

# Medijski prikaz videoigara: od umjetnosti do problema

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**MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF VIDEO GAMES:  
FROM ART TO TROUBLE**

BACHELOR'S THESIS

Zagreb, July 2021

UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB  
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## **Abstract**

Ever since their beginning in the 1980s, video games have been a controversial topic. Furthermore, the media has often shunned the artistic part of the gaming industry, focusing primarily on its growing business or its problems. Partly to blame are the stereotypes revolving around video games and their players. Nowadays, video game development consists of many different stages. Some of them are research, concept art, motion capture, and of course, voice acting. The core purpose of this paper is to show the cultural value of video games, the amount of effort behind them, and their portrayal in the mainstream media.

**Keywords: video games, media, gaming, research, concept art, motion capture, voice acting, historical background, violent behavior**

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# 1. Introduction

Being put into a fringe category of hobbies since their conception, video games often get swayed away as a childish non-sense or get looked down upon as a dangerous threat to modern society. These two extreme opinions do not represent the truth, hence the purpose of this paper, lifting the veil of misconceptions about a very wide and bright industry.

In the first part of this paper we are going to briefly learn about how video games started, after that we are moving on to the stages of development. In “Stages of development” we are taking a deep dive into the creative part of the video game making process which consists of research, concept art, motion capture, and voice actors.

After that, we are shifting our focus on the importance of video games by their historical accuracy and the games that stood out the most in the last few years by their historical background – Assassin’s Creed Odyssey, The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, and Kingdom Come: Deliverance.

The last chapter is focused on the biased media portrayal of video games and the controversy revolving around them.

## 2. Brief history of video games

This is going to be quite brief, if history was that fun to read about, video games would not exist.

History.com (2019) pointed out there were a few crucial points in the early development of video games. Firstly, it is important to mention that a British professor called A.S. Douglas created “OXO” in 1952, or as it is today called tic-tac-toe. Secondly, in 1958 a man called William Higinbotham created “Tennis for Two”. Console games aren’t the topic of this essay so we will mention only the important milestones containing console related games. Those milestones happened in the 1980s:

- The release of the *Space Invaders* arcade game in 1978
- The launch of Activision, the first third-party game developer (which develops software without making consoles or arcade cabinets), in 1979
- The introduction to the United States of Japan’s hugely popular *Pac-Man*
- Nintendo’s creation of *Donkey Kong*, which introduced the world to the character Mario
- Microsoft’s release of its first *Flight Simulator* game (History.com, 2019).

All of these were crucial in further development of interactive, and user-friendly gameplay in the upcoming years.

## 3. Stages of development

### 3.1 Research

“Game design aims to solve a design problem of “how do we create this specific game?” The main goal of this process is a game; new understanding about game development and game design is merely a by-product of that process.“ (Lankoski P., Holopainen J., 2017) The main purpose of an in game design research is to reveal the new facts and insight that is crucial when it comes to game development. The insight consists of game design and the design process. However, “game research“ is an umbrella term that envelopes all kinds of research involving video games (Lankoski P., Holopainen J., 2017).

Lankoski and Holopainen (2017) present certain norms that are important for the development of what is considered a “good game“, the two authors point out that according to Laramée (2002) it is important for game writers to limit themselves to a single person point of view, in order to maintain the players connection to their character that they develop through the game. Basically, this means that it should be made sure that the player never gets affected or shown anything that their own character wouldn't experience directly. However, according to Niiniluoto (1993) those norms can be vital for design but are also a matter of taste. There are differences between making a game appealing to children and making one appealing to adults. Changing and challenging the norms can be a good idea if executed properly, for example: „[...] [the] Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (CD Projekt RED, 2015) was a very successful and popular game even though it breaks Laramée's aforementioned design principles when the game switches between Geralt and Ciri. It is worth emphasizing that immersion as a design norm is not wrong, but the norm tends to promote certain design directions and demote other types of design solutions“ (Lankoski P., Holopainen J., 2017).



## **4. Concept art**

### **4.1 What is concept art when it comes to video game making?**

Everything in a game starts as concept art - the characters, objects, buildings, creatures, environment, planets, maps, and much more. Concept art is the process of transforming 2D lines and art into “live“ 3D objects in a 3D world. The best way to explain concept art is by explaining it as an umbrella term that involves all kinds of content that represents game ideas. However, it does not include those polished and photoshopped advertising posters and it doesn't have a specific format. Concept art is anything from sketches, drawings, paintings, to digitally made artworks and images. It can be drawings of big areas, close-up details, or textures (iMeshup, 2019).

