

Domesticating the First-Person Shooter: The Emergent Challenge of *Gone Home*'s Homely Chronotope

Dean Bowman

University of East Anglia

Abstract

This article argues that—due to their lack of conformity to key characteristics of dominant videogame paradigms, particularly the violent competitiveness of “agonistic” play—the walking simulator is at the heart of a struggle over changing definitions and material realities of videogame consumption and production, linked to the emergence of disruptive female and queer player and creator identities (Anthropy, 2012; Chess, 2017; Juul, 2012; Shaw, 2015). The genre thus provides a valuable alternative space within what has been referred to as the “hegemonic” limits of the game industry, which privileges—through various historically embedded mechanisms—a white, male, cis-gendered, and heteronormative audience (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce, 2007). Such progressive gains have been hotly contested by so-called hardcore gamers (Dymek, 2012; Gursoy, 2013; Kagen, 2017), who view them as a threat to the prevailing orthodoxy of game production that has historically served their interests.

Furthermore, by uncritically adopting the dominant and normative industry-oriented paradigm, game studies has served to further reify this hegemonic player through the replication of its values in rigidly formalist definitions of play constructed around agonistic values (Aarseth, 1997; Juul, 2003). I call this tendency “orthodox game studies,” a position that has bled into wider discourses wherein walking simulators are constructed as “not real games.” I argue that *Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013), a prominent example of the genre, challenges industry hegemony and orthodox game studies by enacting a subversive appropriation of first-person shooter (FPS) mechanics and a radical decentering of the hegemonic gamer—constructing a domestic space as the ground for the development of new subjectivities of play (Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce, 2007). To articulate this, I draw on Bakhtin’s (1981b) notion of the chronotope, demonstrating the critical relevance of this theoretical tool to game studies.

Keywords

Walking simulators; *Gone Home*; hegemony of play; chronotope; Bakhtin

Press Start 2019 | Volume 5 | Issue 2

ISSN: 2055-8198

URL: <http://press-start.gla.ac.uk>



Press Start is an open access student journal that publishes the best undergraduate and postgraduate research, essays and dissertations from across the multidisciplinary subject of game studies. Press Start is published by HATII at the University of Glasgow.

Introduction

The term “walking simulator” has come to apply to a group of independently produced and mechanically minimalist videogames with a deep focus on narrative and immersion over more traditional “agonistic” elements (Carbo-Mascarell, 2016; Kagen, 2017; Muscat & Duckworth, 2018). Here, *agon* corresponds to one of Roger Caillois’ (2001) four classic play archetypes; it relates to the competitive struggle and rivalry characteristic of ancient Greek sporting events. In Caillois’ writing, *agon* is clearly privileged over other forms of play, such as *mimicry* (make-believe), *illinx* (vertigo), or *alea* (chance). Caillois ascribes all of these other forms, in a problematic imperialistic flourish, to the ritualistic traditions of lesser developed societies, supposedly inferior to enlightened Western models of sportsmanship and economic competition—in other words, capitalist progress (pp. 77–78).¹

Indeed, Caillois’ notion of *agon* has had an enduring influence on the formative decades of game studies, particularly the work of ludologists such as Jesper Juul (2003), who enshrines these agonistic notions in his influential “classic game model.” Such agonistic qualities—manifesting as competitive challenge, violent struggle, or mechanical complexity—are often considered by designers and academics alike to be at the heart of an authentic gameplay experience (Costikyan, 2002, p. 14), but these qualities are conspicuously and significantly absent from walking simulators. It is this lack of conformity to dominant gaming paradigms that has been a source of immense controversy, crystallising in discourses around the reception of the genre with self-identifying gamers insisting that such experimental forms are “not real games.”²

Reductive definitions of walking simulators abound, belittling them as nothing but interactive fictions masquerading as games (equally dismissive of the vast and productive field of interactive fiction). Such a reduction cannot help but recall the notorious ludology/narratology debate that shaped early game studies concepts and agendas;³ in its purest form, this debate overtly dismissed narrative concerns,⁴ seeking instead to study games as formalist and functionalist rule-bound systems separated from

¹ The selective use of this text by game scholars and game design teachers the world over elides the imperialistic and chauvinist qualities of the work which, as a formative text of the field, is overdue a critical reassessment. Such a reassessment is beyond my scope here.

² For an instructive example see Ayse Gursoy’s (2013, p. 57) study of the reception of *Dear Esther* (The Chinese Room, 2012), widely considered to be the patient zero of the walking simulator.

³ See Ensslin (2014) for an overview of what is well-trodden ground.

⁴ One need look no further than the inaugural issue of the *Game Studies* journal, in which Espen Aarseth’s (2001) editorial employed a revolutionary rhetoric seeking to fend off “colonising” incursions from the humanities and, in the same issue, Markku Eskelinen (2001) notoriously dismissed narrative in games as “uninteresting ornaments” solely existing to serve the needs of marketers.

wider cultural concerns, as argued recently by Aubrey Anable (2018). Despite the longstanding influence of ludology on what I call “orthodox game studies,” a more recent strand of scholarship seeks to push back against these dominant, formalist tendencies to relink game studies to wider critical discourses of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and critical media theory (Anable, 2018; Chess, 2017; Keogh, 2018; Ruffino, 2018a). Important in this regard was Helen Kennedy and Jon Dovey’s (2006) seminal *Game Cultures*, which constituted an early attempt to rescue the field from a kind of naïve apoliticism best exemplified by Aarseth’s notorious attempt to dismiss the representational aspects of games (using Lara Croft’s overt sexualisation as an example) as unimportant considerations compared to their mechanical function (p. 93).

Another early example of resistance included the notion of “The Hegemony of Play” by Janine Fron et al. (2007), which critiqued game studies’ tendency to derive its theoretical models from an industry that unequivocally and consistently rendered its player-base as male. Here they defined this hegemonic gamer identity, discursively created and constantly maintained by industry discourse and rhetoric, as:

characterized by an adolescent male sensibility that transcends physical age and embraces highly stylized graphical violence, male fantasies of power and domination, hyper-sexualized, objectified depictions of women, and rampant racial stereotyping and discrimination. (p. 7)

Fron et al. issued their warning about the industry (and, by extension, academia) pandering to the hardcore gamer archetype long before #GamerGate demonstrated the dangers of leaving this hypermasculine identity unchecked (Ging, 2017; Massanari, 2017; Ruffino, 2018b). The legacy of the ludological position, though it softened over time, still undergirds game studies’ dominant paradigms, so much so that their definitions of play have bled out into the larger cultural discourse. This is evident in the rhetorical similarities between reactionary popular attacks on walking simulators as “not real games” on forums across the internet and orthodox game studies’ narrowly formalist definitions, each focused solely on the agonistic qualities of games.

