only by the link that binds their fates together, they will face untold horrors in their struggle to survive. As their adventure begins... the time of innocence ends." ^[32]

A Plague Tale: Innocence presents a contemporary manifestation of historical plague art, depicting the instability of societies during an epidemic, the rise of religious movements, and the dangers of public spaces. The recurring motive of public suffering during times of plague responds to the class-dissolving *Danse Macabre*. Suddenly no one is safe from dying outside of the presumed safety of their own home. The separation between classes deteriorates, the established system is abruptly crumbling.



GAMES
AND
CRISIS



RESULT IN FILES ON YOUR HARD DRIVE
BEING DELETED//

LOSE/LOSE

I TAKE NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOSS OF
ANY DATA//

Developed By: Zach Gage

Platforms: Mac OS

Year: 2009

"Lose/Lose is a video-game with real-life consequences. Each alien in the game is created based on a random file on the player's computer. If the player kills the alien, the file it is based on is deleted. If the player's ship is destroyed, the application itself is deleted."

Although touching aliens will cause the player to lose the game, and killing aliens awards points, the aliens will never actually fire at the player. This calls into question the player's mission, which is never explicitly stated, only hinted at through classic game mechanics. Is the player supposed to be an aggressor? Or merely an observer, traversing through a dangerous land?" [33]

While the metacrisis of digital play, the failure of the utilized systems, often only comes to light unintentionally, Zach Gage's game "Lose/Lose" makes the looming system failure a core mechanic. While presenting itself as a Space Invaders clone, the true nature of the game parallelly plays out on an invisible level, as every hit on an enemy spacecraft deletes a random file on the player's computer, slowly destructing the functionality device. If the player crashes into another spacecraft, the game deletes itself. In its autodestructive nature the game is not only subjected to the metacrisis of digital defectiveness, but explicitly addresses it, making it worth mentioning within the context of crisis play. The process of play itself turns into a crisis, which obviously also turns it into a game not to be played, but rather a conceptual artwork.

[HTTP://LOSELOSE.NET/](http://loselose.net/)



GAMES
AND
CRISIS



Developed By: Jump Over the Age

Platforms: PC/Mac, Xbox, PlayStation, Switch

“Wake up, sleeper...”

“Roleplaying in the ruins of interplanetary capitalism. Live the life of an escaped worker, washed-up on a lawless station at the edge of an interstellar society. Inspired by the flexibility and freedom of TTRPGs, explore the station, choose your friends, escape your past and change your future.” ^[34]

Though it is set in a far-flung future where space exploration and colonization is in full effect, the “enemy” one faces in *Citizen Sleeper* is above all the oppressive logics of late capitalism. The player must navigate a familiar, inequitable system as they navigate the game’s other systems of dice rolls and resources to ensure their character’s survival. In the face of something as old and monolithic as capital, the game suggests that there is strength and hope to be found in forging new connections and building new communities, but even these will take work to shape and maintain. In this way, *Citizen Sleeper* is a remarkably effective and affecting reflection on confronting the capitalist crisis and (one hopes) building something better.



GAMES AND CRISIS

Games and Identity

Who plays games? Who are games about? Who do we become through play?



Curators: Usva Friman & Matilda Ståhl

Artistic Intent: Presenting games that engage with questions of personal and cultural identities.

Games are both spaces for media representation and active expression of identity. Through them we can recognize ourselves in their narratives, but also be ourselves through our performance and interactions with others, and even find ourselves in the process.

The question of games and identity is itself multi-pronged and plural. We can ask ourselves about the ways players express themselves through games by making cosmetic choices, customizing skins, or extending their subjectivity through in-game avatars that show them corners of their personality previously unknown to them. We can ask about the relation between gender identity and play experience. We can also wonder about who we become when we play, and how our behaviour, gestuality and virtual embodiment relate to (or diverge from) who we are. We can ask about the cultural identity of those who play games. What does it mean to be a “gamer” and how do different people who play games relate to this identity label? Finally, we can consider how games provide a window into cultural expression by giving voice and visibility to diverse cultures with a variety of expressions and allowing players to immerse themselves into their myths, traditions, and folklore.

The games in this collection invite us to reflect on these topics. Skábma brings the questions of “who are games about?” and “whose voice can be expressed in games?” to the fore, while The Long Dark poses more introspective questions to the player.

The Long Dark

Games and Identity

A Survival Single-Player Video Game



Designed by Raphael van Lierop and Alan Lawrance (2017)

Platforms: Linux, macOS, Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch

A survival game might seem like an odd suggestion on the topic of games and identity, especially if one focuses on the non-narrative survival version of the game. However, through the continuous struggle to survive in the Northern Canadian wilderness, The Long Dark can offer space for reflection. The snow crunching beneath your feet is the only sound you hear. The stars and the occasional rabbit are your only companions. The quiet offers a moment to think: what is survival to me?

A similarly eerie solitude, although in highly different settings, can be experienced in for example Subnautica (Unknown Worlds Entertainment, 2018) and Stranded Deep (Beam Team Games, 2015). At what point do you start replaying the messages left behind by previous survivors for company? When do you start talking to the face drawn on an old volleyball?

"Its really just about you in the middle of the wilderness, with the clothes on your back, trying to see how long you can survive for (...). What does it mean to be isolated by yourself, what does it do to you psychologically?" ^[35] **Raphael Van Lierop (2015)**



More Info



SKÁBMA

SNOWFALL

Designed by Red Stage
Entertainment (2022)

Games and Identity

Platforms: Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch

The game is placed in northern Sápmi and its contents are inspired by old beliefs and folktales of indigenous Sámi people. The player character is Áilu, a young reindeer herder, who finds an old drum and consequently steps onto the path of becoming the first Noaidi, a Sámi seer and healer, in centuries.

Skábma is an example of a game focused on representing indigenous cultural heritage through digital storytelling. Importantly, these are not external portrayals appropriating selected pieces of Sámi culture, but stories told from a personal perspective. The game's writer and the company's co-founder, Marjaana Auranen / Eira-Teresá Joret Mariánná is of Sámi heritage, and has been guiding the process of implementing aspects of Sámi culture within the game. The game's music was created by Sámi musician Hildá Länsman. Skábma is also the first known game to be published in the endangered North Sámi language. The game's website (<https://www.skabma.com>) provides resources that help people to learn about Sámi people and their culture. As such, the game provides an opportunity for Sámi people to explore and strengthen their cultural identity and heritage, and for others to learn about them from authentic sources.