### **4.2 Who makes concept art?**

“A concept artist is a designer who visualizes & creates art for characters, creatures, vehicles, environments, and other creative assets. Concept art is used to visualize ideas so that modelers, animators, and VFX teams can make these ideas ready for production“(Concept Art Empire, 2020). It is the artist's job to bring their ideas to life using their works. It is important for a concept artist to know how to design and how to create those same designs well enough so that they blend well with a creative project. Styles of concept artists are also very different, you can't compare a concept artist working for Pokemon and one working for Blizzard (Concept Art Empire, 2020).

The Concept Art Empire (2020) brings us a typical workflow process of a character design artist:

The art director or creative director brings a brief to the artist. This brief might explain the character’s personality, some visual features, or anything relevant to the design. Then the concept artist starts thumbnailing rough ideas. They might create 2, 20, or 200 thumbnails. But this is the exploration phase which is the most important part. This is how you go from a blank page to something. Once the artist finds a couple cool ideas they’ll start digitally painting their concepts to a full render. The best artists include a front view, back view, and profile view of the character to offer all angles for the design. They might even include some action shots of the character jumping, lunging forward, or swinging a weapon (Concept Art Empire, 2020).

Once that process is finished, the result of it will be used as an example and a reference for all of the other artists working on the project. This process is repeated for every character, animal, scene, environment, every object, and basically everything that a player can see in a game. Concept art is a field of work that is competitive and growing fast. In order to become a concept artist you need to have expert level art skills, and in order to achieve those you need to be knowledgeable in areas regarding perspective, anatomy, composition, lighting tones, etc. Realism is the key here! It's an art style most concept artists use. However, no one can become a concept artist without being a great artist in general (Concept Art Empire, 2020).

## **5. Motion capture**

By the website of Grendel Games (*Getting started with motion capture*) motion capture is simply the act of recording real-life movements done by actors or stuntmen, in order to convert them into hyper-realistic 3D animations. This technique was being used in the animation and film-making industry for over twenty years, it has just recently jumped into the game industry, and now it has become the norm. Recently, Kinect has made it easier to record these animations. Nowadays, you are able to do facial tracking using only your smartphone, as you may have already seen when using Instagram or Snapchat filters. Of course, the quality is nowhere near the “real deal” but it’s a good example of how the technology works.

### **5.1 Protocol of a motion capture session**

Grendel Games (*Getting started with motion capture*) also offers an excellent explanation of the complete motion capture protocol. The first step is calibration, it is also the most important step. The cameras should be calibrated in a way that they are aiming and standing in a way they actually would in real life. Moreover, the cameras have to capture light only on the reflective markers on the actor’s suit. Secondly, the actor or the stunt performer needs to be calibrated too. As the actors arrive into the studio, their light markers will appear on the computer screen. After entering the studio, the actor needs to do what is called a “Range of Motions”, which means he or she needs to perform and exercise all of the

extreme rotations of the body. The exercises consist of bending back and forth, spinning arms, and kicking feet. This is needed so the motion capture program recognizes the markers as individual body parts and acknowledges what are the actor's limits when it comes to movement. Step three happens before recording animations, what will happen is that the "sticks" on the computer screen will connect the markers that are on the actor. Consequently, the actor will become a simplified 3D skeleton. The "sticks" represent the bones of the skeleton. Markers on the actor's suit are labeled with matching body parts. Step four involves "cleaning". It is rather common that during the "Range of Motion" recording some markers will disappear when an actor performs an extreme pose such as bending forward. Then all of the markers on the actor's chest will disappear, because the camera cannot see them anymore. Furthermore, this kind of action will cause so-called "gaps" in the 3D skeleton, and they need to be filled afterward. To shorten this step and avoid doing much manual work it is advised to be careful not to miss anything during the "Range of Motion" recording. The last and final step consists of recording the final animations, it is also the easiest and most fun part of motion capture. The actor can finally let loose and move with his or her 3D skeleton in real time. To simplify, this means that the 3D skeleton will be able to imitate every movement the actor does in the studio.