On the other hand, scholars who value the genre couch this perceived “lack” in more progressive terms as a form of resistance to stultifying commercial formations that ossify games into rigid popular genres. For instance, Melissa Kagen (2017) argues that walking simulators are a prominent subset of a larger category of “anti-games,” evoking Alexander Galloway’s (2006) famous notion of “countergaming,” which subverts the form with an often politicised and self-reflexive flair. Meanwhile Bonnie Ruberg (2015) sees them as an embodiment of an emerging queer tradition, where dominant notions of fun and interaction are subverted and problematised as heteronormative. The thing that unites these opposing viewpoints, it seems, is the acknowledgement

that, for better or worse, walking simulators are perceived as a threat to the prevailing order. Indeed, Brendan Keogh (2018) has argued that games like these have stretched the notion of what videogames can be in an industrial and academic sense to a breaking point (p. 11). With classic models of the player and the game seemingly buckling in the face of new design paradigms and audiences, the branching dialogue choice the industry now faces is to broaden those definitions to accommodate these new forms, or to resist them in order to maintain definitions that have by now become dogmatic scripture.

This article utilises a case study of a prominent example of the genre, *Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013), to examine the implications of this new genre. In particular, it considers the case study in terms of its ontological approach to space and how this may facilitate the formation of new player subjectivities. Unlike the agonistic battlefields of the first-person shooter (Fullerton et al., 2007; Phillips, 2015), *Gone Home* unfolds in the simple domestic space of a large house in which a highly personal story unfurls. This story is experienced indirectly by the player through the eyes of a young female student, Kaitlin Greenbriar, returning from a year abroad in Europe—a far cry from the middle-aged, white male protagonists that have become the stock-in-trade of the industry (Kaiser, 2014). Instead of the warm embrace of her family, Katie is greeted with an ominous note from her younger sister Samantha and, beyond that, an empty house strewn with the detritus of the early 1990s. The narrative centres around the discovery and unfolding of Sam's sexual awakening and coming out as a lesbian, and the tensions this causes with their conservative parents. Significantly, this is one of the first high-profile instances of an LGBTQ+ narrative at the heart of a commercially successful videogame, and its sensitive handling has been praised by many queer commentators (Kate, 2013; Kopas, 2017; Riendeau, 2013). *Gone Home's* female character and non-normative themes are undoubtedly related to the dismissive backlash the game has suffered at the hands of a reactionary hardcore player base, with one Steam reviewer referring to the genre as "fake 'games' from liberal idiots who can't keep their stupid politics off their 'games'" (Ghibli BTFO, 2017).⁵

In an industry already rocked by crises of representation, where the lack of diversity in development teams jars with an extensive diversification of audiences (Weststar, Legault, Gosse, & O'Meara, 2016), including extensive emerging female and queer audiences (Anthropy, 2012; Chess, 2017; Juul, 2012; Ruberg & Shaw, 2017; Shaw, 2015), such struggle is inevitably expressed in its textual products. I argue that the walking simulator has become a key site where this ideological struggle over cultural capital and new subjectivities plays out. It is thus a focal point of the growing epistemological and ontological debates over what should

⁵ The consistent use of air-quotes around the word "games" in this attack makes it clear that the author does not feel walking simulators deserve to be considered such.

constitute a “game” (and, by extension, who gets to play them). Identity formation is inextricably linked to our cultural products, because, as Katherine Hayles (2005) reminds us in her seminal study of how digital paradigms have come to transform our ideological worldviews: “‘what we make’ and ‘what (we think) we are’ coevolve together” (p. 243). To appropriate the rhetoric of their opponents, and following the lead of Kagen, walking simulators should be thought of as a kind of anti-game in this context: less interested in finding a place within the currently existing commercial and critical orthodoxy than subverting it from within.

Gone Home is the ideal case study, not only because it achieved a considerable amount of critical and commercial success, but because it has been given the tag “walking simulator” by 3316 users on Steam (Steamspy, 2019a), making it the doyen of the genre. I argue that the game subverts the dominant gamer archetype through strategically appropriating and reassembling elements of dominant videogame culture, most obviously in its subversion of the tropes of the first-person shooter (FPS) genre and by enacting a radical decentring of the player within the text. I draw on the dialogic theories of language developed by M. M. Bakhtin (1981a; 1981b; 1981c) to illustrate the terms of this displacement. Languages, Bakhtin claimed, including all the derivative works of culture they produce, are fundamentally polyglottal (multi-voiced) since they always already contain unavoidable meanings and exist in contexts that pre-exist any attempt to speak them. Illustrative of the polyglottal nature of the walking simulator is the fact that, just as hardcore players deride them for their lack of gameness, others use this quality to attempt to imagine a broader audience for the medium (Alexander, 2013).

Such clashes between sub-cultural identities, their worldviews, and taste cultures in the increasingly factional and heterogenous field of videogame culture are in line with Bakhtin’s (1981a) notion of polyglossia, where:

within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other. (pp. 354–355)

Although they may be far removed from the agonistic in terms of gameplay, such games, by amplifying these cultural transitions in their gameplay logics and narrative themes, find themselves at the fraught centre of this debate. Of specific relevance is Bakhtin’s (1981b) notion of the chronotope, which he describes as:

the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships ... fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (p. 84)

I use this spatio-temporal tool and the role it plays in identity formation to unpack the political and social complexity of the domestic space of *Gone Home*. I argue this walking simulator presents a potent alternative to the typical game spaces normally constructed around militarised notions of agonistic conflict (Fullerton et al., 2007) or colonial metaphors of domination and control (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995).

“Walking is the New Shooting”: The Walking Simulator as Emergent Challenge to Industry Orthodoxy

Theorists such as Rick Altman (1999) tend to understand genres not as organised and coherent structures defined and deployed by industry to organise its products, but as the result of complex processes of negotiation between industry marketing, critical interpretation, and audience expectation. Genres must thus be understood as “a site of struggle among users” (Altman, 1999, p. 99), a multi-coded process that is the emergent and precarious result of such social production. For Altman, this is where “multiple groups who, by helping to define the genre, may be said to ‘speak’ the genre” (p. 208), with the generic category itself coming to act “as regulatory schemes facilitating the integration of diverse factions into a single social fabric” (p. 208). Genre, then, is fundamentally polyglottal: able to accommodate multiple interpretations for different collectives of social actors held in tension. Just as the walking simulator provides a beachhead on the margins of the medium for new audiences to arrive, it becomes a front within larger online culture wars (Nagle, 2017) for entrenched gamer identities to enter into conflict with these emergent identities.⁶

As the scale of videogames has become ever more ambitious (Maiberg, 2016), a result of the increasing oligopolistic consolidation of the industry around a few big studios (Kline, Dyer-Witthof, & de Peuter, 2003, pp. 171–172), genres are routinely hybridised to capture as many potential players as possible. In the crowded modern marketplace, these multi-layered games are a categorical imperative—combining mechanics and sub-systems from a number of genres to create a kind of all-encompassing experience that keeps players locked into a product cycle for months or years. This shift in single-player game design, to say nothing of similar trends in multiplayer experiences, is characterised by huge open worlds, drenched in roleplaying game (RPG) progression systems, and packed with activities (Meikleham, 2017). Rather than opening up the medium, this hybridisation and excess of content imposes a regimented homogeneity sometimes referred to as “the ever-

⁶ In this context, the *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* mod by Nipper that transforms *Gone Home* into a first-person shooter (see Matulef, 2014b) can be viewed not only as a humorous parody of modern gaming’s mechanically reductive set of concerns that renders everything into a violent arena of agonistic struggle, but as recognition of the game’s fraught position in relation to the FPS and as a site of struggle between hardcore and new audiences.

game”—a game supposedly so complete that it fulfils all of a player’s needs and desires, which is endlessly chased as the holy grail of modern, commercial game design.