The game world mirrors the old beliefs of Sámi cosmology with the idea of different spirit realms, the Saivu worlds. It is a world where Familiar and Nature spirits were ever-present.^[36]
Marjaana Auranen

SKÁBMA

SNOWFALL

The game has been awarded with the Nordic Game of the Year and Best Art awards in the 2023 Nordic Game Awards, and the Creative Achievement of the Year in the 2022 Finnish Game Awards.



The one of the two groups I belong to is Aanaar Sámi, with only 1000 members. So the situation is way different than in other minority cultures where some may have near to millions of members. Sadly there are not that many Sámi who have experience of working in games (we are talking about under five people in Finland). But hopefully this will change in the near future. ^[36] **Marjaana Auranen**



More Info



Games and Queerness

What makes a game queer? How does queerness disrupt games?



Curators: Mark Maletka, Yanal Marji, Antonio Pomposini

Artistic Intent: Showcasing diverse ways in which games create space for queerness and disrupt traditional expectations of games.

Queerness, as a concept, seeks to challenge and disturb normative expectations of gender and sexual orientation, and notions of fixed identities. Queer theory has sought to explore ways of thinking identity in its complexity and constant becoming, understanding ourselves beyond clearly defined binaries.

When it comes to video games, a space that has traditionally been dominated by white, cis, heterosexual men, queerness challenges the norms of gamer culture, the type of games that can be made, who they are made for and what can be expected of them. Often, they achieve this through discomfort, subversion of expectations or uncanny aesthetics. Games can also offer a space for queer representation, where queer imaginaries of life can find a place to exist, representing diversity and showing forms of understanding oneself that are often excluded from consideration. Finally, games can be “queered”, meaning played in ways that challenge the intended form of play, choosing to reject the values that games offer as a form of resistance to create space for the very values that have been excluded from social space.

Through this exhibition, we want to showcase a variety of games and the ways they relate to queerness, particularly through representation, failure & frustration, and the uncanny and liminal.

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Thirsty Sui-tors

Developed By: Outerloop Games

Platforms: PC, Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, iOS & AndroidS



"Thirsty Sui-tors feels like the lovechild of a polycule featuring the Persona series, Scott Pilgrim vs The World, Netflix's Heartstopper and Sex Education, and a Bollywood fever dream." ^[37]

– David McNamara, Checkpoint Games

Developed by Outerloop Games, Thirsty Sui-tors is the queer coming-of-age game that we've needed for a long time. You take on the role of Jala, returning home after running away and trying to reconcile with her family, past friends, and the game's spin on the league of evil exes. The game delicately balances the intricacies of a queer, second-generation immigrant upbringing explored through turn-based combat, skateboarding mechanics, and cooking mini-challenges, handled with effective humor and great care for preserving the messiness of it all.

While clunky and repetitive at times, the game, much like how it describes its protagonist, is "a bisexual disaster. A hot mess. A romantic dumpster fire in human form." ^[37]

**GAMES
AND
QUEERNESS**



ANATOMY

Developed By: Kitty Horrorshow

Platforms: PC, Mac, Linux

Anatomy is an experimental horror game by indie developer Kitty Horrorshow. The game takes a first-person perspective, where the player explores a house collecting tapes with recordings that explore the house as an analogy for the body. The windows as eyes, the kitchen as the stomach, the hallways as veins. As the game progresses, the player encounters ever more resistance from the house and the game itself in the form of glitches, errors and forced-quits.



As Christine Prevas has pointed out, through the metaphor of the house-as-body, it can be read as an exploration of the trans body and the entrapment experienced through normative expectations both in the body and within the household. Spaces within the house such as the kitchen, the make-up table, the “man-cave” contain gendered expectations of inhabiting, not to mention the notion of the “man of the house”.

Evoking feelings of the uncanny, the game makes the player feel uneasy and unsettled in their own house. The house exerts violence against the player, eventually devouring them and killing them, much like normative expectations exert violence on queer bodies, often leading to the tension of not feeling at home in one's own body-house.



The glitches are experienced as ruptures, cracks and discontinuities within established reality, and as spaces where difference and resistance seep through. Ultimately, Prevas argues, the game doesn't advocate for a "journey home" narrative where a trans body eventually frees itself from violence and arrives home. Rather, through these disconnects and breaks in coherent narrative, it poses a nomadic subjectivity of *becoming trans* as a constant problematization of queer subjectivity.

"Every house is haunted" ^[38] - **Kitty Horrorshow**



**GAMES
AND
QUEERNESS**

Games and Culture

How do games express culture?
and how is culture created
through them?



Curators: Joleen Blom, Ian Sturrock, Diego Rodriguez

Artistic Intent: Presenting diverse ways in which culture is expressed and related to through games

Games are cultural artifacts in their own right, yet they are also a medium through which culture is expressed, created and revisited. We can first think about what the culture of game-making is like. What are the cultural practices that shape how the games we enjoy are made? How do they affect the people that work in these spaces? But we can also think about the culture of those who play games and how games can be made for different cultures of players. How do these two cultural spaces interact and shape each other?

Games can also bring to the fore the ways in which we interact with culture. They can be used as a way to express different cultures and showcase them to the world, inviting players to learn about and experience cultures that would otherwise remain unknown to them. They can also help us revisit and reinterpret the familiar myths and stories that have shaped our understanding of the world and offer a way to see them in a new light. Finally, they can invite players to relate to the difficulties of intercultural communication and the ways in which different cultures hold different values through the use of player choices when dealing with other characters.

Whatever the case, culture is always being created and transformed through the experience of playing games, which calls for a closer look on the ways in which games relate to culture.

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Tunche is a charming, hand-drawn beat 'em up hack and slash game with roguelike elements where you travel through 4 unique worlds filled with enemies, bosses, challenges and stories.

