fiar

FORUM FOR INTER-AMERICAN RESEARCH (FIAR) VOL. 11.2 (SEP. 2018) 5-14
ISSN: 1867-1519
© forum for inter-american research

A game (simulation) is a game (interactive technology) is a game (lifestyle) is a game (live archive): *An Introduction*

MAHSHID MAYAR (BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY)

In the post-9/11 world, critics and advocates of the so-called preemptive war have resorted to video games as a metaphor, or at least a motif, to reach opposing ends. The virtual world has already turned into a space where campaign wars are fought and elections are won. In their capacity to engage with sociopolitical realities, video games have been continually mentioned in debates over war: either comparable to a first-person shooter, or far more technically, affectively, and politically complex than any game title. On the one hand, as Roger Stahl reminds us in "Digital War and Public Mind," as journalism and the big screen failed to record the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, "the video game industry squarely embraced the thematic of contemporary warfare" (144). At the same time, however, the video game industry is inherently at a loss when it comes to the realities of war on the ground as it is viewed at worst as a purgatory and at best as a medium of simulation. In fact, video games as realistic documentary renderings of war have been heavily criticized as bland and apolitical; in the words of Ben Fountain:

> Everything is political, if we're living among other human beings. Certainly everything in a society is political… And war perhaps is the ultimate political sphere. Some representations of the Iraq war—Hollywood movies, especially—have tried to be neutral, to simply present the soldiers' experience on the ground without political commentary. Well, what you get then is a video game… Any realistic exploration of the war is going to have to include the political element; otherwise it's just not worth the time. (qtd. in Buchanan 103)

On the other hand, in a 2012 interview with the *Atlantic*'s Jeffery Goldberg about waging war against Iran, President Obama maintained:

> Look, if people want to say about me that I have a profound preference for peace over war, that every time I order young men and women into a combat theater and then see the consequences on some of them, if they're lucky enough to come back, that this weighs on me—I make no apologies for that. Because anybody who is sitting in my chair who isn't mindful of the costs of war shouldn't be here, because it's serious business. These aren't video games that we're playing here.

These are the words of a president who is fondly remembered by the American gamer community as the godfather of the video game industry in the United States—"the most video game-friendly president in U.S. history" (Crecente). His remarks about the post-9/11 American ways of war as a far more complex matter than a video game, while intentionally downplaying the elaborate power of in-game narratives in giving force to out-game debates and practices, could be read as an attempt by the former U.S. president to counter the debates over the massive investment of the U.S. Army in video games as recruitment entry points.[1]

On a cultural front, 2012 was also the year during which the MoMA acquired fourteen digital games for its Architecture and Design Collection, ranging from *Packman* and *Tetris* to *SimCity* and *Super Mario*. These classic video game titles were selected and put on display in a permanent exhibition thanks, as the museum announced, to their capacity not only as art but as "interaction design." According to the exhibition's curator Paola Antonelli:

> As with all other design objects in MoMA's collection, from posters to chairs to cars

> to fonts, curators seek a combination of historical and cultural relevance, aesthetic expression, functional and structural soundness, innovative approaches to technology and behavior, and a successful synthesis of materials and techniques [in video games] in achieving the goal set by the initial program.

Economically speaking, too, video game revenues have increased remarkably across the globe. With an expanding official market following decades of video game piracy in the region, Latin America for one is now the second fastest growing video game market in the world. According to a 2016 Gamer Consumer Insights survey conducted by Newzoo, Latin America closely follows Southeast Asia in its share of annual growth in video game revenues (Holleman). With approximately 110 million paying gamers in 2016, the total annual game revenues were more than $4 billion, the research suggests. With a regimen of 20% annual growth, Holleman predicts that the 2019 total game revenues in Latin American will reach $6.2 billion, with a major share of the revenues coming from mobile games. In the meantime, while Canada's market is reported to have had a total game revenues of $1.8 billion in 2016, the country's video game market growth (3.8% per annum) is remarkably slower than that of Latin America (ESAC). Even the United States, which is a leader in terms both of revenues (worth $23.6 billion) and the total number of gamers (179 million gamers in 2016), has an estimated average annual growth rate of only 4.1% ("US Games Market 2016").