## **5.2 The Witcher 3 cinematic trailer motion capture process breakdown**

Fxguide (2015) gave a detailed description of how CD Projekt RED (CDPR) made their latest Witcher 3: Blood and Wine cinematic trailer. With the help of DigiC Pictures CD Projekt RED wanted to project the dark fantasy feeling from the game into the trailer. The DigiC Pictures director István Zorkóczy says that CD Projekt RED provided them with a lot of game references and concept art material which helped them to develop their ideas in the right direction. The DigiC pictured team jumped right into making the motion capture with the help of the appropriate actors and stunt performers. For particular parts, such as the conversation between Geralt ( the main protagonist) and the vampire, the team used recorded PCAP data, which means that with the body motion capture they used the head-mounted camera (HMC). The HMC was used to supply them with footage of the actor's facial performance which is later perfectly attached with the suitable voice over lines performed by the voice over actors. The key is to balance out the game character with the available motion capture actors. One of the most challenging parts of the build is the character's hair:

The main character's hair was 'combed' in Ornatix, then detailed in Yeti. "Geralt's hair was assembled from a number of separate pieces divided into static and dynamic parts," describes lead hair TD Csaba Máté. "The ponytail, and his loose/hanging locks of hair were dynamic, while the part held together on the top of his head was static. His beard and eyebrows were also created using Yeti, and a peach-fuzz layer was also added for greater realism – as was the case on the vampire as well" (Fxguide, 2015) .

Besides Geralt, there is also the "monster" character which needed to be developed:

The process began with scanning, where DigiC primarily adopted a photogrammetry approach for acquiring detail. "We cast a local actress for the performance capture," says Varga, "whose face we also scanned, including a full set of FACS expressions and some more complex facial poses. We also cast a local model for the body of her human form, with the body proportions that CD Projekt RED was aiming for. Then we combined the body and the face scans and added some subtle tweaks in ZBrush to create the final character" (Fxguide, 2015).

Facial animation was quite a challenge, too; the system is based on a derivation of the FACS system which uses about 60 base blendshapes. The majority of the base shapes are molded by the facial scans but also refined by the DigiC Pictures modelers, then: "...[t]he animators identify key frames from the facial camera's feed, then the modelers tweak the shapes and set the controls to match these expressions." The vampire monster's facial rig needed much more manual sculpting because it needed to show "fight" poses and emotions such as pride, confidence, surprise, fear, and shock. Moreover, for that it was vital to take the real-life actress scans and alternate them to exaggerate certain elements (Fxguide, 2015).

Various methods were used when it came to the environments of the trailer. For Fxguide (2015) Zoltán Pócza, the director of the environment division explained: "we have used traditional 3D, projection painting, scanned objects, ground patches, stock videos and matte paintings. All these elements were created by different groups of people usually and they had to come together nicely in NUKE – something that was done by our amazing comp team." A 50 camera Photoscan system was used, initially developed for character scanning, however it was also utilized for scanning large objects. Moreover, it was used for objects such as trees and barns. Effects were quite a hard task to accomplish, too; many small effects were generated in Houdini, such as silver dust, dust, debris, blood, leaves, breath, smoke, grain, etc.

How were the effects for the spells made explains the effects lead, Dániel Bukovec:

Spells from the game are also featured in the trailer. “Quen is the defensive one, where Geralt is defending himself with a big orange ball against the flying cart, which is about to crush him,” [...] “The other is Aard, he is using this as an offensive spell, when he tosses the vampire away with it. The Aard effect is affecting the environment, moving things in the barn, raising dust and debris from the floor. These effects are composed from dynamic smoke sims, geometry effects (not simulated), and particle instancing, made in Houdini. There were also some dust components made with FumeFX” (Fxguide, 2015).

CG has been a crucial part of this development, but the team still used the real world camera movement and paid close attention to the lighting design. Their goal was to achieve a bit foggy and misty moonlight scenes in the night shots. The team’s lead compositor Balázs Horváth mentioned that his team looked at a lot of movie references for inspiration more than real-life photos because they considered those a bit misleading. Real-life photos of moonlight scenes can often look strange, like strange daytime lightning photos than something that is considered moonlight. Furthermore, that made them decide to render scenes with neutral lights then compose them to look more like night time (Fxguide, 2015).

For the last step, rendering, the team used Arnold: “[...] a tool the studio has embraced wholeheartedly and often works with Solid Angle on refinements for the software. “We’ve been using physically based shading for years now,” says lead compositor Balázs Horváth, “but we also found that if we properly split shading into AOVs then some tweaks can easily be done in post without visually breaking the shaders’ internal logic” (Fxguide, 2015).

## 6. Voice actors

The Voices.com (2020) website published an easy intro into the world of voice acting for beginners. This introduction also allows us, “outsiders”, to dwell into the world of voice acting. As a voice actor you have to be prepared to face anything, the wide world of video games offers endless possibilities when it comes to voice acting. You can be anything, from a majestic hero to a mischievous villain, or a troll, ogre, pixie, a talking dragon. Anything. A voice actor has the option to work in many fields, one of them being video games. Nowadays, almost every possible video game contains a degree of voice over. It is indispensable to give a character a voice, it is how a player connects to it, gets to know it, and eventually cares for it.