The huge budgets and growing financial risks in mainstream videogame development have resulted in a hit-driven and risk-averse industry (Readman & Grantham, 2006, p. 263) that adopts a cautious policy of careful improvements over wholesale innovation (Whitson, 2013). A reciprocal, self-reinforcing process can thus be identified in the production of content which maps onto what Mikolaj Dymek (2012) calls the “industry spiral,” in which powerful platform holders and publisher marketing strategies set the standards for the industry at large. These standards construct priorities and values at the macro level that trickle down and inform individual texts. Thus, iteration remains a watchword for the industry, describing a process of slow and careful cyclical refinement of tried-and-tested systems and ideas rigidly constrained by industry norms and assumptions, all built around the established audience of the white, male gamer at its normative centre (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006; Dymek, 2012; Fron et al., 2007).

In particular, this can be seen by the rise and unmitigated commercial success of the FPS, which has been linked to the social context of American military exceptionalism and unilateral geopolitical intervention following the September 11 attacks in 2001 (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009; Robinson, 2012). This genre casts a shadow over modern gaming culture, characterising what Stephen Kline et al. (2003) refer to as “militarised masculinity,” a hypermasculine subject position which has “structured virtual experience across most of gaming’s major genres, constructed by design and marketing practices aimed at the industry’s most reliable customers - adolescent boys and young men” (pp. 194–195). The fact that shooting is held up by hardcore gamers as the ultimate mechanical activity in a videogame, whilst walking/interacting is reviled as pedestrian, reveals the way dominant values in games circulate around agonistic notions of highly complex skill-based play on a mechanical level and violent interactions on a narrative level.⁷ The fact that walking simulators by and large reject both of these excessively macho positions is highly revealing of the subversive relationship of this genre vis-à-vis the FPS. Indeed, their simplicity of focus and short play times are a significant deviation from the exigencies and imperatives of modern commercial game design.

Crucially, the homogenising tendency described above is an activity not only undertaken by the industry attempting to pre-format its products to imagined audiences or merely of videogame fandoms undertaking identity formation work, but is refracted within the scholarly traditions of the academy itself; written, you might say, into the underlying code of

⁷ This is revealed by Amanda Phillips’ (2015) potent analysis of the aesthetic and mechanical reification of headshots in the genre and its far-reaching cultural implications.

game studies, which as I have argued above is shot through with agonistic priorities. The walking simulator's deviation from normative models of play not only suggests a short-circuiting of the dominant industry paradigm described by Dymek and others, but also flies in the face of many long-standing academic definitions. Jesper Juul's (2003) "classic game model," which is itself built from a thorough overview of pre-existing definitions, is a case in point and defines games as:

a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable. (p. 35)

Juul's definition is one of the more generous versions of the formalist and instrumentalist model of games that emerged out of the ludologist movement,⁸ but even here walking simulators appear to be excluded by definition since they feature a rule-based system only in the broadest possible sense; they are often concerned with telling a particular story and do not have a variable or quantifiable outcome. Certainly, the player exerts mental effort in reassembling that story, but this is hardly what Juul means by "effort"—instead, he is drawing on Aarseth's (1997) breakthrough work *Cybertext*, which introduced the notion of the "ergodic" nature of games, where "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (p. 1).

However, there is now ample evidence that the comfortable homogeneity of the industry and the uniformity of its products, defined by the FPS and the classic game model, is starting to give way to a heterogenous new arrangement. This new arrangement is led by a polyglot assemblage of diverse voices, including a growing collective of queer and female players who do not align so comfortably with the hegemonic model or its key works (Chess, 2017; Juul, 2012; Ruberg & Shaw, 2017).⁹ Ruffino (2018a) proposes that the result of this influx of new voices, manifesting most clearly in the rise of the indie scene, is the disruption of the industry and its products as stable objects, and, as a consequence, the destabilisation of the hegemonic paradigm of the gamer, which has been historically created and maintained through them (pp. 14–15). The industry is thus pitched between the seemingly contradictory desire to appeal to a reliable, hardcore fanbase with

⁸ Indeed, he admits in the conference paper that videogames have challenged the classic game model as it has pertained for centuries due to the medium's uniquely interactive characteristics, though narrative is still implied to be outside of these systems.

⁹ Although this by no means suggests that such groups can't or don't play such games, but they do so with a problematic and other-marked relation to the dominant audience, as studies of all-female FPS clans like The Frag Dolls and PMS (Psychotic Men Slayers), expressly constructed as exceptions from the norm, have aptly shown (Newman, 2004, p. 56).

predictable if demanding tastes, or to explore new ludic and narrative formations (Dymek, 2012). This bifurcation of the market is now widely acknowledged within the industry itself (Merel, 2011; 2012), even while it is grudgingly resisted by the hardcore player base.

Gone Home's designer Steve Gaynor (2015) has himself demonstrated an awareness of this division, and the opportunities it affords, as a motivating factor for his own work:

There are new ways to get those games to audiences more easily and there's this generation of developers who ... given the chance to make their own thing on their own terms and bring it to an audience themselves, they're going to take the game literacy they have and do things with it that we wouldn't normally see otherwise. (personal communication)

For Gaynor, this pre-existing "game literacy" derives from his experience working at Irrational Games for the *BioShock* series (2007–2013), which endeavoured to explore more mature, philosophical issues through its fiction and mechanics (Jackson, 2014). Gaynor's reading of these changes in the current audience formation might appear overtly optimistic or premature,¹⁰ reliant as they are on the existence of an audience willing to go along with the gamble, but whilst it is hard to assess the true extent and nature of this audience outside of an extensive reception study, these games undoubtedly continue to perform well critically and commercially, despite the backlash against them within the established medium's fandom.

Although walking simulators would not exist without the considerable gains made by the larger experimental indie scene—which, over the last decade, has taken advantage of new audiences as well as technological developments to forge crucial new links to ever broadening and fragmenting market demographics—walking simulators must take centre stage in accounts of this diversification of formats by virtue of their extreme deviation from the dominant model towards more accessible forms of play. For instance, their mechanical simplicity allows non-traditional and non-hardcore players (derided for years as "casuals") to experience their interactive narratives without having to learn complex control interfaces, which tend to be a significant barrier to entry (Calleja, 2011, p. 171; Keogh, 2018, pp. 77–78). Walking simulators are, therefore, a complex product of, and simultaneously illustrative of, larger material and cultural shifts in the industry and its practices;

¹⁰ Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to unpack, there are clear links between the generational maturation of the established game audiences, which has led to a demand for different kinds of experience (De Prato, Lindmark, & Simon, 2012, p. 233; Readman & Grantham, 2006, p. 261), and the transitions we are witnessing in television with the emergence of "prestige television" (Sepinwall, 2013) and streaming services targeting niche audiences in the post-network era (Lotz, 2014).

economic and technical shifts that afford new approaches to game design and distribution; as well as evidence of changing modes of consumption and, with them, entirely new player subjectivities. As Dovey and Kennedy (2006) once predicted, “as gaming culture becomes a central part of the mediated environment it will begin to produce a diversification of product and personnel at its margins,” which has the potential to “change the nature of existing game cultures” (p. 141).