You can play with one of five characters: Rumi, Qaru, Nayra, and Pancho, and Hat Kid, a guest character. Each of them has unique motivations to venture deep into the heart of the jungle to find Tunche, a mysterious and deadly entity that is said to have immense power. As you progress, not only you unlock new abilities, but also find pieces of the backstory of each character, learning more about the myths and traditions that have influenced them.

Tunche is a love letter to Peru and the Amazon rainforest, with a narrative inspired by cultural elements and myths of the region — mainly the Shipibo-Conibo — which are represented in the characters, creatures, and locations, not to mention how the soundtrack and effects immerse the player in the *sounds of the peruvian jungle*.

“When talking about Latin American stories or games, the most well-known cultures are the Incas, the Mayans or the Aztecs. There is very little, at least in the area of video games and other multimedia, about Amazonian folklore or the attractive mythology that exists in the jungle”. ^[39]

–Jorge García, LEAP Game Studios



GAMES
AND
CULTURE



Developed By: A Sharp
Platforms: PC, iOS, Mac



In Six Ages: Ride Like The Wind, you lead a clan of bronze-age farmers, herders, raiders, priests, shamans, and warriors in the beloved TTRPG world of Glorantha (RuneQuest). Your home valley is facing an inexorable, worsening environmental cataclysm, and neighbouring clans cannot simply be conquered or assimilated as might be expected in a more conventional game.

You cannot win Six Ages without losing many battles, adapting to and mitigating catastrophic events, and finding common cause with folks who have radically different cultures, beliefs, and values. There's a system management element -- do you have enough food, cattle, trade goods, people, horses -- but managing your clansfolk's petty squabbles, magical practices, marriage difficulties, hunting territory violations, divine revelations, is just as important and much more captivating.

A delegation from the Grey Wing clan arrives to petition you for aid. Raids from the White Fox clan have exacted a toll on their herds, they say. Any help you give will be remembered gratefully.

1. Give them goods.
2. Give them livestock.
3. Offer to intercede with the White Foxes.
4. Perform a taxing ritual of assistance.
5. Decline their request.





The 2D watercolour art, and the equally beautiful words of news, argument, negotiation, or mythical quest, draw you deeper into the struggles of your clan and the dying world of Six Ages. When the very gods are at war in the sky, when the climate is too harsh for your cattle and crops, when the powerful Ram Tribes arrive in the valley... just surviving can look a lot like winning, but is it enough?

"As the world changed, neighbours who admired us became targets for our last-resort raids. Trade caravans became more desperate. More foragers and hunters were sent, and often died, costing us talented nobles. As magic dwindled, our forays into the gods' realm to seek their aid became more dangerous. Cattle were slaughtered for food, making us poorer and even more reliant on raiding, which in turn made us an easier target through injuries and malnutrition. The failure spiral is rough, but we started to turn it around. We struggled on for a few more years, but I made one too many poor decisions. It was all over, and my people were lost to history. I loved every minute of it." [40]

-Sin Vega, Rock, Paper, Shotgun



GAMES
AND
CULTURE

HADES

Developed By: Supergiant Games

Platforms: Switch, PC, Playstation, Xbox, iOS

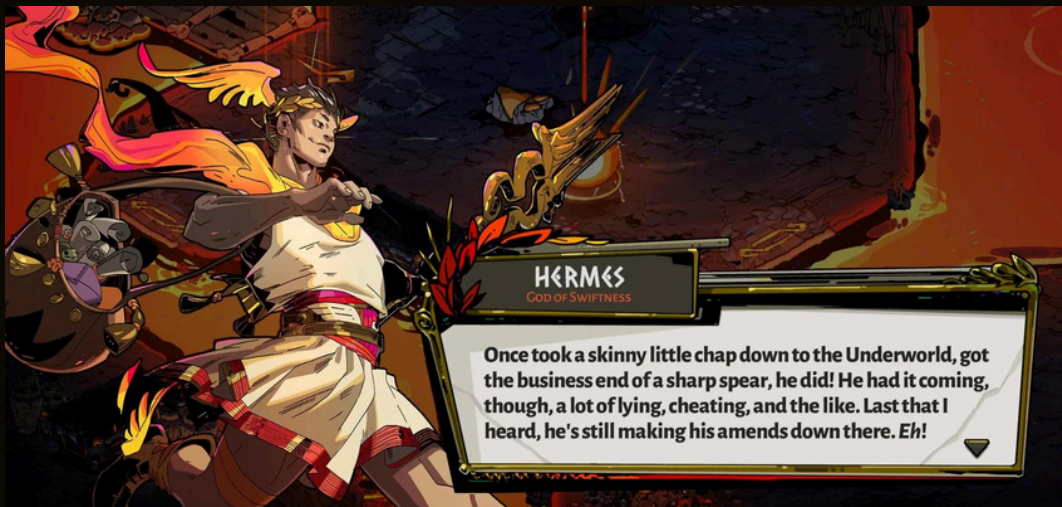
"Hades is our first game adapted from an existing mythology – the world of Greek myth. We felt we had a unique perspective on this theme, and saw the adaptation process as a new and exciting creative opportunity to explore." [41]

-Supergiant Games

Hades is a rogue-lite game developed by the independent game studio Supergiant Games. The game is inspired by Ancient Greek (and Roman) mythology, a common theme for many works of art. What makes Hades so outstanding is that the game's mythological inspiration serves a direct purpose for its rogue-like mechanics: unlike most rogue games, the characters in Hades acknowledge each death of the player character, Zagreus.



Although Zagreus is the protagonist of this game, his origins as a mythological figure are ambiguous; sometimes he is seen as a god of the underworld, sometimes he is identified as Dionysus, the god of winemaking, fertility, and ecstasy. In this game, Zagreus is the son of Hades and Persephone, King and Queen of the Underworld. Zagreus attempts to escape the underworld, where souls of the departed gather, so that he may reunite with his mother who left right after Zagreus was born.



Zagreus can die, but, because of his god-like qualities, all this means is that he will return via the river Styx to the underworld to start a new escape attempt. Just like in the myths, the Olympian gods bicker among each other. They use Zagreus to ignite their ongoing family feud –only to mock him whenever he fails to escape to the overworld. No escape attempt is the same, and even if the player manages to reach the overworld, that does not mean that they have reached the game's end.