To show how the need for voice actors is growing, Voices. com (2020) gave an example from the New York Times article where: “[...] Dan Houser, a creative video game director, explains the importance of video game voice overs by stating: “We need audio to carry a lot of the weight because we are trying to convince people [that] this is a huge and vibrant world”. The audio Houser is referring to consists of voice over recorded by talented voice actors which help carry the narrative of the game.”

The ever-expanding industry of video games, whose profits are anticipated to reach 180 billion dollars by the year 2012 always needs fresh faces and voices. A talented voice actor can become a part of this world and expect to create a fruitful career for themselves. The diversity of video games also allows a voice actor to develop and expand his skills since every character they get will have a unique personality, tone of voice, accent, etc. Characters like this do not exist in radio commercials or any other field of work (Voices.com, 2020).

Voice.com (2020) explains how voice actors reach their full potential depending on the game genre they are in. Video games have several quite a few genres and subgenres that differentiate them. They try to accommodate every demographic and players with different abilities and preferences. Creators of video games pay a lot of attention to provide a wide variety of genres. Here are a few examples of games where a voice actor can truly shine: Action games! In games like these players complete physical challenges with their character and progress to overcome even greater ones. Here one needs a lot of hand-eye coordination and a quick reaction time. If you are a voice actor in this kind of game, you might be voicing

several sound effects such as grunts or squeals or narrating the stages of gameplay. Here are the key points why a narrator is important:

Video games can feature varying styles of narrators, such as a main narrator, or an absent narrator. The main narrator can be the protagonist, or any other character who explains the game's storyline and plot for the players as they move through the game. Narrators are very important in adventure games and RPGs, because their dialogue helps game designers connect crucial aspects of the game to the storyline, such as new characters, antagonists, settings, etc. On the other hand, an absent narrator is a character who isn't directly a part of the game. It can be a mysterious being who creates a lens to analyze the narrative of the game (Voice.com, 2020).

When it comes to adventure games: "These games tend to have a lot of dialogue, which allows voice actors to take on exciting characters to keep the players entertained. For example, Elijah Wood takes on the role of Spyro in *Spyro the Dragon: A New Beginning*, telling players about his journey as a purple dragon, as they move from one level to the next. By the end of the game, players understand Spyro's destiny and develop an emotional connection with him"(Voices.com, 2020). And RPGs or Role- Playing Games are at the top of the pile, they are one of the most engaging games on the planet. Usually set in the past with hints of fantasy, they provide a great adventure to their players. In RPGs, almost every character has their own personal voice actor. The characters have extensive dialogues filled with emotions and intriguing stories. If one voices a protagonist in an RPG, he or she has to realize that: "Video game creators usually spend the most time designing great protagonists for their games. From deciding the look of the character to the entire backstory, the whole process is treated very seriously" (Voices.com, 2020).

Here is how Doug Cockle, a voice actor, describes his 13- year-long journey with CD Projekt RED while working on the *Witcher* series and his connection to the main protagonist in an interview with Kirk McKeand for VG24/7 (2020):

"When we did *The Witcher*, CD Projekt were adamant that he could have absolutely no emotions whatsoever," Cockle tells me. "I did that as well as I could, but being an actor – that's what we do, we play with emotions. [...] By the time the second game came around, CD Projekt decided to relax the rules a little. [...] It needed to have more personality, and it needed to tell a more personal story with characters players could relate to – even if that character is a sad bridge troll with a drinking problem. [...] "What you can see in the progression from *The Witcher* right through to *The Witcher 3* is a progression in the writing, but also in terms of Geralt and how close to the surface his emotions are," Cockle says. "I think by the time we get to the end of *Blood and Wine*, he's almost a different character. He's

sentimental and he's expressing his care for the people around him in a way that he didn't in the earlier games." (VG24/7, 2020)

Let's not forget about the game's antagonists, when a voice actor takes the role of a video game antagonist, they have to be ready to express their outer worldly desire to take over the world or just ruin the protagonist's day. However, they aren't so different from the protagonist. An antagonist also has a rich and in-depth backstory, if not, then that is not a well-developed antagonist. A voice over actor can expect that:" The voice over styles most video game antagonists display are aggressive, bossy and villainous. However, this is not always the case, sometimes video game antagonists seem quite normal, and are revealed at the very end of the game"(Voices.com, 2020).