We do the indie sector a disservice if we see it as diametrically opposed to, and thus entirely isolated from, AAA. Rather, it is bound up with the larger networks of game production through interdependency of resources, audiences, and ideas. The relationship between indie and AAA is best understood in complexly relational and recursive terms in which the two sectors, as they come into ever closer alignment, constantly co-create one another. Indeed, some journalists (e.g. Matulef, 2014) have recently noted with admiration the increasing presence of elements characteristic of walking simulators within prominent AAA experiences, such as *Alien: Isolation* (Creative Assembly, 2014). A cynical reading might see this as evidence of the dominant culture consuming and neutralising the threat of this emergent form, when it may in fact be more characteristic of a subversive appropriation of the dominant centre by new subjectivities in the periphery.¹¹ I prefer to hope that the inclusion of such radical emergent elements *back into* dominant works will have a potentially reconfigurative effect on the culture into which they are inserted and its prevailing worldview.¹²

The radical potential of this exchange of ideas between dominant centre and emergent periphery is evident, in our example, by Gaynor’s transition from AAA to indie production. Such a transition is romantically and idealistically celebrated in the gaming press (Mahardy, 2013), which frames his explicit desire to critically engage with and subvert the dominant FPS models he once participated in creating. In doing so, Gaynor (2015) consciously turns the narrative, mechanical, and emotional potential of the hybrid mainstream form to non-violent ends through a selective appropriation and refocusing of its elements:

Our basic thinking was that if we effectively just took the combat out of Bioshock and took out the RPGish elements and stuff; [what] if it was just the aspect of exploring an immersive environment and finding the story there through environmental storytelling and audio diaries. (personal communication)

¹¹ These terms gesture towards the work of Raymond Williams (2003), whose cultural materialist framework understands historical periods as a complex arrangement of dominant, emergent, and residual elements.

¹² How much is carried across in the process, and how effectively, remains to be seen. This should be the subject of future research in this crucial moment of industry transition, but important work towards this has already been undertaken by Kagen (2017; 2018) through the lens of the walking simulator.

Alexander Galloway (2006) has famously described the “kernel image” of the first-person shooter genre, a constitutive element of *Bioshock*, as “a subjective camera perspective, coupled with a weapon in the foreground” (p. 57). In *Gone Home*, however, the subjective perspective is explicitly maintained whilst the weapon, and thus the violent means of interaction it imposes on the player, is jettisoned—a deconstructive gesture that also by association rejects much of the culture of militarised masculinity the gun has come to represent in gaming. The player has been potently disarmed.

If Galloway (2006, p.2) claims action is the heart of the gamic form, then this is a very different kind of kernel image that places communication and exploration above conflict and athleticism. Indeed, this is concretised in *Firewatch* (Campo Santo, 2016) by the explicit replacement of the gun with a walkie-talkie. Such is a penchant for richly affective narrative experience divested from traditional agonistic mechanics or complexity of interaction. That hardcore gamer discourses on forums, social media, and comment fields across the internet have turned so vociferously against this genre, and new audiences associated with it, is a potent indicator of the extent of the industrial split, and the stakes involved in debates around titles like *Gone Home*.¹³

Bakhtin (1981a) uses the terms centrifugal and centripetal to denote the two forces at play in language and its larger cultural context, constantly seeking to explode its potential meanings or close them down (p. 272). The gamer identity outlined above—although partial, provisional, and in no way representing the entire audience of games—can be understood as such a centripetal force since it seeks to act as a conservative rallying point for homogeneity in the face of diverse new cultures of play. Meanwhile, opposing centrifugal forces, of which I argue the walking simulator is a prime example, attempt to explode prevailing forms, attitudes, and meanings outwards.¹⁴

From Virtual Backyards to Digital Indoors: The Subversive Effect of *Gone Home*'s Domestic Chronotope

Despite the almost universally positive response by games journalists, and the reactionary backlash from hardcore gaming communities, academic interest in *Gone Home* has been more ambivalent: often justifiably critical and, at times, bafflingly hostile. Ian Bogost's (2013)

¹³ Such a practice of reactive protectionism against external threats has been well observed in the field of fan studies (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2012) and Bruno Latour (2005, p. 31) has argued that the perception and construction of an external other is essential to group formation.

¹⁴ It has been argued, for instance, that the current rancour of gaming culture is a response to industry diversification and an ontological struggle over the value of the term “gamer,” in which hardcore communities of play seek to preserve it as it is and progressive journalists and scholars attempt to adapt or scrap it (see Ruffino, 2018b for a commentary on this phenomena).

piece for the *LA Review of Books* is indicative of the latter reaction, wherein he can barely contain his indignation that *Gone Home* is acclaimed as a high point of videogame storytelling. The review dismissively insists that, instead, the game is “a literary work on the level of young adult fiction” and, according to Bogost, illustrative of the immaturity in popular culture more broadly, which is “mired in a permanent adolescence that videogames can now easily equal.”

The tone of stuffy elitism here ignores that every era has had its popular and commercial expressions of culture outweigh its loftier pursuits; after all, it is certainly not the case that a generation ago teenagers were avidly reading Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, a masterpiece of literary fiction that Bogost sets up here as the impossible intellectual bar to which *Gone Home* fails to rise. That Bogost (2015; 2017) continues to fly the anti-narrative flag in high profile journalistic articles like these does much to extend ludologist ways of thinking into the popular and mainstream domains, where it echoes and reinforces the critical backlash against the initial success of these games. It seems incredible that we should have to return to the argument put forward by Henry Jenkins (2006) in his influential article “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” to remind ourselves how disingenuous it is to compare the approach to storytelling in games on a one-to-one ratio to the expectations of an entirely different medium.¹⁵

Dimitrios Pavlounis (2016) undertakes a more nuanced critique that cautions against the blitheness with which we embrace the surface progressive values of a text like *Gone Home*, arguing that because it still depends so much on the foundations of heteronormative attitudes to game design, it is inevitably held back in its ambitions. However, his conclusion that “*any critique* is undercut by the game’s systems” (p. 588, my emphasis) risks over-privileging the underlying formal systems of the game every bit as much as the ludologists’ carefully deployed schematic models and throwing the progressive thematic baby out with the regressive mechanical bathwater. Between these two extremes—dismissing the game for not being as literary as Virginia Woolf and for not shedding every vestige of the dominant ludic grammar—is there not a position where we can appreciate the progressive achievements the game *does* make without falling into the trap of claiming it has solved all the medium’s problems in one fell swoop? At stake in both the above critiques is the notion of space and so, by attending to this, I hope I can demonstrate this middle ground.