These are but a handful of points that mark the widespread presence of video games in political rhetoric, arts, and economy, showcasing the relevance of a videogaming mentality/language in the Americas (and of course globally) in the past two to three decades—what Phillip Penix-Tadsen refers to as the "increased interpenetration of 'reality' and 'gamespace'" (4). Following these examples, and looking at the Americas through the lens of critical game studies as my guiding objective in this introduction, I examine the rather recent, mostly undocumented intimacy and reciprocity between (inter-)American studies and game studies in order to make arguments about their commerce in terms of both semantics and thematics.

Indeed, among the many lenses through which the cultures of the Americas have been examined in the new millennium, video games are a particularly productive one. In its routines of inclusivity and exclusivity (as well as instances of lukewarm and superficial pretences to inclusion),[2] videogaming as a socially significant, culturally ubiquitous, and politically charged practice reveals what about the Americas' past, present, and future is deemed ludic, why and in what terms. A critical examination of video games as medium of engagement provides insight into the multitudinous aspects of the post-9/11 world order in which only certain of those aspects are dealt with as ludic (interactively simulable and narratively consumable). In the meantime, topics, character types, and historical events that are excluded from the gamescape (e.g., the intricacies of decades of drug wars in Latin America, the individuals and communities that have led the ethnic struggle in Canada, or the eventful history of unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on its so-called strategic foes) are either left for other media to cover (such as the traditional news media or social networks) or left entirely off the radar. I understand this feature of video games as *videoludification*; as Muriel and Crawford suggest, our social realities and cultural concerns in the new century—and I would add, our postmodern accounts of history tailored for popular consumption—could be made sense of as we examine "the institutionalization of video game practices, experiences, and meanings, in contemporary society"(5).

Therefore, rather than a close reading of individual game titles or transmedia networks that ludify Americanness, take the Americas as their setting where the post-apocalyptic unfolds, or complicate our relationship with the historical narratives available to us via more formal channels such as history textbooks, consider this introduction a brief report on some of the ways these fields corroborate and contribute to one another—a series of cut-scenes to the contact zones between critical game studies and (inter-)American studies. As a north-Americanist, I do not treat video games in this

introduction as cultural artefacts of archival or artistic value (which they have proved to be), nor do I analyse individual commercial titles or game franchises that compete against older cultural forms (and often succeed). Similarly, I do not address questions of ludonarratology, gaming subcultures, hacktivism, or the semantics and semiotics of indie digital games, nor do I engage with the lines of research that are central to the concerns of both American and inter-American studies, such as longstanding concerns over the commerce between virtual and real violence, video game addiction, or the so-called militainment of the U.S. society through video games. Rather, following a quick tour of the thematic and semantic exchange between (inter-)American Studies and Critical Game Studies, and in an attempt to co-map the two fields, I focus the remainder of my discussions here on the ways the Americas' past, present and future are depicted in video games as they engage with the social, the political, and the cultural.

Past, Present, and Future in Video Games

Reflected in the works of game theorists, even game reviewers and designers, the ludic turn—mapped by prominent game theorists such as Brian Sutton-Smith in the late 20th century—has influenced the ways we practice (inter-)American studies as well as the research questions we raise. Consequently, it is inescapable for Americanists (a term which, broadly speaking, includes both those engaged in the rather exclusive study of north America and those engaged in the study of the Americas, the inter-Americanists) to consider the centrality of video games in the minds and hearts of generations of Americans who, like the protagonists in the American coming-of-age movie *Boyhood* (2014) or the Mexican road movie *Duck Season* (2004), have been brought up with a steady regimen of video games in their lives, turning them into adults who are well-versed in the language of video games. At the dawn of the new millennium, few Americanists doubt that video games have a unique capacity in engaging gamers with the cultural, the social, and the political in numerous complex or superficial, uncharted or familiar ways, introducing alternate historical narratives, predicting the apocalypse, or depicting the post-apocalyptic. In fact, if we ask Americanists about the texts and contexts in which video games have entered their research (either as focal research interests or as casual means of procrastination) the list will be a rather long one.