For its ingenuity, Hades has won several awards. It was granted the title Game of the Year (2021) by several game awards, such as the Game Developers Choice Awards. It also won the Hugo Award, which honours the best science fiction and fantasy work. Hades was the very first video game to have won this prize. Hades' sequel, Hades 2, is currently in early access.

GAMES
AND
CULTURE



Games and Child Development



How does play impact learning?

Curators: Leland Masek, Daniel Fernández Galeote & Antonio Pomposini

Artistic Intent: Present different ways in which play and games contribute to the developmental process in childhood.

Play and games have long held an important place in our understanding of child development. From our naïve understandings of play as mere “child’s play” to biological studies on the functions of play in various animal species, to the role of play in cognitive development as outlined by Jean Piaget.^[42] Play and games can contribute to our social adaptability, emotional regulation, cognitive faculties and motor function. They can provide a safer space for children to explore, imagine and create, often without the fear of real-life consequences.

Yet most interestingly, play can be a powerful drive that motivates children to engage with the world through their own curiosity and desire. This play drive has been connected to the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi)^[43] and flourishing, or the notion of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan)^[44]. It is this quality that makes learning through play deeply meaningful and personal.

Through this exhibition we take a look at different games and spaces for play, exploring their possibilities and implications for learning and the different ways in which educational games and play have been applied.

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Model UN

And the History of Edu-larp



The Model League of Nations was founded in 1921 at the University of Oxford in the UK. In this program students learn about international diplomacy by role playing as nation state representatives in mock debates and negotiations. This program became the Model United Nations program in 1945 and continues to this day in countries around the world. While this program has never explicitly embraced or acknowledged the term Edu-larp, it is realistically the largest ongoing Edu-larp program running today.



MODEL UN: WITH OVER 100 COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING

Edu-larp was first implemented as an educational strategy of the Soviet Union. Nikolaevich Zhukov (1875–1948) made calls for a new form of education for children. Instead of what he called a “rationalist” school he argued children should learn through long-term games of live action role playing . In 1918, seven hundred participants aged 12-14 in the school system of CHITA in the USSR played a two and a half year-long larp designed by him to learn core school subject matter. This is the birth of educational live action role-playing. After the fall of the Soviet Union, this idea spread and transformed rapidly around the world. ^[45]

In the United States, “Edularp” began in the 1990s and early 2000s predominantly in educational summer camps, connected to the larger history of “adventure” based education, focused on outdoor, challenge-based pedagogy. Some important programs include Renaissance Adventures (1995), Guard Up Adventures (1999), The Larp Adventure Program (2000), the Wayfinder Experience (2012), with exponentially more in recent years such as Camp Half-Blood, Brooklyn Game Lab, and Fantasy Frontier in New York.^[45]



In Nordic countries, Edu-larp has been an important contemporary movement, often connected to the larp community of Knutepunkt which has founded full-time private larp academies such as the Danish Østerskov efterskole (2004) where children are educated through a mixture of live action role playing and other game-based pedagogy.



In these games, play is serious, merging with life itself... (Translation of Nikolaevich Zhukov by Yaraslau I. Kot 2012)^[46]

**GAMES
AND CHILD
DEVELOPMENT**

The Sumerian Game

Developed By: Mabel Addis and William McKay

Platforms: IBM 7090

The Sumerian Game is a simulation education game to teach school children about the ancient civilization of Sumer in 3500 BC. In this game players are three successive rulers facing various narrative and resource management challenges. It was the outcome of a research project between the Board of Cooperative Educational Services and IBM. This text-based economic simulator was played by 30 sixth-grade students in 1964 and again in 1966. The original utilized a variety of technologies including interactive text, projectors, and teleprinters.



The Sumerian Game is considered the first educational computer game and was designed by a public school teacher named Mabel Addis (1912-2004), with programming assistance by IBM programmer William McKay. Addis is also sometimes cited as the first female video game designer and an innovator of storytelling in video games. Several sources have labeled her the first “Narrative Designer” in digital game history. While often overlooked in game history, she posthumously received a pioneer award from the Game Developers Conference in 2023 for her revolutionary work.^[47]

The Sumerian Game was re-released in 2024 on steam (QR code below). Details of the game were also reported on at Archive.org ERIC ED014227. Original slides, documents and scripts from the game are stored at the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester New York. This game is widely considered one of the most influential video games in history, being directly cited as an inspiration for the video game Civilization, in addition to starting the genre of video games that aim to teach schoolchildren specific school subject materials.^[47]



Other critical examples of educational video games include “Zoombini’s” (2001), The “Jump Start” Game Series (1994-2023), and “The Oregon Trail” (1974) pictured here.



I lean heavily upon your wisdom, Luduga, but I am also here to help you. Tell me, if your population is increasing, would you expect the quantity of grain fed to your people to 1-increase 2-decrease?

1

Of course it should increase. Forgive me if my questions seem simple. It is my duty to urge you to see the relationship among the items in your Steward's reports.^[47]



Text from The Sumerian Game (1964))

**GAMES
AND CHILD
DEVELOPMENT**

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Developed By: Wizards of the Coast
Platforms: Tabletop game



Dungeons & Dragons is a tabletop role-playing game that uses communication, imagination and creative problem solving to tell a collaborative story as a group. It uses rules and dice to structure play and a “dungeon master” or referee to adjudicate the game, create the scenarios and incorporate everyone’s input to create a collective story.

D&D has grown from a niche hobby into a mainstream phenomenon, in no small part thanks to the popularity of Stranger Things and Critical Role, a livestream where voice actors play D&D. With this wider appeal, accessibility, and newfound popularity, there has been a growth in the educational applications of D&D both within curricular activities and as after-school programs.



On the one hand, tabletop role-playing games like D&D offer a chance for learners to practice basic skills in maths, spatial reasoning, logic, out-of-the-box thinking, and narrative & creative writing. On the other, it provides a space to develop interpersonal skills such as active listening, turn-taking, empathy, and teamwork. After-school programs run games with facilitators that work closely with players to help them work on personal challenges through the game which can often involve emotional regulation, assertiveness, or identity exploration amongst other things. D&D gives players a space to voice their hopes and their fears, and work through them with the support of their peers.



