

Editorial

Sarah Stang, Erin Maclean, Samuel Poirier-Poulin, Gabriel Elvery, Alexandra Catá-Ross, Ashley P. Jones, Azul Romo Flores, Bryce Stout, Dennis Jansen, Drew Fleshman, Francis Butterworth-Parr, Hayley McCullough, K.T. Wong, Madeleine Antonellos

Press Start 2021 Editorial Board

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In the editorial for the June 2020 issue, we mentioned that 2020 “has certainly been a difficult year so far,” but none of us imagined that we would still be dealing with those same difficulties a year later as we publish our June 2021 issue. Once again, we want to express our heartfelt thanks to our contributors and reviewers for their hard work bringing this new issue to fruition within the context of a seemingly endless global pandemic that has affected every aspect of our lives.

Like every year, we have had some turnover in our editorial board, saying goodbye to editors who have stepped down either because they graduated or needed to focus on other commitments (like getting their theses and dissertations written!) and welcoming some wonderful new members to fill their shoes. We have also had some exciting developments, as several of our board members have finished their PhDs and some have even successfully navigated the notoriously challenging academic job market to land faculty positions. Otherwise, Sarah Stang remains at the helm as Editor-in-Chief, Erin Maclean has taken on the role of Senior Vice Editor, and Samuel Poirier-Poulin and Gabriel Elvery have levelled up to become co-Vice Editors. Even with these changes, some things remain constant: *Press Start's* supportive, generous, and constructive approach to academic publishing; our atmosphere of transparency, collegiality, and mentorship; and our dedication to helping graduate students publish their game studies research.

Despite the inevitable and understandable delays due to both graduate student life and the challenges posed by COVID-19, we once again have an excellent new issue of *Press Start* to share with you.

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The issue begins with “Integrative Complexity, Horror, and Gender: A Linguistic Case Study of *Until Dawn*” by Hayley McCullough, who is also one of our new board members. In this article, McCullough compares the integrative complexity levels of female and male characters in the horror video game *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games, 2015). Her study reveals that the female characters scored significantly lower than the male characters, supporting the idea that female characters are devalued in horror narratives and often lack agency, nuance, and complexity.

Hibby Thach’s article, “A Cross-Game Look at Transgender Representation in Video Games,” examines transgender portrayals in video games released between 1988–2019. Four main trends of trans representation are identified: a focus on dysphoria/physical transition, the portrayal of trans characters as mentally-ill killers, the use of trans shock/reveal, and ambiguity in which gender is left open to audience interpretation. The article reveals that trans representations are often homogenized and potentially harmful in AAA games, similar to portrayals in film and television, and suggests that more realistic, nuanced, and positive trans narratives can be found instead in independent games.

Simon Bowie’s article, “Posthumanism in *Outer Wilds*,” performs a posthumanist reading of the BAFTA-winning game. Bowie examines how *Outer Wilds* (Mobius Digital, 2019) explores the differences between the two conceptions of subjectivity: a transhumanism focused on technological augmentation of the human, and a posthumanism focused on decentering the human subject from philosophy and culture. The article concludes with a discussion of how *Outer Wilds* can encourage reflection on what it means to be a posthuman ethical subject in a world on the verge of environmental collapse.

In “Humans as Data: *Watch_Dogs 2*’s Marxist Criticism of Social Media and the Internet,” Kai Kehrer uncovers how *Watch_Dogs 2*’s (Ubisoft, 2016) underlying narrative message—that our digital and social lives are being monopolized by a handful of technology companies—is contradicted by the gameplay. Through a detailed reading of the game’s ideological commitments and gameplay design, Kehrer demonstrates how the game’s efforts to maximize the player’s moment-to-moment entertainment muddles its critique of security and data privacy.

“The Reliquaries of Hyrule: A Semiotic and Iconographic Analysis of Sacred Architecture Within *Ocarina of Time*” by Jared Hansen explores religious symbolism in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo, 1998). Through semiotic analysis, this article examines the game’s main temples and their association with Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christian architecture and iconography. Hansen argues that creating virtual environments with religious and sacred meaning may encourage

spirituality in the players, as the progression in the game mimics the sacred rituals of said religions.

Finally, we end our issue with Braden Timss's book review of *A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames* by Brendan Keogh. It has been a while since we published a book review, so we are very pleased to include such a careful and nuanced look at this important contribution to game studies.

Thank you again to our authors and reviewers for all your hard work in helping us to publish these pieces, which we feel demonstrate how engaging and important graduate student game studies writing is. We are always accepting submissions on a rolling basis and looking for peer reviewers—we post updates, calls for special issue contributions, and review requests on our social media pages. Also, please keep an eye out for our wonderful upcoming special issue on "Digital Heroisms," to be published later this year.

Best wishes from the *Press Start* editorial board!