To be found on such a list is the now classic line of inquiry in the over-militarization of the post-Cold War society that finds its various expressions in the fascination of generations of Americans with first- and third-person shooters. As the illuminating analysis in such volumes as *Playing War* (by Matthew Thomas Payne, 2016) and *America's Digital Army: Games at Work and War* (by Robertson Allen, 2017) confirm, even for those Americanists who have remained sceptical of (even entirely indifferent toward) the undeniable commercial success of shooter video games since the early 2000s or dismiss the medium as too popular or too ephemeral to be of scholarly value, the rise of 'military brand' video games (most famously, first-person shooters *America's Army* (2002) and its sequels, *America's Army 2* (2003), *America's Army 3* (2008), and *America's Army: Proving Grounds* (2012), and *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004) and the overt proliferation of government-owned spaces where such games can be played for free have been received as a matter of engaged intellectual concern. In fact, the recruitment policies of the U.S. Army among the young as part and parcel of a more complex political imaginary matter to both gamer and non-gamer researchers in American studies exactly because, as Matthew Thomas Payne asserts in the case of post-9/11 war video games, "the matters of gameplay are never restricted to their ephemeral play sessions. The virtual realms of games and the physical world exist in a complex but coevolving dialectic" (4).

The most common of the many ways critical game studies enriches and expands the scope of cultural studies—as an instance of the density of the ways "culture is negotiated through media technologies" (Penix-Tadsen, *Cultural Code* 7)—is the emphasis it places on video games as a reflection of what *is*. In their matchless capacity for simulation and interaction, and whether deliberately or inadvertently, video games (such

as humanitarian crisis video games, the so-called HCGs) draw upon social, political, and cultural realities such as unrest across national borders, struggles for social, political, and gender equality, awareness toward ecological and human disasters, or resistance against new (or hidden old) forms of intersectional exploitation.

In a semantic context, and closely related to this, I argue, are the discussions made within traditional game studies circles about the modern man as *Homo Ludens* (man the player) and its applicability to the present state of humankind in the digital age. Discussing the reciprocities of culture and play in the West, and writing in the inter-war period in Europe, the cultural historian Johann Huizing commented on human civilizations as being founded on a rather exceptional seedbed: play. Huizinga's main point in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture* (1949) centered around a historically-informed argument about the current stage of 'human civilizations.'[3] From where Huizinga stood, it is impossible to make sense of human cultures without taking the element of play into account (Huizinga ix-x). Observing human actions beyond the optimistic post-Enlightenment lens of *Homo Sapiens* (man the thinker) and *Homo Faber* (man the maker),[4] he identified a newfangled humankind: *Homo Ludens* (man the player) and further examined the historical roots of play as constitutive of old and young civilizations in contexts as seemingly wide apart as poetry, chivalry, art, politics (including U.S. presidential elections), and war.

Huizinga's insights are relevant to my discussion here (and in the whole special issue) as they inform popular views about modern U.S.-American life. In volumes such as *The Ultimate Game Guide to Your Life: or, The Video Game as Existential Metaphor* by Christopher Monks (2008), for one, modern American life is likened to a video game at the same time that video games are examined in their metaphoric relationship with the American way of life in the new century.[5] Written with a great deal of humour as a kind of 'How to Life' manual for dummies, the title has a general audience in mind among Americans who are more or less invested in video games. Resembling a game franchise with new titles introduced every few years, the book's chapters each stand for a phase in a white, male, straight American's life from birth to death and each include challenges, life points, mini-games, cheat codes and hidden items, physical and emotional health meters, instructions on how to save the game, activities and tips, extensive visual information on the level-appropriate joystick and the difficulty level. The most interesting feature of each phase/game is the mini-games this average American has to play: workaday subjects such as 'Crawling' and 'Don't Lose your Mittens', 'Believing in Santa Claus,' 'Blogging' and 'Student Loan Debt Calculation,' less workaday subjects like 'Hip Hip Hurray! My Son is Gay!', and old-age challenges such as 'Making Friends' at the assisted living facility and undergoing the 'Hip Replacement Surgery.'