## 7. Importance of video games by their historical background

### 7.1 Assassin's Creed Odyssey

PCGamesN made a perfect article (*How historically accurate is Assassin's Creed Odyssey? We asked a Classics professor*) describing how much Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed Odyssey is actually historically accurate. First of all, it is important to mention what Odyssey is all about. It is an amazing recreation of Ancient Greece but it is not in full faithful to the time period. Odyssey is the first game in Ubisoft's installment to feature mythical monsters- Sphinx, Minotaur, Medusa, Cyclops, etc. The article battles the question- does the introduction of mythical creatures interrupt the historical accuracy of the game? Stephanie Scully, an expert in Greek Mythology says that: "As an imaginative structure it's terrific, [...] it adds a layer of engagement with a story. It would work whether the story be a Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Greek, or whatever sort of story. You aren't dealing with truth here, you're dealing with human imagination, and Medusa is a figment of Greek imagination. Our word for myth comes from the Greek word 'muthos', meaning story. The Greek people understood these myths as fictional stories."

Further, the professor explains that there existed a movement among the Ancient Greeks that would compliment this adaptation of Greek history:

That approach, known as Euhemerism, follows the belief that mythological accounts originated from real events and people. Euhemerus, who the interpretation is named after, believed that Zeus was a mortal king who died in Crete and that his tomb could still be found there. So, in some ways, Assassin's Creed Odyssey's depiction of history goes along with the rare belief that these legendary monsters are exaggerated versions of real people (*How historically accurate is Assassin's Creed Odyssey? We asked a Classics professor*).

In conclusion, Ubisoft was successful in depicting the best of both worlds. They managed to create a game that dressed its characters in period-appropriate clothes and returned to life all of the statues, buildings, and cultural traditions that were long gone. Furthermore, it also brought back the spirits of Ancient Greeks who rather enjoyed embellished stories (PCGamesN, *How historically accurate is Assassin's Creed Odyssey? We asked a Classics professor*).

## 7.2 Kingdom Come: Deliverance

PCGamesN article (*The obsessive historical accuracy of Kingdom Come: Deliverance, and how it makes for a better RPG*) gives us an inside view into how much Warhorse Studios invested into making their game, Kingdom Come: Deliverance, as historically accurate as possible while still making it fun to play. The PR manager of Warhorse Studios, Tobias Stolz-Zwilling explains what is Kingdom Come bringing new to the table: “[...] Kingdom Come: Deliverance is diametrically opposed to fantasy: it finds everything, from its visuals to story and quest design, in the history books. Most of the NPCs really lived, and all of the buildings really existed [...]”. They introduced a system they call “charisma”, which basically means the player has to be careful when it comes to what his character is wearing, the dirtier ones clothes are the less reputation he gets. Game designer Prokop Jirsa offered an example of a monastery: “[...] [the] clothes you’re wearing grant you certain access rights and privileges. For example, “there’s a part in the game where you have the option to infiltrate the monastery,” Jirsa continues, “and you actually experience the life of those monks.” [...] [and] there was simply no way anyone but a monk would be allowed to enter such a building in 1403.”

Kingdom Come: Deliverance is based around a specific time and place in Bohemia:

[...] the entire project’s based on summoning a time and place from the past, it’s pretty important for Warhorse to choose a setting that’s actually worth summoning. The aforementioned stretch of Bohemia is the village of Stříbrná Skalice, located 50 km south of Prague. It was well-known for its rich mining veins of silver in the 1400s, and in 1403 King Sigismund of Hungary invaded the region, with that silver glinting in his eyes. It’s Sigismund who occupies the role of chief antagonist in Kingdom Come: Deliverance (*The obsessive historical accuracy of Kingdom Come: Deliverance, and how it makes for a better RPG*).

Warhorse Studios went as far as it was possible to make their own Stříbrná Skalice. They began with researching satellite maps of the area, and then digitally reconstructed the buildings in the area. However, they took some freedom when it came to the geography of the area, resizing some of the empty spaces to make it more enjoyable and less tiring for the player (*The obsessive historical accuracy of Kingdom Come: Deliverance, and how it makes for a better RPG*).

### 7.3 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (CD Projekt RED, 2015) is one of the most successful RPGs of this decade. It originated from the books of a famous Polish author, Andrzej Sapkowski. The game is based on a dark fantasy story which besides typical European customs, also features an extensive amount of Slavic mythology. The game presents the old myths like new meaningful and heartfelt stories.