The flexibility and freeform nature of the game means that players can make the games their own, tell their own stories and change the framing to suit what they are interested in. It also means that facilitators can easily adapt to the needs of children, and create scenarios crafted for specific group needs.

Through its ludic framing, D&D motivates players to be independent readers and learners. Engaging with materials, learning more about the rules, and investigating the lore of the world are all ways in which players may seek out information on their own. This form of self-driven, intrinsically motivated curiosity can have lasting positive impacts in the learning journey. It is this flexibility and adaptability that allows for the games people play to be personally meaningful to them and remain relevant throughout their lives.



GAMES
AND CHILD
DEVELOPMENT



Playgrounds

The history of Western playgrounds begins in the 19th century, when philosophers and pedagogues such as the German Friedrich Fröbel advocated unstructured play (but supervised and often directed) for the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development of children. In the following years, playgrounds evolved from outdoor gymnasias and piles of sand that kept children from the increasingly urbanized and menacing streets towards the first modern-looking playgrounds at the turn of the century. The following decades saw a succession of design philosophies, from junk playgrounds where the role of children shifted towards creation to themed leisure spaces, the rise of standardization and safety concerns and, already in the 21st century, the integration of electronic components.

Playgrounds represent the most typical play space. Although their design often aims to organize play in various ways, they rarely impose what activities or goals should be pursued. Yet, the rise of guidelines and standards has meant that in restricting potentially dangerous interactions, playgrounds end up comprising, in the words of Miguel Sicart, “repetitive architectures built for safety rather than for play.” ^[48]



“The worst slide ever” ^[51] – Reddit User



Adventure Playground ^[50] – *The Land*

While children of the 90s may not miss the kiss of scorching hot metal slides on their skin, playground horrors have perhaps mutated into frustrating elements such as winding slides that prevent any attempt at... well, sliding. On the opposite side of the spectrum, junk or adventure playgrounds, a Danish invention from the 1930s, remain a strong alternative for those who prefer children with saws to children in seesaws. ^[49]

Metaphorically, the concept of playground remains useful for understanding what we do with other environments. For example, many have attempted to transform our cities into playgrounds, from failed institutional initiatives like the Spanish slide connecting two streets that had to close in less than a day after injuring some pioneering users, to the creative practices of skaters and traceurs and the reappropriation of digital spaces for sandbox-like play.



The urban slide in Estepona, Spain, had to close immediately due to injuries.^[52]

"The relationship between space and play is marked by the tension between appropriation and resistance: how a space offers itself to be appropriated by play, but how that space resists some forms of play, specifically those not allowed for political, legal, moral, or cultural reasons. Play relates to space through the ways of appropriation and the constant dance between resistance and surrender."^[48]

Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters*, p. 52



The Land Documentary:
<https://www.newday.com/films/the-land>^[50]



Dr. Joe Frost on the history and evolution of
(not only) American playgrounds

**GAMES
AND CHILD
DEVELOPMENT**

Play, Politics and Propaganda



How does play impact learning?

Curators: Leland Masek, Daniel Fernández Galeote, Antonio Pomposini & Jackie Kemchanin

Artistic Intent: Revealing the ways propaganda and ideology can be embedded in and reinforced by games

Play is often associated with a sense of freedom. We get to do what we want, be who we want, and enjoy ourselves while doing it. However, when we look at the types of games a society plays at and the patterns that they fall on, we can unveil an ideological function behind what is seen as innocent games, past times, and entertainment.

Games can often be used as vehicles for propaganda that serve to reinforce ideologies and naturalize power structures. They can reinforce economic structures like neoliberal capitalism, justify nationalistic and militaristic intervention through military games, or racist and bigoted beliefs through discriminatory depictions.

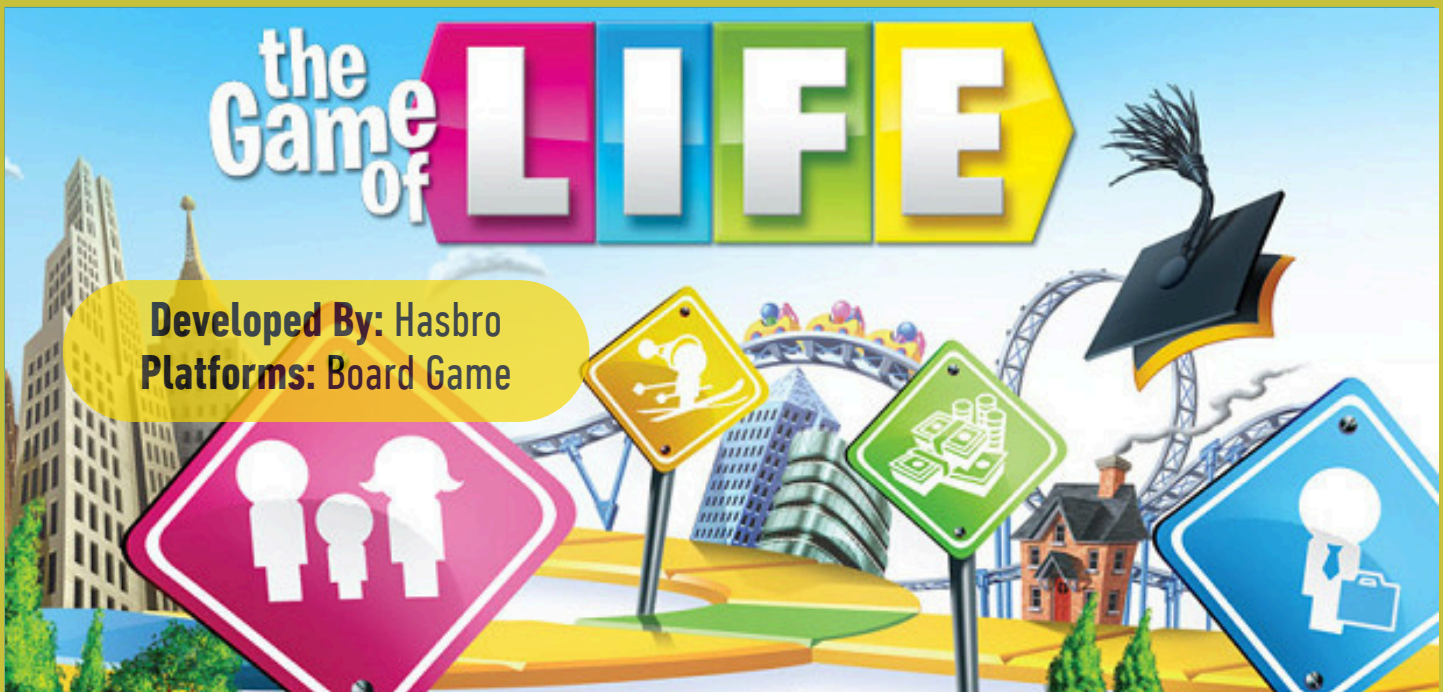
But games can also question. They can turn a critical eye and be used to reflect injustices, point out hypocrisies and make us reflect on the consequences of the systems we engage with. We hope that this curation brings forth both the ways in which games have been used as propaganda and indoctrination, as well as the ways in which games have highlighted critical political sentiment. One thing is true, though, games are political, and it is when we are blind to this fact that we are most susceptible to their propaganda.