Interestingly, while some of these mini-games are common to all human beings, most of them are in fact specific to the American way of life in its most simplified and generalized version based on the fantasies and norms of an average heterosexual white, male American living in the twenty-first century. In this sense, the book works as a manual to a sheltered, 'average' lifestyle as if everyone lives the life of an average, not overly ambitious, semi-religious, white, male, middle-class U.S.-American, localized, my guess is, in suburbia. Monks makes occasional references to the minorities in the U.S. society, women, people of colour, the newly migrated and the homosexual, who might want to apply the manual about *their* life, by sarcastically suggesting that they ought to wait for mods and spin-offs that are supposed to be made available "next year." As in many other areas of life in the United States today, the book reminds us that, while those who closely resemble his protagonist's lifestyle live a life that *is readily available* to them, 'others' have to wait for what *might become available* at some point in future.

To return to Huizinga's insights, Christopher Monks' book does not make references to a list of ludic moments in the life of his American prototype. Rather, he talks about his prototypical American as a *Homo Ludens*: a faceless, nameless individual whose life—far from including some ephemeral gaming moments/sessions—is set in a stretch of video games in which he spends his entire time, a form of a ludic

Truman Show that he does not figure out nor does he want to escape from. He so completely fits the setting and is so busy overcoming the minor, almost 'natural' challenges the games throw at him, Monks tells us, that he never begins to question the authenticity of his life or look for the borders of this game-world. In fact, *The Ultimate Guide to Your Life* stretches the idea of game sessions to a whole life-time of ludic quality—as Huizinga would agree is how modern human beings live—including few matter-of-fact moments in which his hero actually plays with a toy gun or finds an XBox to kill time while waiting for the birth of his child in the local hospital.[6]

In further examining the book, a quick overview of the concept of 'metaphor' as defined by Paul Ricoeur would help us make better sense of the book's subtitle, 'Video Game as Existential Metaphor'. According to Ricoeur, "[m]etaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power certain fictions have to redescribe reality" (5). Ricoeur explains this point in terms of discourse when he maintains: "Metaphor bears information because it 'redescribes' reality" (24). Therefore, historically viewed as deviant, a dispensable, ornamental, nominal figure of speech in classic literature, Ricoeur reinstates metaphor as a forceful tool at the service of modern political discourse. In doing so, he defines metaphor as a relational linguistic affair that "always involves a kind of mistake, … involves taking one thing for another by a sort of calculated error," concluding that as such it is "essentially a discursive phenomenon" (23). "Metaphor," he further asserts, "holds together within one simple meaning two different missing parts of different contexts of this meaning. Thus, we are not dealing any longer with a simple transfer of words, but with a commerce between thoughts, that is, a transaction between contexts" (Ricoeur 80).

With this in mind, we can think of a number of questions to ask while paging through Christopher Monks' book: Does the book equate, by way of metaphor, modern human life to a video game? Does it view the post 9/11 video game as a material site of a life-long ludic bastion? And if so, what does this metaphorical co-contextualization (to requote Ricoeur), this transaction of meanings and significations say about American life? Who is an average American? How scripted is (in this case) his life? How ludic is his life? How serious is his life game? If both scripted and ludic, then: does one play one's life or live it? Does one live video games or play them? Given the ludicity of such a life, as the book maintains, are we to categorize all U.S.-Americans, by extension, as prime examples of *Homo Ludens*? What does such a view imply about play and playfulness as foundational elements of life in the West? In the Americas? As an Americanist, I would further ask, whether play is an existential metaphor for a narrative-specific succession of pre-plotted events, semi-accidental challenges, and harmless, though wicked mini-games with a far-from-complex points system on the side? If so, how far reaching do we understand ludic or entertaining to be? From such a perspective, how can we account for tragedies, natural and human disasters, prejudices and exclusions, denial of due process of law to minorities, personal and collective trauma, or modern warfare as ludic or entertaining?

Similarly, in a conditional type-I manner, video games map the *terra incognita* of the cultures and crises ahead. This goes hand-in-hand with the debates in critical game studies over the potential of video games not only as a simulation of what already is but as a conjecture into both what *can be* and what *will be* (or not). Aside from genres that by nature engage with the future (for instance, the post-apocalyptic as a genre best represented through the medium of video games), works such as *Video Games as Culture* (Muriel and Crawford, 2018), register the map-territory relationship between video games and what the future will bring. As Muriel and Crawford contend, it is already more-or-less common sense that video games reflect the social and cultural life of contemporary communities under the aegis of neoliberalism.[7]After discussing the affinities of video games and culture—"video game culture, video game in culture, and video game as culture" (5)—they take a step further, placing emphasis on video games in their capacity to function as a blueprint for future changes in society. Commenting on the long-standing debates on the precedence of maps over territory in the context of colonialism (that

maps drawn by European colonizers preceded the territorial realities of the spaces colonized), they invite attention to videogaming as a mapping activity that precedes social reality. In this sense, video games reflect (upend or endorse) the cultures that give birth to them while they also help gamers imagine first-time social realities (Muriel and Crawford 5), as they serve as "the beta test version of the society to come"(Muriel and Crawford 181).[8]