Alphr (2018) reports that characters from The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt such as the immortal crones of Crookback Bog are the symbols for Baba Yaga. Many share the opinion that Baba Yaga is one of the most exemplary villains when it comes to Slavic folk tales. Portrayed as "...an ogress who steals, cooks, and eats her victims, usually children. A guardian of the fountains of the water of life, she lives with two or three sisters (all known as Baba Yaga) in a forest hut that spins continually on birds' legs..." (Britannica, 2020)

Besides old crones, the game also presents its take on stories of restless spirits. In the game, spirits linger around specific places linked to their deaths. Their stories are revealed as the main character, Geralt, takes interest in them. Some of them are the monstrous spirits called noonwraiths: "[...] serve merely as the personification for heatstroke that laborers risk suffering out in the fields during the hot summer months. In Poland, she is referred to as "Poludnica", which in English can be translated as "Lady Middy". Unlike her ghoulish appearance in The Witcher, Poludnica takes the form of whirling clouds of dust and carries a scythe or shears. In art, she was often depicted as a young woman robed in white, though it isn't uncommon to see her shown as an old woman either." (Rock, paper, shotgun, 2015)

And one of the most memorable are "Botchlings", in Scandinavian folklore Botchlings aren't as ugly but share the same tragic story as in the game, they are: „[...] the phantasms of unbaptized infants who are discarded when the parents are unable to care for them. They are said to jump on the backs of lone travelers, demanding to be taken to a graveyard and receive a proper burial [...]“. In Slavic mythology they are called "drekvavci". Witcher 3 is an enormous game, so this isn't even the beginning, almost all of the "creatures" in it are based on European lore and oral history (Rock, paper, shotgun, 2015).

## 8. Media portrayal and controversy

### 8.1 Media Coverage of Video Games

The Ringer (2019) has made a detailed article about the Washington Post and their take on video games coverage in the mainstream media. The story begins with Mike Hume, an ex-ESPN researcher who started introducing his team and associates to the so-called “e-sports space“. His initiative was a new step for the Washington Post. A step that started a new section at their website called “Launcher“, which is devoted only to videogames and esports. Some mainstream media sites have already tried to delve into covering video games but their efforts soon seized and the projects got abandoned. A New York Times journalist, Chris Suellentrop, used to regularly write video games reviews until The Times discontinued the segment (The Ringer, 2019).

In 2019 video game culture started to “melt into“ every other kind of mainstream entertainment culture when a game called Fortnite started to reach its peak in popularity. Even Hollywood started to release more and more TVshows and movies based on the gaming culture and games themselves (The Ringer, 2019).

The Ringer (2019) gives an overview of the best examples where gaming was used as a tool for political statements:

The video game industry served as a locus for flashpoints in larger debates about gambling, working conditions, and unionization. As the NBA grappled with (and walked back) its own response to a team employee who had expressed his support for pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, Activision Blizzard invited widespread condemnation (and a bipartisan letter from Congress) by suspending a Hearthstone player who had voiced similar sentiments. Politicians continued to scapegoat games and gamers after mass shootings, and in a tragic inversion of the typical post-death discovery, a victim of police violence was revealed to have been enjoying an innocent evening of video games with her nephew just before she was killed (The Ringer, 2019).

Brian Crecente, the founding editor of Polygon, a video games editor for Rolling Stone and Variety, and a consultant to Launcher pointed out how crucial it is to acknowledge that video games have maybe become the most important form of entertainment today. When it comes to media coverage of gaming, it comes and goes. Throughout the history of video games, a mainstream media outlet tended to show immense interest in video games just to

lose it completely after a few years of reporting. Crecente named those short bursts of interest “spasms“ (The Ringer, 2019).

To show the history of the relationship between video games and the media, the best example to follow is The New York Times. In the 80s, when games migrated from arcades to home consoles, a prediction was made that gaming is going to become a new pass time and maybe, a profession. A prediction that turned out to be completely true. In 1982 The Times reported how the video game revenue already passed the movie business (The Ringer, 2019).

Unfortunately, in that time period the early rise of video games and their media coverage didn't last long:

Contrary to the *Times*' sunny outlook on the near future of games, 1984 would not turn out to be another year of record revenue. The video game crash of 1983 wiped out much of the industry and, along with it, mainstream coverage and criticism. When video games reemerged in the mid-'80s, led by Nintendo and its hugely successful NES, games were marketed as a kid's activity, and covered like one—or, just as often, not covered at all (The Ringer, 2019).