This curation asks: How do games connect to Politics? What forms of political messages exist in games? How should we play or discuss politics in games?

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Neoliberalism? Well, Let's Play The Game of Life.

With its long history and development, The Game of Life is more than just a family game. It reflects the values of a contemporary neoliberal society. Players play through “Life”, from students to retired people, aiming to become the wealthiest person at the end. It is not only an entertainment medium for children with the ability to serve as a valuable learning tool about education, work, family, and retirement with sufficient financial security, but also a small-scale simulation to adults of life’s decisions and consequences within today’s economic system.

The game shows a world where a society is shaped by individual freedom, meritocracy, and economic productivity. Players act as gears running in a large system, making choices that highlight the rewards of effort and adherence to societal norms as continuing the concept of neoliberalism in reality. Players face the situation in life, such as “College offers more career and salary options, but it takes time-and it puts you in debt!” or “Pay the bank 50K for wedding expenses”. By playing through the journey, the game highlights what is seen as important in life today: education decisions, family decisions, and career decisions - and it keeps these ideas alive for future generations.

While it is unlikely the game’s creators deliberately embedded neoliberal ideology, its design naturally reflects the values of its time. Whatever questions arise in the mind, the game gives players a chance to explore their place in the system, both in the game and in real life.^[51]



Newsgames

The modern history of newsgames begins usually with *Powerful Robot Games*' September 12 (2003), a case of "simulation meets political cartoons" in the words of one of its creators, Gonzalo Frasca. In this interactive toy, players can bomb terrorists in a Middle Eastern town, but as they do, "collateral damage" is inevitable. As the innocent get caught in the bombing, social outrage and the number of terrorists keep growing. Yet, it seems that even before September 12 other creations were already exploring the intersection of gaming and the news (see box story). Other pieces would follow, further engaging players with war (*Darfur is Dying*, 2006) and other political topics (*Budget Hero*, 2008).^[52]

Ian Bogost and his colleagues, who published a book on the matter in 2010, define newsgames as those works "produced at the intersection of videogames and journalism." According to an analysis by Gómez-García and de la Hera Conde-Pumpido, they may inform about current events, but they may also contextualize them or focus on giving an opinion, just like political cartoons tend to do. The boundaries of what constitutes a newsgame remain elusive—although it has been seen as important that newsgames are guided by the values of journalism, they may not even be made by formal news organizations.^[53]



September 12: A Toy World (2003)

A prominent example within Peru was *Vladigame* (2001), a video game published by the political magazine *Caretas*, which followed a young kid on an adventure to capture the fleeing ex-dictator Alberto Fujimori and his advisor Vladimiro Montesinos. It was easily accessible at kiosks and could be bought together with the magazine. The game became an outlet to express the feelings of many Peruvians after the end of the regime, where tapes were released showing Vladimiro bribing important members of congress. The game was quite successful, selling over 10,000 copies and introducing many children into gaming and into developing an understanding of the complex political situation the country was going through with a satirical twist.^[55]

Vladigame wasn't a complex or technically accomplished game. Yet, even though it has fallen somewhat into obscurity as a piece of media, its impact lives on in how it inspired the children of that generation, and in the way it channeled a serious public sentiment through humor and irreverence. In presenting this game, we hope to extend its contribution to the memory, both of Peruvian gaming culture and the social context this game existed within.



"Although the game is an entertainment product, we secretly aspire to have it contribute to the memory of future generations of citizens" [55]
 - Enrique Zilari, Caretas' Publisher.



Although prominent media outlets such as The New York Times have published successful games from the mid-2000s to this day, including How Y'all, Youse and You Guys Talk which became their most popular piece in 2013, newsgames never quite took off—they remain scarce, rarer than formulaic quizzes and much rarer than crosswords and other newspaper pastimes. Bogost has argued that by the time academics started noticing newsgames, the ecosystem was already hostile to their production and consumption—social media kept rapid engagement with text, image and video at their core; most media outlets were in a permanent crisis and uninterested in reinventing their means of communication; and games' increasing diversity was channeled through indie productions offered in game distribution platforms. In this environment, in which not even linear immersive journalism has become a staple format, games and similarly involving interactive media do not seem to have found a stable place as part of traditional journalism. Perhaps, as the quote below proposes, their current place is elsewhere.