Furthermore, turning attention to historical video games in their engagement with what *has been* or what *could have been* (and this is the main focus of the three articles included in this special issue), videogaming has joined forces with New Imperial Studies—a field that has changed our everyday relationship to and encounters with empires and our (post)colonial heritage. In general, as the New Imperial Studies holds, the contemporary experiences, myths, and memories of/about empires in the former colonies such as Haiti, Peru, and Canada, have opened spaces for the colonized to record their otherwise unheard or suppressed voices through a plethora of new media. On the other hand, in the so-called metropole, unprecedented geopolitical ruptures, disruptions in the colonial economic (im)balance, and newly conceived narratives of (post)coloniality and of relating to, representing, and imagining (post)colonial identities have altered the perspectives and experiences of empire and the settings in which it is re-enacted. As the main objective taken up by the articles, reviews, and the interview included in *Encounters in the 'Game-Over Era': The Americas in/and Video games*, this changed everyday experience and exposure to the Americas' past and to the state of (post) coloniality in the present post-colonial 'game-over era' in the Americas is worth closer scholarly examination.[9]

Making sense of the ways the past creeps into and the historical is brought to the present (what *has been*) through videogaming, video games can indeed be viewed as a site for re-telling the "history of the present" (Lowe 136)—the ways a work/text with references to the past "refuses the simple recovery of the past and troubles the givenness of the present formation" (Lowe 136). While being entertaining, video games remind players of the ways the past (a) permanently changes the present, as well as the ways (b) it continually changes the present in unprecedented ways. The focal point in addressing and assessing video games as part of a larger 'live archive' in the twenty-first century is indeed to systematically investigate our understanding of the colonial past in as diverse and globally entangled a geopolitical region as the Americas takes unprecedented shapes as gamers and game researchers continue encountering the recently digitized historical/archival as the born ludic/digital.

In This Issue

What follows this introduction focuses on the various medial, rhetorical, literary, and historical aspects of a growing body of video games that engage with past forms of imperialism and colonialism in the double-continent in one way or another. The discussions revolve around the many faces of empire that surface in the intra- and inter-imperial encounters in the Americas as well as between the Americas and other continents, including the lasting colonial imprint of the Spanish Empire in the Americas and the colonization of British North America as depicted or debated in video games. The short anthology that follows views video games as media through which events, places, and peoples from/in the Americas have been turned by game designers into ludic matter (setting, narrative, personae, sound effect, violent NPC) and made sense of all over again for the post-colonial gamer to encounter. The questions that inform the ensuing discussions include: How is 'empire' represented in video games about the Americas and the complex, evolving entanglements it has historically spun? How does relating to the (post)colonial heritage in the Americas through video games affect/reinforce/cleanse/dismiss/renew existing imperial myths and narratives in and about the Americas? How do gamers' affinity to a specific colonial heritage (being a Colombian adolescent, e.g.) and the historical moment at which they play (e.g., in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump as the US president) affect their relationship to imperialism/colonialism and to the various narratives which

function as the games' backdrop? In what ways does the post-colonial studies of the Americas benefit from research on video games? In what ways do video games differ from/resonate with other media such as film in depicting the (post) colonial entanglements in/of the Americas?

As its central point of interest, this issue joins the rich scholarship in critical game studies to invite digital historians, researchers in media, cultural studies, literature, American studies, game studies, and Latin-, African- and inter-American studies, who are interested in video game cultures to discuss the potential of video games as a significant and prevalent new media, new text, and new means to narrate imperialism and to re-construct colonialism—media which help remind Americanists of the necessity of reflecting upon the tenacity of the (post)colonial heritage in the Americas through a rather new, highly popular, interactive field, i.e., the video game.