For Bogost in *Gone Home*, everything fits together too neatly, which, as other commentators have rightly pointed out, hardly captures the messy, confusing, and challenging life experiences of coming out as a

¹⁵ Bakhtin’s (1981c) writing is informative here too, since his study of the evolution of the novel’s literary form demonstrates that it did not leap fully formed from history, as Bogost seems to believe, but gradually crystallised from its origins in simplistic adventure stories of the classical era.

queer teenager (Myers, 2013). But this is not the issue for Bogost (2013), rather the setting fails to appear authentic because

anything less than ontological fullness breaks the immersive promise of a lived-in world ... At worst, it amounts to a complicated menu system for selecting narrative fragments.

Here, Bogost evokes that old adage by making perfection the enemy of the good, and seems to forget his own claims that every game contains an inevitable "simulation gap" (Bogost, 2010, p. 43) between what it seeks to represent and what it ultimately does represent. *Gone Home* is not perfect and, therefore, it fails utterly. But such flippancy ignores the achievements such a small team has made in rendering hundreds of individual objects that can each be interacted with in an industry that typically fills its virtual locales with a limited range of static and duplicated props.

For Pavlounis (2016), the problem with the house is how it represents the notion of the "archive" as a static, unified entity concealing a fundamental truth, rather than the messy, contingent, partial, and heterogenous manner in which post-structural theory imagines it (Derrida, 1998). Ultimately, he claims, it still "adher[es] to design conventions typical of the games industry" (Pavlounis, 2016, pp. 581–582), thus placing the game mechanically within the hegemony of play and ontologically within the gaze of the colonial male subject, appropriating and organising the game space according to a logic of domination and exclusion (Pratt, 1992). The game is thus said to imagine the player as a tourist in the archive, like Robert Yang's (2017) critique of the larger movement of empathy games in which the player is seen to be merely trying on the clothing of the marginalised other. And this is especially true of the developer, Pavlounis claims, because despite the sensitivity with which Gaynor, as a straight white man, claims to have gone about researching and writing his queer female character (Fyfe, 2015), the result can only ever be appropriative and reductive in which the game "disavows any ethical complications by framing Sam's story as one crafted specifically for Katie's consumption" (Pavlounis, 2016, p. 588).

Yet, arguably, the player's actual interaction with the space, and the drawing out of its story through the objects contained within, are much more subjective and affective than this analysis implies. For all its supposed linearity, the game affords a huge degree of latitude in interacting with myriad unique objects in an evocative domestic space that strongly brings to mind the affective memories of a real time and place (Riendeau, 2013). Indeed, this is crucial to its storytelling since the player must discern, through active engagement, which objects are meaningful without the typical UI prompts that cue player attention in most games. This suggests that the emphasis in *Gone Home* is on creating real emotional relationships to what Sherry Turkle (2011) refers to as evocative objects: objects so strongly associated with people and their worldviews that they provide deep opportunities for reflection.

It is hard to see this as unsuccessful given the well-documented and self-motivated activities undertaken by many players to arrange these myriad objects into shrines dedicated to specific characters or, indeed, to mythologise and narrativise individual items like the “Christmas duck” (Ellison, 2013). Whilst Pavlounis sees such activities as evidence of players expressively interacting with the game in spite of its rigidity (suggesting a centripetal closing down of options and meanings), there is ample evidence that such participation was actively encouraged by the design itself, which explicitly allows players to pick up and manipulate all small objects. Indeed, in a high-profile Game Developers Conference talk, Gaynor (2014) himself uses these moments as evidence of the expressive potential of *Gone Home* and proof that it possesses the procedurality and freedom of interaction that allows it to be considered a game.

By breaking the contextual and conceptual moorings of the strict categories of object-oriented design, where virtual objects inherit the traits of their parent categories in a rigid tree of hierarchical relationships, this game allows players to perform and create their own affective arrangements and subjective taxonomies that are rhizomatic in nature. In doing so, players can tell stories through objects in an emergent way that belies the rigidity that Bogost and Pavlounis see as defining the game. Rather than the objectivity and mastery a colonial relationship to space implies, a worldview has been seen to align to videogames (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995; Mukherjee, 2017), *Gone Home* offers a space of respectful understanding, even offering players a prompt that allows them to carefully place objects back where they found them, thus mechanically underlining the fact that they are a mere visitor within another’s story and should tread lightly.

Crucially, this reframing of the story as it is viewed tangentially decentres the player so used to being at the privileged centre of a ludic world that bends to their will through their choices and actions (backed up by firepower). Here, the player is powerless to affect events directly and must merely bear witness to their unfolding through traces that are left behind. The player watches Samantha’s story unfold through Katie, in a manner which eschews the dangers inherent in empathy games—namely, the trivialisation of real experiences—even whilst it radically decentres the player, who, like Henry in Kagen’s (2018) account of *Firewatch*, is no longer posited as integral to the narrative.

In *Gone Home*, simple puzzles and locked doors seemingly rigidly control the player’s movement through the house and its narrative. For Pavlounis (2016), such linearity is an example of the game’s failure to embody queerness in mechanical rather than simply representational terms. But the theme and the method of its delivery (its narration) are in conflict only if we consider linearity to be the norm in the context of videogames. Rather, I would suggest that open worlds that gesture towards a privileged player freedom and imply a colonial domination of space are the most dominant structure for games, a fact that has led

some scholars to argue that linearity should be considered a radical queer position in games (Pelurson, 2019). This does not derail previous arguments about queer disruption of (hetero)norms, but calls us to recognise in each case the specificities of the medium at hand. In literature and film, for example, linearity is the norm to be disrupted, enshrined in classical models of realist fiction and the classical Hollywood style that works towards reassuring closure (Bordwell, Staiger, & Thompson, 1988). In games, however, it is the illusory and superficial openness of the game world, echoed in definitional frameworks like the classic game model—with the attendant emphasis on freedom of choice, mechanical complexity, procedurality, and exploration—that is increasingly the norm to be disrupted.