"From one lens, there are still only a few nationally or internationally recognized newsgames annually (Grace and Huang, 2020). From the other perspective, the communities on Itch.io and Global Game Jam abound with thousands of games about current topics that read similar to the promise offered in 2010. To borrow an analogy, is it perhaps that disco's not dead, but instead littered throughout the musical forms that followed it?" [54]

Grace & Solomon, 2022. 'Lessons Learned in the Rise and Fall of Newsgames as a Genre'

THE OFFICIAL U.S. ARMY GAME™

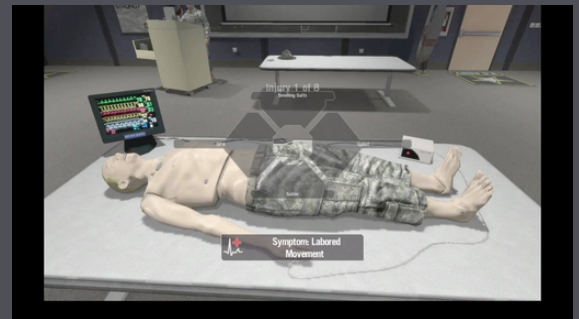
AMERICA'S ARMY™

Developed By: United States Army

Platforms: Windows, Xbox, Xbox 360, Linux, Mac OSX, PlayStation4

America's Army is a AAA video game series with seven installments from 2002-2022 made by the United States Army in order to promote, train, and recruit soldiers. This video game was produced as youth cultural tool and has been called the first propaganda video game ever produced. It was also quite succesful as a recruitment tool, with "leads produced through the website [America's Army] visits yield a higher percentage of recruits than any other method of contact" (Army Subcommittee Testimony February 2000). It has had over 13 million signed up players, and over 260 million play hours in total. ^[52]

The series' gameplay is a mixture of simulator and first person shooter game. It aims to model various aspects of being in the army, including accurate equipment, medical training, and other components of military life. It presented the Army's seven core values in a variety of ways, requiring actions related to it for players to advance in the main ranking system.



In the multi-player online versions of the game, each team sees themselves as American soldiers and sees the opposing team as "the enemy" with graphics changing to be, for example, ununiformed "Eastern Bloc" men with AK-47s instead of the US-issued M16A2. This rhetorical choice reveals an almost shockingly self-aware implication and critique of modern warfare. While the implication is that each team is a moral hero to themselves, they are a generic enemy to the other. In reality this choice appears to be an unaware recreation of nationalistic views of war saying "you are a hero, don't worry what the other side thinks". This represents an essential irony in the game: it recreates the heightened moralized view of the military's self-narrative, and then uses these narratives to place players in a situation designed to always result in "justified" shooting.



While generally considered the first propaganda video game, America's Army is not the last.





It is unclear if this game was a mod, produced, or advertised while never existing.

The radical muslim group ISIS also advertised the release of a propagandic video game called Grand Theft Auto:Salil al-Sawarem (The Clanging of Swords) pictured to the left. Hezbollah released the video game Special Force as a recruitment tool. Al Qaeda has released several video games as well. It is still generally unclear if these games work as intended or are successful recruitment tools.

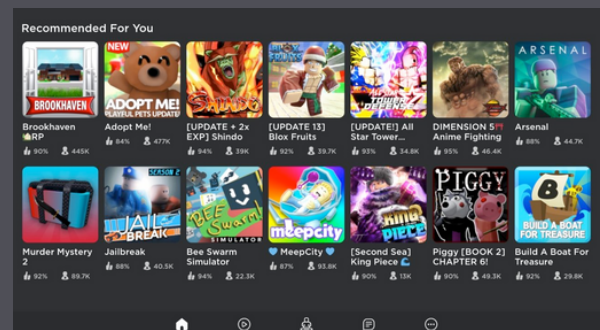


Hezbollah's القوة الخاصة, Al-Quwwa al-Khāṣṣa or Special Force (2003) begins with a training mission where player's shoot poster's of Israeli Officials. This introduction demonstrates it's intention of hedonically encouraging political violence.



Certain video game platforms have been used to create far-right ideological extremist scenarios for militant groups and not just professionalized militaries. Platforms such as Roblox^[53] have had far-right game makers come into the platform and develop propagandic games targeting children to play. The platform uses human moderators to actively remove accounts that use far-right and Nazi propaganda and encourage children to join Discord channels for further indoctrination. Any platform that allows users to create and share their own content has faced similar issues of radical political movements attempting to leverage their free-choice to promote violence and hate.

Other propaganda games have been made by the Westboro Baptist Church to demonize homosexuality and other games such as "Ethnic Cleansing the game" have been released.^[54]



Free upload platforms are unique targets for propaganda games

In addition to games designed for propaganda, gamers as a social group have been targeted specifically for pro-war propaganda in meta-communication channels. In September 2024 the USA Department of Justice revealed a Russian misinformation campaign "Good Ol' USA Project" meant to radicalize gamers in the United States, shortly before the US presidential election, into being pro-war, pro-Russia, anti-Ukraine and ignite another round of Gamergate sentiments. Taken together, it is clear that video games are a medium by which propaganda is being actively produced. The gamers who play them can be seen as unique social group with practices and spaces and may be intentional targets for these messages.

Games & The Body



Curators: Leland Masek, Maximilian Brückner

Artistic Intent: Expanding and defining the zones of game-body interactions

This is a curated selection of games based on a research talk on November 29th 2024 given by Dr. Oz Buruk, MSc Ville Uhlgren, and Mac Max Brückner exploring the intersection of games and the body. Games demonstrate a diverse relationship to the body, from wearables which give our bodies playful abilities, games that use real-world such as Pokémon Go, or how video games use tools to define the bodies for their fictional characters.

Three playful examples of how bodies critically exist in games are presented in the collection through wearables, location-based gaming, and design tools for “diverse” character bodies. Reflecting on how bodies are present in games expands our understanding of bodies, limits, and even critical failures in representation and leave many questions such as:

How do games connect with the body? How does the Body exist, in as, or with a game?

WEARPG



Playful Wearables

Designer: Oz Buruk et al.

Platform: Table-Top Role Playing

Wearpg is a research project that combined physicality, technology and TTRPG gameplay. A series of workshops were conducted on how to use Wearable technology to enact a storytelling game. The game used shaking, squeezing, and moving 12-sided orbs to enact abilities and also roll them as traditional Dice would be used in a role-playing game. These dice add to traditional roleplaying with an embodied dexterity experience. [56]

We believe that our exploration in this area may provide answers for how to use movement based interaction with narrative involved games.