It is therefore fitting to begin the special issue with Eugen Pfister's article, "'In a world without gold, we might have been heroes!' Cultural Imaginations of Piracy in Video Games." In this article, Pfister examines the extent to which classic depictions of and fantasies around the figure of pirates in older media forms in Northern Europe have found their way into the game-world. Complicating the relationship between the historical, the literary, the colonial, and the ludic, Pfister introduces eighteenth-century imaginaries revolving around the image of the pirate before turning his attention to the twenty-first century "iterations of these ahistorical imaginations in video games" such as *Pirates!* and *Assassin's Creed IV*. Stefan Schubert's article, "Columbian Nightmare: Narrative, History, and Nationalism in *BioShock Infinite*," moves to the north of the double-continent as he examines the game in its capacity to engage, even if indirectly, with questions of nationalism and imperialism in the case of a rising U.S. Empire. Drawing attention to "the constructedness of worlds, of narrative, and of history", Schubert's close reading of *Bioshock Infinite* as an example of political/historical fantasy video game reveals the ways the game title does "cultural work" as it criticizes "underlying notions of nationalism and imperialism in US history." Following Schubert's contribution, Daniel Giere engages with video games' potential to accommodate unprecedented historical narrations while they engage with "individually staged, seemingly historical situation[s]." Examining how the Boston Tea Party, as the founding event that marks the birth of the United states as a nation, is ludified in *Assassin's Creed III*, Giere adopts Adam Chapman's analytical framework (the four-dimensional toolbox he proposes in the study of historical video games, consisting of epistemology and style of simulation, time, space, and narrative) as he juxtaposes the more formal historical accounts of the event with those narrative elements that are inserted into the game narrative by the game's developer-historians, placing emphasis on pre-game research, interactivity, and players' choice as part of what I view as the 'live,' if flawed, historical archive of videogaming.

Next, and in close conversation with the three articles outlined above, especially with the first article by Eugen Pfister in its depiction of piracy across various media, the interview I have conducted with Stephen Joyce turns attention to some of the discussions he makes in his forthcoming book about transmedia storytelling and the post-apocalyptic as a genre. As Joyce contends in his understanding of the prominent position video games occupy in transmedia studies, "[i]n many ways, the content of games isn't as important as the conversations they enable." In response to a question about the interrelationship between post-apocalyptic and post-colonial in video games, Joyce highlights the two genres' "desire to rebuild after a catastrophic event and to imagine an alternate world in which things turned out differently or in which we have more agency than many feel they currently possess. Post-apocalyptic worlds," he concludes, "offer a chance to wipe the slate clean of colonial legacies." This interview is followed by two book reviews: while Naima Shaheen's choice of review, *Cultural Code*, underlines Penix-Tadsen's seminal work on the reciprocity of game studies and Latin American cultures, Leonid Moyzhes' review of *Video Games as History* draws attention to the illuminating discussions and methodological breakthroughs in Chapman's work on the ludification of historical

narratives through video games. Ultimately, Philipp Penix-Tadsen's afterword wraps up the discussions I have picked up in this introduction and the many lines of argument driven in the articles, the interview, and the two book reviews, highlighting the importance of "understand[ing] the obstacles and affordances that define video games' potential for historical depiction, realism, accuracy and scope." As he makes the case, this special issue joins the expanding body of literature in the study of games and culture under the umbrella of what he refers to as "regional game studies."[10]

Conclusion

The contributions included in the special issue, including the present introduction, examine video games in their playful and poli-angular but not necessarily careless or casual, capacity to treat the historical, the political, and the social as the studies of the Americas' past, present, and future meet critical game studies. While highly timely to delve into the videogaming scene in Central and South America (where the sports hit *Lucha Libre AAA: Héroes del Ring*, the sci-fi title *Reversion*, *Papo Y Yo* (Colombia/Canada), *Kerbal Space Program* (Mexico), *Rock of Ages* (Chile), *Kingdom Rush* (Uruguay), *Preguntados* (Argentina) and the serious game *Pregnancy* are developed and played alongside popular, pirated or officially imported, Japanese, American and European video games), or to discover the reasons behind the lacklustre interest in official investment in this expanding market or to localize the titles that are sold to various gamer communities in the region, the examination of individual game titles (such as the serious game *ICED – I Can End Deportation*) and the Latin American market politics lie outside the scope of this introduction.[11]