Another “spasm“ happened in the 90s when games received the third dimension. Edward Rothstein, *Times*' former music critic, and occasional video games columnist stated that video games would have become an art form, another prediction that turned out true. Moreover, Rothstein claimed gaming was close to a breakthrough where picture, sound, and narrative will merge into one. In 2005, the first major mainstream article was issued in the *Times* about World of Warcraft. Gaming as a topic moved from business and technology to entertainment and culture. The video games industry was often compared to the movie industry and the reporting on it got reduced only to numbers and revenue. And this was not a good representation because the articles were only focusing on the profit of the gaming industry. Prioritizing popularity over their artistic value. In 2008 was the first time that a big media news outlet like The *Times* had reviewed a game. Grand Theft Auto IV (Rockstar Games, 2008) found itself on the cover of The *Times*' Arts section. However, in 2015 video game criticism got cut back as the *Times* moved to a digital-first format and they weren't able to compete with larger-scale hobbyist sites. However, three years ago, The *Times*' cover wrap was an advertisement for Red Dead Redemption 2 (Rockstar Games, 2018), a sequel to a game they positively reviewed in 2010. Launcher, The Washington Post's gaming site, was made with the intention to cater to an audience that takes more of a “thinking“ approach to gaming. A question arose: How to provide a mainstream source of information that's good

enough to satisfy the general audience, a hardcore gamer, and a business person? An arts and entertainment reporter for The Wall Street Journal, Jamin Warren, who had trouble publishing his game reviews says that the best answer to that question is to cater to the audience that actually plays games (The Ringer, 2019).

Mainstream media sites should incorporate video game coverage in their cultural selection because most of their readers are gamers anyway:

The Entertainment Software Association's annual reports on the demographics of gamers emphasize the medium's inclusiveness: In 2019, the ESA says, 65 percent of American adults play video games, the average age of a gamer is 33 years old, 21 percent of gamers are 50 or older, and 46 percent of gamers are female. (The Ringer, 2019).

The problem about reporting on video games might also be that the people who run these publications are the ones that didn't grow up playing them. And the only solution to this problem is patience because every generation's familiarity with video games is better than the previous ones. The digital media disruption of newspapers and the social media influence on journalism caused cuts for many publishers. Therefore, many news outlets like The Rolling Stone's site, Glixel, Variety, Yahoo Esports, etc. decided to primarily shut down their gaming sections after a year or two. Although, Launcher and The Washington Post have been profitable after the Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos acquired them in 2013, as well as the gaming streaming platform Twitch in 2014 (The Ringer, 2019).

In 2020, major outlets like Bloomberg and Wired have announced investments going into gaming coverage when the gaming industry soared during the COVID pandemic. The plan is to capitalize on and investigate the gaming industry by making stories that will both appeal to existing and future gamers (CNN Business, 2020).

## **8.2 Diversity issues**

A blogger Brendan "Lor" Lowry made a post in 2018 discussing the racial controversy around the upcoming release of Kingdom Come: Deliverance. Lowry found out about the controversy when he was browsing the internet and saw all of the unjustified accusations of Kingdom Come. Lowry states that: "[...] the game is accused of "whitewashing" (removing people of color from places they should be present) medieval Bohemia. Some websites have refused to cover the game outright, and progressives have condemned it." (Lortarkam, 2018)

As we have pointed out in this paper a few chapters before, *Kingdom Come* is a game based on full realism. Lowry also points out that both the games mechanics and historical depictions are also based on realism.

Lowry (Lortarkam, 2018) explains why the accusations of “whitewashing” In *Kingdom Come* are completely needless:

Though it’s true that people of color contributed to many medieval societies and were a notable part of them, this is not the case with the Kingdom of Bohemia. Aside from the native Czechs, the region was also dominated by Germans. Both of these peoples were white skinned, as were the minority groups like the Poles, Slovenians, Hungarians, Italians, and Romanians. It simply was not an area where people of color lived. Some may argue that games should be as inclusive as humanly possible in order to appeal to a wider audience and make everyone feel like they’re represented, but I disagree and reject that notion. While I do think representation is important, I also believe that it has its place. Being forced into an otherwise incredibly accurate recreation of a historical civilization is not that place. The choice of the developer to sacrifice social inclusivity for historical authenticity does not make them racist. If anything, it makes them determined and strong-willed, especially in today’s social and political climates.

### **8.3 Violent behaviour**

Christopher J. Ferguson, a professor of Psychology at the Stetson University reported for *The Conversation* (2019) about an El Paso shooting that happened on August the 3<sup>rd</sup> where dozens were left either injured or dead. Often when a young man is the one guilty for the crime, people go straight to his hobbies and try to put the blame on video games and every other form of media he used.

