CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Issue GAMEVIRONMENTS 2020

Democracy dies playfully.

(Anti)-Democratic ideas in and around video games

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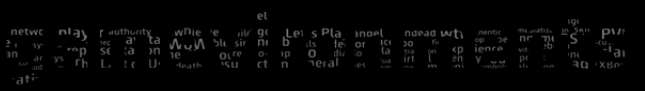
All video games are political. That is, while a vocal minority urges publishers and developers alike to refrain from any political statements, video games and their production are always in and of themselves political. They communicate and (re-)produce political values and hence may contribute to the construction of collective identities. Above anything else the majority of video games teach us to recognize the good from the bad. Actors develop morality and an ethical compass not only based on influences from families, peer groups and (school) education but also based on experiences with popular culture of which video games are a vital part. Keeping in mind that most of European gamers nowadays are living in democracies while at the same time public belief in our political system is eroding, we must focus all the more on this political dimension. How do video games communicate and frame democratic processes, in their in-game representations and game-mechanics as well as in their production and reception cycles?

A first step would be to search for democratic aspects or building blocks in the narratives, aesthetics and game-mechanics of video games. A first glance might be sobering. Modern-day gaming experiences - especially in blockbuster productions - are often characterized by a tendency to put player agency at the forefront. The fetish of the all-mighty lone wolf character as protagonist may appear to not be compatible with ideas of democratic participation, deliberation and compromises. The so-called



‘God Games’ have earned their names for a reason, and this reason does not incorporate players simulating a situation where they might be voted out of office. One might ask, however, if video games and their elaborate simulations are not, in fact, particularly suited to emulate the finding of common ground between the many. For example, there are more and more games focusing on online and offline cooperation and societal problem-solving.

Secondly, reports of workplace harassment, burnout-inducing crunch practices and mass layoffs call into questions whether the industrialized mass production of video games is prone to undemocratic tendencies of marginalisation and oppression. Meanwhile, unionization appears to make ground in the internationalised game industry, aiming to bring democratic participation to the workplace. Another question then might be whether the supposedly ‘new’ digital economy is in any substantial way different from other types of industries and the historically well-known problems with codetermination at the workplace they have been prone to produce.

Finally, a ferocious vocal minority of self-proclaimed gamers is hard at work trying to regulate who should and who shouldn’t participate and have a say in gaming culture. For example, the so-called *gamergate*-movement can be of interest to researchers not least because of its anti-democratic impetus and its employment of techniques to discourage and inhibit communication on topics of participation and equality.

We encourage reflections on any of the mentioned contexts and invite contributions on how the long and volatile tradition of democracy has shaped games, is shaped by games or is and has been represented in games and the contexts of their production and use.

Topics for further investigation may include, but are not limited to:

- Imaginations of modern democratic systems and practices in video games
- Symbols related to democracy and (historical) personalities in video games
- Historical perspectives on the representation of democratic processes in video games (transitions, directions, …)
- Historical perspectives on the representation of notably un-democratic processes
- Representations of historical democracies (e.g., in genres such as global strategy)
- Video games as spaces to experiment with democratic practices online and offline
- Video games as spaces to experiment with undemocratic practices or as a challenge to democratic ideas
- Games from different political systems (i.e., from Iran, Russia or the PR China)
- Games as media for civic education in democratic systems (both state-sponsored and free market productions)
- Games and their surrounding discourses as processes of democratic deliberation or anti-democratic obstruction
- Gaming communities and their role in democratic and non-democratic systems

GUIDELINES

Submit a title and 300-word abstract to Felix Zimmermann (gamevironments@felix-zimmermann.net) by 01.03.2020.

Possible formats for submission include:

a) regular academic articles

b) interviews

c) research reports

d) book reviews

e) game reviews

All articles submitted will be subject to double-blind peer-review.

For more on submission formats and guidelines see:

http://www.gamevironments.uni-bremen.de/submission-guideline/

https://www.gamevironments.uni-bremen.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/gv-stylesheet.pdf

TIMELINE

Title and abstract submission: 01.03.2020

Full text submission: 01.07.2020

Review results returned: 01.09.2020

Revised text submission: 15.10.2020

Online publication: December 2020