In his article “Complete Freedom of Movement,” Henry Jenkins (1998) argues that games act as “digital backyards,” replacing the dwindling reserves of real-life wilderness that fuelled traditional boy’s culture. Such games, which he identifies as the dominant expression of videogame culture, tend to replicate the tropes and traits of male young adult adventure fiction such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 2014), whilst works oriented toward female readers like *The Secret Garden* (Burnett, 2015) evoke the intimacy of a formalised domestic space instead. Such literature tended to socialise children to specific, sanctioned gender roles through a set of binary distinctions that are mapped onto the overall gender binary: society/nature, adventure/domesticity, and outside/inside. In each case the former term is considered the privileged pole of the dichotomy and associated with masculinity. By tracing specific genres of games from those traditions, Jenkin’s shows how game spaces are gendered and continue these tropes of socialisation in digital spaces.¹⁶

Such conceptualisation of space and its bearing on subjectivity can be explored through Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope. This concept accounts for spatio-temporal motifs which emerge at specific historically contingent moments to provide potent concrete structures around which specific subjectivities come to form. Such spaces afford, constrain, and shape certain types of interactions and narratives; as social geographers have long argued (Lynch, 1960; Tuan, 1977), the human experience of space is complex and deeply constitutive of our worldviews. As a highly spatial medium (Jenkins, 2006), videogames are well suited to contribute to this process, especially since they directly simulate such spaces. By utilising the highly constrained and private chronotope of an empty house, *Gone Home* not only recalls the horror conventions that

¹⁶ Shira Chess’s (2017, pp. 98–99) study of female oriented games, for instance, finds that casual games aimed at female audiences, like *Cooking Mama* (Office Create, 2006) and *Diner Dash* (Gamelab, 2004), tend to be focused around similar themes of servitude, care-giving, and domestic tasks rather than adventures in far-flung exotic spaces that determine most games in the action-adventure genre aimed at males.

are relentlessly subverted by the game in favour of normal explanations (the game's conclusion suggests that it is homophobia that is abhorrent, rather than the supernatural elements hinted at throughout), but actively makes the player's experience one of intimate and constrained domesticity, rather than the freedom of far-flung adventure.

In the adventure novels of the past, Bakhtin (1981b) finds chronotopes of the meeting, the road, and the agora, which are structures that are often repeated in mainstream videogames constructed around quest narratives. But for Bakhtin, the modern novel evolves alongside the chronotope of the drawing room, which emerges historically as a new private/domestic space, becoming instrumental in forming the newly minted private subjectivity of the emergent Liberal-Humanist subject (p. 143). This new-found interiority was partly expressed through the popular form of letter writing, which leads in its extreme form to the Victorian epistolary novel—a form that *Gone Home* undeniably evokes by unveiling its story through written artefacts left by Sam. In an article for *Film Quarterly*, Daniel Reynolds (2014) proposes that *Gone Home* is an example of “epistolary architecture” and notes that, despite its early associations with the male domain of the study, the epistolary novel becomes more and more associated with works written for and by women, often addressing “female characters’ subjectivity and volition” (p. 48). In a similar sense, the young adult novel is a form that is popularly understood to be predominantly female in both its readership and authorship (Lewit, 2012; Moore, 2017), an observation that should not have escaped Bogost whose off-hand dismissal of which, intentionally or not, smacks of a form of gendered boundary policing. But in some ways Bogost's observation is also an astute one: *Gone Home* is very much like a young adult fiction, but this should be celebrated and not derided. The walking simulator follows the young adult novel in inheriting literary traditions of affective interiority and domesticity, strongly associated with historical feminine genres and forms, and thus provides an intimate setting for such identities to be explored. *Gone Home* arguably constructs a kind of feminine enclave in the male-dominated spaces of modern videogames, just as the epistolary novel did in its time amidst a growing female readership.

Conclusion

By replacing the traditional virtual back-yards of AAA games culture with its domestic space, *Gone Home* presents a potent chronotope that serves to sever it from the traditional outdoor spaces of dominant games culture and their emphasis on mastery and traversal of an expansive domain, viewed by Jenkins (1998) as a core motivating factor of masculine videogame experience. It thus reimagines the house as a novel space¹⁷ for exploring a new kind of subjectivity, whilst rejecting (or reversing) the specific problematic terms of this gender dichotomy.

¹⁷ Pun intended.

That is to say *Gone Home* reinstates the domestic space critically as one oriented around refuge, familial/romantic relationships, and personal growth, but attempts to reject the sexist implications (such as through its aesthetic commitment to the *Riot grrrl* feminist punk movement) inherent in traditional gendered notions of domesticity. Those notions often revolve around house-keeping and, as Shira Chess (2017, pp. 98–99) has noted, manifest crudely in many female-oriented casual games.

I have used the notion of the chronotope, already a potent tool in the hands of literary theorists, to explore this newly emergent arrangement. In the context of games, this term can be extended to include not only a fusion of spatial and temporal elements into a single gameplay-image, but also to incorporate the actions of the player as a space of simulation. Crucially, the chronotope allows for the formation and exploration of new subjectivities as they are formed in conjunction with and through cultural works, becoming a valuable concept for understanding the shifting concept of player subjectivity and a means to analyse these transitions at work in individual texts, as I have shown with *Gone Home*. Whilst many have observed how the traditional gamer has evolved in the masculine and competitive play spaces of traditional videogames culture such as the arcade (Kline et al., 2003; Kocurek, 2015), I have deployed this evocative concept above to discuss the domestic structure of *Gone Home* as a subversive space for working through an alternative to the hegemonic model of play as unfolding in a agonistic space of violence and struggle.¹⁸ Instead, *Gone Home* enacts a kind of queering (Ruberg & Shaw, 2017) of heteronormative understandings of dominant virtual topographies through its shifting of emphasis from exterior settings of domination to the intimacy of the domestic space, which enacts a new player subjectivity based on interiority (both in a literal and a metaphysical sense).

In short, the kind of ludic commitment to queerness that Pavlounis finds lacking in *Gone Home* can be found in its potent decentring and rehabilitation of the traditional gamer. Unlike most games in which the story revolves around the player as the most important agent in the world, in the walking simulator that player is typically a mere observer of someone else's story (Kopas, 2017); the player is carefully placed in a specific material space and given an incomplete understanding of the narrative.¹⁹ Through the figure of Kaitlin, the otherness of the player is expressed through the (intentionally, I would say) voyeuristic uncovering of Sam's predicament, and this recasting is undoubtedly a troubling and deeply disruptive sensation for a gamer used to being inserted in the privileged centre of the text.

¹⁸ Laine Nooney's (2013; 2017) New Historicist work on the domestic origins of *Sierra Online* and the role of Roberta Williams is another insightful route into this topic.

¹⁹ Which recalls modern technofeminist notions of subjectivity as always partial and situated (Haraway, 1997; Hayles, 2005; Wajcman, 2004).

Whilst Fron et al.'s (2007) conference paper on the hegemony of play presciently critiques the industry and its surrounding scholarly apparatus for celebrating or pandering to the core gamer and agonistic notions of play, another of the authors' essays, "A Game of One's Own" (Fullerton et al., 2007), offers a picture of what an alternative to such a dominant arrangement might look like (and the irony of their use of Virginia Woolf as a point of reference shouldn't be lost on us). Significantly, they unfold their discussion in terms of space—where agonistic spaces in which player action is framed as a competitive, zero-sum game and in which destruction is the predominant mode of interaction—are posited against a more inclusive and "androgynous space" that lies an emphasis on narrative, exploration and construction (p. 7). *Gone Home* comes close to realising this androgynous space and thus points to a new, disruptive gamic form characterised by the act of incorporating and disrupting elements of traditional videogame FPS aesthetics and decentering the hegemonic gamer from the narrative centre. *Gone Home* reimagines and recontextualises the gamer by domesticating them and, by doing so, radically supports newly emergent player constructions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Rayna Dennison and colleague Dr Karina Aveyard for their feedback on drafts of this essay, and for the very useful and supportive recommendations of my anonymous reviewers and the editorial work of Esther Wright. I dedicate this article to Rachel Catto, who has always been a patient and supportive housemate throughout my PhD, and whose recent moving prompted me to reflect on the value of home that contributed towards this article.