Ferguson (2019) emphasizes these few examples:

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick placed some of the blame on a video game industry that “teaches young people to kill.” Republican House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California went on to condemn video games that “dehumanize individuals” as a “problem for future generations.” And President Trump pointed to society’s “glorification of violence,” including “gruesome and grisly video games.” These are the same connections a Florida lawmaker made after the Parkland shooting in February 2018, suggesting that the gunman in that case “was prepared to pick off students like it’s a video game” (*The Conversation*, 2019).

Just how wrong and biased these conclusions are, Ferguson highlights by saying: “[...] as a researcher who has studied violent video games for almost 15 years, I can state that there is no evidence to support these claims that violent media and real-world violence are connected.” Even in 2011, the United States Court stated and ruled that there isn't a clear connection between violent video games and individuals who express aggressive and violent behavior. This sort of “connection” is considered as a “myth” among criminologists who study mass shootings. In 2017 Ferguson helped the American Psychological Association present a statement where they are suggesting the media and law force to stop linking mass shootings to violent media because of the lack of evidence for it (The Conversation, 2019).

## **8.4 Benefits of gaming**

The researchers at the Radboud University Nijmegen, Isabela Granic, Adam Lobel, and Rutger C. M. E. Engels point out how there has been far more research done on the topic of video games and their effect on violent behavior than there is on their benefits. To balance out the perspective they summarize the research done on the values of gaming in their article “Benefits of Playing Video Games“(2014). Players interested in “shooter“ games have shown a rise in a wide range of cognitive skills such as higher spatial resolution in visual processing, higher attention allocation, and better mental rotation abilities. Enhanced creativity has also been associated with gaming. Research has shown that playing any kind of video game has a positive influence on creative capabilities.

Playing video games affected problem-solving in a way that:

Instead of learning through explicit linear instruction (e.g., by reading a manual first), many children and youth problem-solve through trial and error, recursively collecting evidence which they test through experimentation (Granic I., Lobel A., Engels R. C. M. E., 2014).

Motivational benefits of gaming are based on rewarding the player based on his efforts, which means that:

[...] video games are an ideal training ground for acquiring an incremental theory of intelligence because they provide players concrete, immediate feedback regarding specific efforts players have made (Granic I., Lobel A., Engels R. C. M. E., 2014).



Failure in video games is used as motivation too, in a gaming environment when the player is faced with failure he is motivated to change his behavior and return to the task at hand, which is reaching his goal (Granic I., Lobel A., Engels R. C. M. E., 2014).

Gaming is considered to be one of the most efficient ways to induce positive emotions. Many studies have shown a connection between playing video games and a rise in positive feelings. However, games also endorse negative emotions such as frustration, anger, sadness, and anxiety where:

[...] research has shown on the function of traditional play, the pretend context of video games may be real enough to make the accomplishment of goals matter but also safe enough to practice controlling, or modulating, negative emotions in the service of those goals. Adaptive regulation strategies such as acceptance, problem solving, and reappraisal have repeatedly been linked to less negative effect, more social support, and lower levels of depressive symptoms (Granic I., Lobel A., Engels R. C. M. E., 2014).

As games developed so did their social features. More than 70% of gamers play games with their friends. Most popular are multiplayer games that consist of virtual social communities where players are faced with:

[...] decisions [that] need to be made on the fly about whom to trust, whom to reject, and how to most effectively lead a group. Given these immersive social contexts, [...] gamers are rapidly learning social skills and prosocial behavior that might generalize to their peer and family relations outside the gaming environment (Granic I., Lobel A., Engels R. C. M. E., 2014).

## 9. Conclusion

After becoming popularized in the 1980's, the video game industry took over the world. The first thing that needs to be done before a game developer starts a new project is research. For a game to be good and successful, game developers need to put a lot of attention to details, character development, and gameplay.

Motion capture is one of the hardest and longest elements of the whole process. It requires actors, stunt performers, the appropriate technology, and cameras.

Concept art takes a lot of time and effort to bring to perfection. Concept artists are very skilled individuals who put their heart and soul into every piece of artwork. But let's not forget about voice actors who bring life into each, and every character.

Media often represented video games in a bad light. However, with every new generation of journalists, video games are getting the attention they deserve.

Video games, overall, are pieces of art that take years to develop. And the biggest reward a game developer can receive are faithful fans, who often appreciate all that it took to get the finished product.

There is much more to a video game than meets the eye. There are countless hours of researching, writing, designing, and programming behind every single object, character, and place in the game.

Hopefully, the veil of misconceptions has been lifted, a newfound appreciation for this industry discovered and a glimpse of interest appeared.

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