In fact, what follows this introduction marks (inter-)American studies' fascination with videogaming as a practice and a metaphor as our disciplines respond to the great number of changes in the ways American Studies and critical game studies have met in the past half-decade. As the number of panels and conferences organized to examine the digital games culture within the brackets of American Studies increase, so does the number of thematic and semantic points of commerce between the two fields and the hashtag campaigns over various issues of intellectual interest around videogaming such as the so-called GamerGate. This coincides, not surprisingly, with the release of a record number of video games that "cross over with real life [in the Americas]" (Penix-Tadsen, *Cultural Code* 6). As the tour in the past few pages made clear, video games ludify politics, history, and culture in the double continent (as well as elsewhere) as the Americas' past meets its present in the form of the post-colonial and as populations continue to be on the move, polities questioned, and presidencies shaken to the ground.

Notes

1. In terms of domestic politics, we all are familiar with Obama's rather small-scale in-game campaign advertisement in a total of eighteen online video games as he ran for U.S. presidency in 2008. The campaign was conducted by the in-game ad firm Massive Inc., owned by Microsoft. Obama's use of video games released by large American tech companies was criticized as biased by (John) McCain's campaign.

Furthermore, once in office, Obama did a lot that in hindsight is viewed by gamer communities as historical landslides in recognizing video games as intellectual property, declaring them as free and protected speech. What is more, gamers and design companies fondly remember the first White House game jam in 2014 and an online stream of a video game competition to make the case for Obamacare in 2016.

2. As Alfie Bown makes clear in an article on the momentous necessity of the video game industry to move from formally political to purposefully progressive, "progressive content is not enough… Video games communicate ideology at the level of form, and laying a progressive storyline over the top does not necessarily prevent a game from serving rightwing ideas."

3. Even though the general historical overview that he offered in the book about the history of human civilizations founded on the play element has to be taken with a grain of salt, his work is still a starting point for practitioners in the field of game studies and cultural studies scholars who view play as part and parcel of culture.

4. Huizinga ix.

5. While not extremely popular nor part of a larger body of works that equate American life to video games, I believe that the title deserves closer scholarly attention especially among Americanists.

6. Indeed, the book's protagonist seems to be an American Peter Pan, the boy who—busy with playing the game of his

life—would never grow up to have to endure real hardship, unexpected mishaps, and life-changing events such as migration/expatriation, bankruptcy, or cancer.

7. The book does a fantastic job in reading culture through video games, weaving arguments about identity politics, participatory cultures, and consumerism with the help of the experiences and exposures of the player community as games evolve and as individuals and communities play.

8. For a list of reasons as to why it is a productive endeavor to study contemporary culture and society through video games, see the introduction to *Videogames as Culture* (Muriel and Crawford 3-5).

9. To get a sense of the central work on video games and postcolonialism, see Souvik Mukherjee (2015, 2017) and Sybille Lammes, "Postcolonial Playgrounds."

10. For a thorough understanding of the term, see: Bjarke Liboriussen and Paul Martin "Regional Game Studies."

11. For a thorough understanding of the market dynamics in the Latin American gamescape, see Gackstetter Nichols and Robbins, *Pop Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean*; and Aldama, "Getting Your Mind/Body On: Latinos in Video Games."

Works Cited

Aldama, Frederick Luis. "Getting Your Mind/Body On: Latinos in Video Games." *Latinos and Narrative Media: Participation and Portrayal*, Palgrave McMillan, 2013, pp. 241-258.

Allen, Robertson. *America's Digital Army: Games at Work and War.* U of Nebraska P, 2017.

America's Army. United States Army, 2002.

America's Army 2: Special Forces. United States Army, 2003.

America's Army 3. United States Army, 2008.

America's Army: Providing Grounds. United States Army, 2012.

Antonelli, Paola. "Video Games: 14 in the Collection, for Starters." *Inside/ Out. A MoMA/ MoMA PS1 Blog*, 29 Nov. 2012, www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters/. Accessed 28 June 2018.

Boyhood. Directed by Richard Linklater, IFC Productions, 2014.

Brown, Alfie. "Video Games Are Political. Here's How They Can be Progressive." *The Guardian*, 13 August 2018, www.theguardian.com/games/2018/aug/13/video-games-are-political-heres-how-they-can-be-progressive. Accessed 14 August 2018.