More Info

Oz Buruk



Air



Earth

Power
Sustain
Endurance
Speed
Influence
Focus



Earth	Air
Prm.	Scn.
10	10
9	9
8	8
7	7
6	6
5	5
4	4
3	3
2	2
1	1

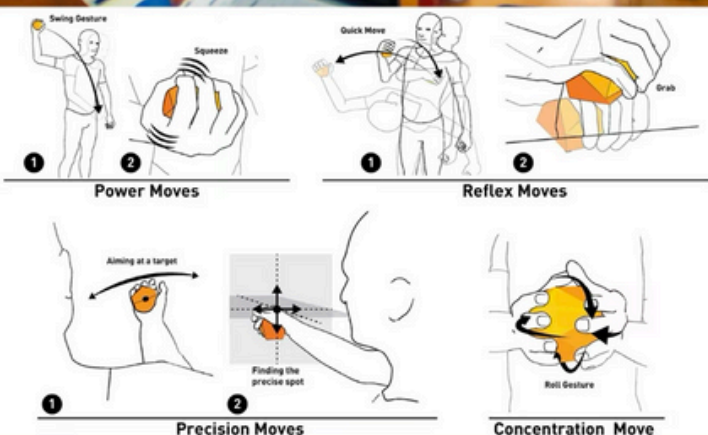
Concentration



Reflex 1



Precision 2





Location-Based Games

Designer: Niantec, Nintendo, The Pokémon Company

Platform: Mobile Game

Pokémon Go is the largest location-based game in the world. Built on the underlying infrastructure of the earlier game Ingress by Niantec, players walk in the real world to certain locations where their phones show digital pokémon who they can capture, as well as power-ups, particular gym battles and other icons. This mixture of digital platform and the real world is representative of the larger category of location-based games and other Augmented Reality games. This game was a wild success upon release, with over 10 million downloads, it has been researched for it's capacity to encourage social interaction, physical exercise and is also a uniquely effective execution for using AR in a mobile game.

Even though it's possible to do a lot of things with your phone today, often that has the effect of pulling you into a bubble, instead of enhancing your experience. [57]

John Hanke
CEO of Niantec

More Info





Designer: MIT Game Lab, King (Activision: Blizzard)
Platform: Digital Games

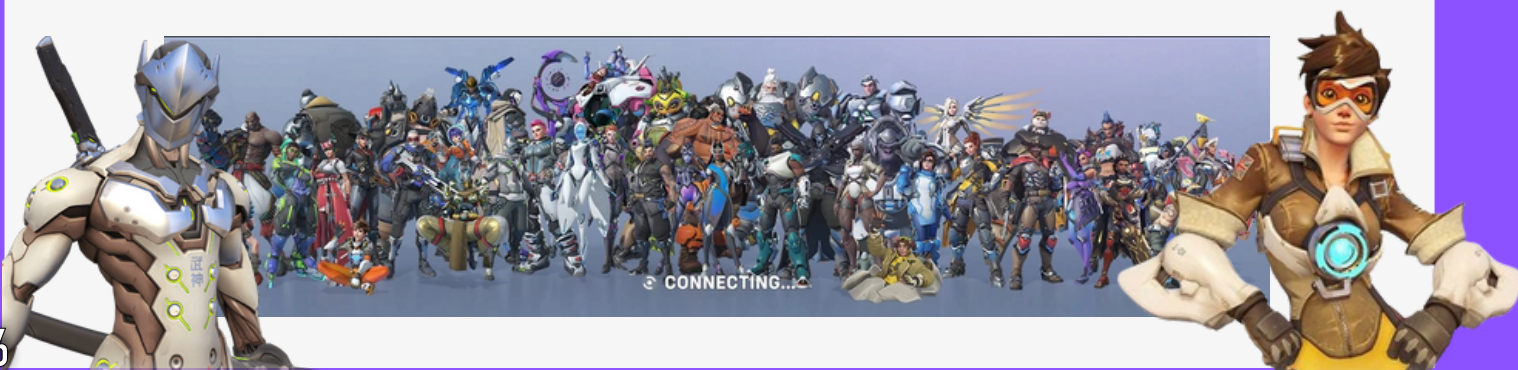
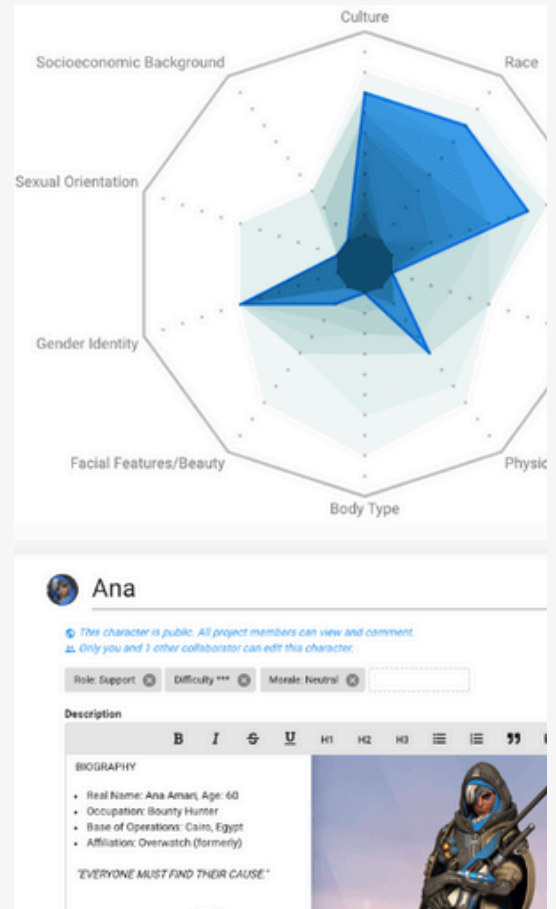
With the Overwatch franchise, Activision: Blizzard has created a hero-based first-person-shooter which puts character and narrative design on a level that contributes to its selling point and fandom.

Along with the growing, diverse character pool, the focus of representation and character studies has become a part of research in AAA game development and the Overwatch franchise.

The King's Diversity Space is a design tool focusing on the creation of diverse characters and narratives; including representation of game characters and bodies in digital games. With research collaboration the tool has become the center of attention during an official game developer blog post, disconnecting from the initial design intent and leading to a potential misunderstanding of the diversity space.

Connections of games and the body inhibit complex social themes which are reflected in game creation and identity politics. With the example of Overwatch 2 we can observe diverse characters and bodies while the character pool still strongly remains heteronormative. [58]

The body as a contextualized category can for example show how game industry workers are treated, how videogame characters become embodied representations of diversity, and what meaning lies behind the connection of structures of complexity. (Brückner [former Solala], 2024) [58]



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Games As Art Center