References

- Aarseth, E. (2001). Computer game studies, year one. *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html>
- Aarseth, E. J. (1997). *Cybertext: Perspectives on ergodic literature*. London, England: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Alexander, L. (2013, September 11). *Gone Home*: A brilliant example of how less can be more in video games. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/09/-em-gone-home-em-a-brilliant-example-of-how-less-can-be-more-in-video-games/279464/>
- Altman, R. (1999). *Film/genre*. London, England: British Film Institute.
- Anable, A. (2018). *Playing with feelings: Video games and affect*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Anthropy, A. (2012). *Rise of the videogame zinesters: How freaks, normals, amateurs, artists, dreamers, drop-outs, queers, housewives are taking back an art form*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981a). Discourse in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *Dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans., pp. 259–422). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981b). Forms of time and the chronotope in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *Dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans., pp. 84–258). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981c). From the prehistory of novelistic discourse. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *Dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans., pp. 41–83). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bogost, I. (2010). *Persuasive games: The expressive power of videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bogost, I. (2013, September 28). Perpetual adolescence: The Fullbright Company's "Gone Home." *Los Angeles Review of Books*. Retrieved from <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/perpetual-adolescence-the-fullbright-companys-gone-home/>
- Bogost, I. (2015, March 13). Video games are better without characters. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/video-games-are-better-without-characters/387556/>
- Bogost, I. (2017, April 25). Video games are better without stories. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/04/video-games-stories/524148/>
- Bordwell, D., Staiger, J., & Thompson, K. (1988). *The classical Hollywood cinema: Film style and mode of production to 1960*. London, England: Routledge.
- Caillois, R. (2001). *Man, play and games* (M. Barash, Trans.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Calleja, G. (2011). *In-game: Immersion to incorporation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Carbo-Mascarell, R. (2016). Walking simulators: The digitisation of an aesthetic practice. Presented at the *First International Joint Conference of DIGRA and FDG*, Dundee, Scotland.
- Chess, S. (2017). *Ready player two: Women gamers and designed identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Costikyan, G. (2002). I have no words & I must design: Toward a critical vocabulary for games. In F. Mäyrä (Ed.), *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conferences* (pp. 9–33). Tampere, Finland: Tampere University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/05164.51146.pdf>

De Prato, G., Lindmark, S., & Simon, J. (2012). The evolving European videogame ecosystem. In P. Zackariasson & T. Wilson (Eds.), *The video game industry: Formation, present state, and future* (pp. 221–243). New York, NY: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1998). *Archive fever: A Freudian impression* (E. Prenowitz, Trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Dovey, J., & Kennedy, H. W. (2006). *Game cultures: Computer games as new media*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

Dyer-Witheford, N., & de Peuter, G. (2009). *Games of empire: Global capitalism and video games*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dymek, M. (2012). Video games: A subcultural industry. In P. Zackariasson & T. Wilson (Eds.), *The video game industry: Formation, present state, and future* (pp. 34–56). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ellison, C. (2013). An exclusive interview with *Gone Home's* Christmas Duck. *IGN*. Retrieved from <https://uk.ign.com/articles/2013/12/19/an-exclusive-interview-with-gone-homes-christmas-duck>

Ensslin, A. (2014). *Literary gaming*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Eskelinen, M. (2001). The gaming situation. *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/>

Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. F., & Pearce, C. (2007). The hegemony of play. In *Situated Play: Proceedings of Digital Games Research Association 2007 Conference* (pp. 1–10). Tampere, Finland: Digital Games Research Association.

Fuller, M., & Jenkins, H. (1995). Nintendo and new world travel writing. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *Cybersociety: Computer-mediated communication and community* (pp. 57–72). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved from http://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Cyberspace/FullerJenkins_Nintendo.html

Fullerton, T., Morie, J. F., & Pearce, C. (2007). *A game of one's own: Towards a new gendered poetics of digital space*. Paper presented at Digital Arts and Culture 2007, Perth, Australia.

Fyfe, D. (2015, December 31). The art of fiction #5: Steve Gaynor. *The Campo Santo Quarterly Review*. Retrieved from <https://quarterly.camposanto.com/the-art-of-fiction-5-steve-gaynor-6ede4112ece2>

Galloway, A. R. (2006). *Gaming: Essays on algorithmic culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gaynor, S. (2014). *Why is Gone Home a game?* Paper presented at the Game Developer's Conference, San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from <http://www.gdcvault.com/play/1020376/Why-Is-Gone-Home-a>

Ghibli BTFO. (2017). Walking simulators are dead and I couldn't be happier about it. Retrieved from <https://steamcommunity.com/app/343860/discussions/0/1520386297684779489/?ctp=4>

Ging, D. (2017). Alphas, betas, and incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401>

Gursoy, A. (2013). *Game worlds: A study of video game criticism* (Master's thesis). Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge. Retrieved from <https://cmsw.mit.edu/game-worlds-study-video-game-criticism/>

Haraway, D. J. (1997). *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and technoscience*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hayles, N. K. (2005). *My mother was a computer: Digital subjects and literary texts*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Jackson, R. (2014). *BioShock: Decision, forced choice and propaganda*. Alresford, UK: Zero Books.

Jenkins, H. (1998). "Complete freedom of movement": Video games as gendered play spaces. In J. Cassell & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and computer games* (pp. 262–297). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jenkins, H. (2006). Game design as narrative architecture. In N. Wardrip-Fruin & P. Harrigan (Eds.), *First person: New media as story, performance and game* (pp. 118–130). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Juul, J. (2003). The game, the player, the world: Looking for a heart of gameness. In M. Copier & J. Raessens (Eds.), *Level up: Digital games research conference proceedings* (pp. 30–47). Utrecht, Netherlands: University of Utrecht.

- Juul, J. (2012). *A casual revolution: Reinventing video games and their players*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kagen, M. (2017). Walking simulators, #GamerGate, and the gender of wandering. In J. P. Eburne & B. Schreier (Eds.), *The year's work in nerds, wonks, and neocons* (pp. 275–300). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kagen, M. (2018). Walking, talking and playing with masculinities in *Firewatch*. *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 18(2). Retrieved from <http://gamestudies.org/1802/articles/kagen>
- Kaiser, R. (2014, July 20). The curse of the scruffy white male: Why representation matters in video games. *IndieWire*. Retrieved from <http://www.indiewire.com/2014/07/the-curse-of-the-scruffy-white-male-why-representation-matters-in-video-games-23990/>
- Kate, L. (2013, August 22). Just take me seriously – A personal slice of *Gone Home*. *Indie Haven*. Retrieved from <http://indiehaven.com/just-take-me-seriously-a-personal-slice-of-gone-home/>
- Keogh, B. (2018). *A play of bodies: How we perceive videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kline, S., Dyer-Witheford, N., & de Peuter, G. (2003). *Digital play: The interaction of technology, culture and marketing* (2nd ed.). Montréal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Kocurek, C. A. (2015). *Coin-operated Americans: Rebooting boyhood at the video game arcade*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kopas, M. (2017). On *Gone Home*. In B. Ruberg & A. Shaw (Eds.), *Queer game studies* (pp. 145–150). Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Lewit, M. (2012, August 7). Why do female authors dominate young-adult fiction? *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/08/why-do-female-authors-dominate-young-adult-fiction/260829/>
- Lotz, A. D. (2014). *The television will be revolutionized* (2nd ed.). New York: New York University Press.
- Lynch, K. (1960). *The image of the city*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mahardy, M. (2013, August 13). Meet me in Portland: The Fullbright Company's journey home. *Polygon*. Retrieved from <http://www.polygon.com/features/2013/8/13/4568900/the-fullbright-company-gone-home>