Buchanan, David A. *Going Scapegoat: Post-9/11 War Literature, Language and Culture.* McFarland and Company Publishers, 2012.

Crecente, Brian. "Videogames owe a lot to President Obama's administration." *Polygon*, 20 January 2017, www.polygon.com/2017/1/20/14335040/barack-obama-gaming-president. Accessed 10 June 2018.

Duck Season. Directed by Fernando Eimbcke, CinePantera / Esperanto Filmoj/ IMCINE, 2004.

ESAC (The Entertainment Software Association of Canada). *The Canadian Video Game Industry!,* 2017, theesa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ESAC2017_Booklet_13_Digital.pdf. Accessed 28 July 2018.

Full Spectrum Warrior. Pandemic Studios Mass Media Inc., 2004.

Gackstetter Nichols, Elizabeth and Timothy R. Robbins. *Pop Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean.* ABC-Clio, 2015. Print.

Goldberg, Jeffrey. "Obama to Iran and Israel: 'As President of the United States, I Don't Bluff'." *The Atlantic*, 2 March 2012, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/obama-to-iran-and-israel-as-president-of-the-united-states-i-dont-bluff/253875/. Accessed 20 July 2018.

Holleman, Gijs. "The Latin American Games Market: Console Still Standing Strong, but Mobile is Winning." *Newzoo*, 31 October 2016, newzoo.com/insights/articles/latin-american-games-market/. Accessed 28 July 2018.

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture.* Routledge & K. Paul, 1949.

ICED - I Can End Deportation. Anea_Duo_Dev, 2017.

Kerbal Space Program. Windows Version, Squad, 2015.

Kingdom Rush. Ironhide Game Studio, 2011.

Lammes, Sybille. "Postcolonial Playgrounds: Games as postcolonial cultures." *Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture,* vol. 4, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1-6.

Liboriussen, Bjarke and Paul Martin "Regional Game Studies." *Game Studies,* vol. 16, no. 1, 2016, gamestudies.org/1601/articles/liboriussen. Accessed 28 July 2018.

Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents.* Duke UP, 2015.

Lucha Libre AAA: Héroes del Ring. Slang, 2010.

Monks, Christopher. *The Ultimate Game Guide to Your Life: or, The Video Game as Existential Metaphor.* Tow Books, 2008.

Mukherjee, Souvik. *Videogames and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back.* Palgrave, 2017.

---. "The Playing Fields of Empire: Empire and Spatiality in Video Games." *The Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*, vol. 7, no.3, 2015, pp. 299-315.

Muriel, Daniel and Gary Crawford. *Video Games as Culture. Considering the Role and Importance of Video Games in Contemporary Society.* Routledge, 2018.

Papo y Yo. Minority Media Inc., 2012.

Payne, Matthew Thomas. *Playing War. Military Video Games After 9/11*. New York UP, 2016.

Penix-Tadsen, Phillip. *Cultural Code: Video Games and Latin America*. MIT UP, 2016.

Pregnancy. Locomotivah, 2015.

Preguntados. Etermax, 2013.

Reversion - The Escape (1st Chapter). 3f Interactive, 2012.

Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language.* Routledge, 2003.

Rock of Ages. ACE Team, 2011.

Shaw, Adrianne. *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2014.

Stahl, Roger. "Digital War and Public Mind. Call of Duty Reloaded, Decoded." *In/visible War: The Culture of War in Twenty-first-Century America*, edited by Jon Simmons and John Louis Lucaites, Rutgers UP, 2017, pp.143-158.

"The US Games Market 2016." *Newzoo*, 27 July 2016, newzoo.com/insights/infographics/us-games-market-2016/. Accessed 28 July 2018.

Author's Biography

Mahshid Mayar is an assistant professor of North American Literature and Culture at Bielefeld University, Germany. She holds a Ph.D. in history from the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS). While her doctoral project (under review for publication as her first book) examined the cultural geographical formations of the U.S. Empire at the turn of the 20th century, in her post-doc she conducts research in critical game studies and postmodern American literature. Her research interests further include transnational American studies, postmodern American literature, 19th century U/S. history, cultural geography, and childhood studies.