Maiberg, E. (2016, October 4). Making a big budget video game is riskier and harder than ever. So why do it? *Vice*. Retrieved from https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qv58z3/gears-of-war-4-aaa-games-are-hard-so-why-make-them

Massanari, A. (2017). #Gamergate and the fapping: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media & Society*, 19(3), 329–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815608807>

Matulef, J. (2014, October 18). Walking is the new shooting. *Eurogamer*. Retrieved from <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2014-10-18-walking-is-the-new-shooting>

Meikleham, D. (2017, September 21). How collectibles, stealth and climbing came to define the Ubisoft open world game. *PC Gamer*. Retrieved from <https://www.pcgamer.com/how-collectibles-stealth-and-climbing-came-to-define-the-ubisoft-open-world-game/>

Merel, T. (2011, July 6). The big v: The great games market split. *VentureBeat*. Retrieved from <https://venturebeat.com/2011/07/06/the-big-v-the-great-games-market-split/>

Merel, T. (2012, May 30). Do consoles have a future? *GamesIndustry.biz*. Retrieved from <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2012-05-30-do-consoles-have-a-future>

Moore, T. (2017, August 3). A conversation with one of the few men in young adult fiction. *MEL Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/a-conversation-with-one-of-the-few-men-in-young-adult-fiction-2>

Mukherjee, S. (2017). *Videogames and postcolonialism: Empire plays back*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Muscat, A., & Duckworth, J. (2018). WORLD4: Designing ambiguity for first-person exploration games. In *Proceedings of the 2018 Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play* (pp. 341–351). Melbourne, Australia: ACM.

Myers, M. (2013, August 19). Growing up riot grrl: The nostalgia lie of *Gone Home*. *Midi Myers*. Retrieved <http://midimyrs.com/blog/2013/8/19/growing-up-riot-grrl-the-nostalgia-lie-of-gone-home>

Nagle, A. (2017). *Kill all normies: Online culture wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the alt-right*. Alresford, UK: Zero Books.

Newman, J. (2004). *Videogames* (2nd ed.). London, England: Routledge.

- Nooney, L. (2013). A pedestal, a table, a love letter: Archaeologies of gender in videogame history. *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 13(2). Retrieved from <http://gamestudies.org/1302/articles/nooney>
- Nooney, L. (2017). Let's begin again: *Sierra On-Line* and the origins of the graphical adventure game. *American Journal of Play*, 10(1), 71–98.
- Pavlounis, D. (2016). Straightening up the archive: Queer historiography, queer play, and the archival politics of *Gone Home*. *Television & New Media*, 17(7), 579–594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476416631627>
- Pelurson, G. (2019). *Queering between the lines: Queer game capital in FFXIII*. Paper presented at Beyond the Console: Gender and Narrative Games, London, England.
- Phillips, A. (2015). Shooting to kill: Headshots, twitch reflexes, and the mechropolitics of video games. *Games and Culture*, 13(2), 136–152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015612611>
- Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. London, England: Routledge.
- Readman, J., & Grantham, A. (2006). Shopping for buyers of product development expertise: How video games developers stay ahead. *European Management Journal*, 24(4), 256–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2006.05.004>
- Reynolds, D. (2014). Letters and the unseen woman: Epistolary architecture in three recent video games. *Film Quarterly*, 68(1), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2014.68.1.48>
- Riendeau, D. (2013, August 15). *Gone Home* review: Living room. *Polygon*. Retrieved from <https://www.polygon.com/2013/8/15/4620172/gone-home-review-if-these-walls-could-talk>
- Robinson, N. (2012). Videogames, persuasion and the war on terror: Escaping or embedding the military-entertainment complex? *Political Studies*, 60(3), 504–522. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00923.x>
- Ruberg, B. (2015). No fun: The queer potential of video games that annoy, anger, disappoint, sadden, and hurt. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 2(2), 108–124.
- Ruberg, B., & Shaw, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Queer game studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Ruffino, P. (2018a). *Future gaming: Creative interventions in video game culture*. London, England: Goldsmiths Press.
- Ruffino, P. (2018b). GamerGate: Becoming parasites to gaming. In *Future gaming: Creative interventions in video game culture* (pp. 104–119). London, England: Goldsmiths Press.
- Sepinwall, A. (2013). *The revolution was televised: The cops, crooks, slingers, and slayers who changed TV drama forever*. New York, NY: Gallery Books.
- Shaw, A. (2015). *Gaming at the edge: Sexuality and gender at the margins of gamer culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. London, England: Edward Arnold.
- Turkle, S. (Ed.). (2011). *Evocative objects: Things we think with*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wajcman, J. (2004). *Technofeminism*. Cambridge, England: Polity.
- Weststar, J., Legault, M., Gosse, C., & O'Meara, V. (2016). *Developer satisfaction survey 2014 & 2015: Diversity in the game industry report*. Toronto, Canada: International Game Developers Association.
- Whitson, J. (2013). The 'console ship is sinking' and what this means for indies. *Loading... The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association*, 7(11), 122–129. Retrieved from <http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/125/161>
- Williams, R. (2003). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Yang, R. (2017, April 5). "If you walk in someone else's shoes, then you've taken their shoes": Empathy machines as appropriation machines. *Radiator Design Blog*. Retrieved from <https://www.blog.radiator.debaclle.us/2017/04/if-you-walk-in-someone-elses-shoes-then.html>

Media Cited

- Burnett, F. (2015). *The secret garden*. London, England: Faber & Faber.
- Campo Santo. (2016). *Firewatch* [PC]. Panic.
- Creative Assembly. (2014). *Alien: Isolation* [PC]. SEGA.
- Fullbright. (2013). *Gone home* [PC]. Fullbright.
- Gamelab. (2004). *Diner dash* [Mobile]. Playfirst.

Irrational Games. (2007–2013). *Bioshock* series [Xbox, PlayStation, and PC]. 2K Games.

Office Create. (2006). *Cooking mama* [Nintendo DS]. Taito.

Twain, M. (2014). *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. London, England: Arcturus.

The Chinese Room. (2012). *Dear Esther* [PC]. The Chinese Room.

Valve Corporation. (2012). *Counter-strike: Global offensive* [PC]. Valve Corporation.