The discourse around games

"We have this silly word 'game' and it just sort of encompasses everything […] in a sense there isn't necessarily a lot similar, you know, if you have to actually make parallels between 'Uncharted 313' and 'Candy Crush 14', it is a completely different kind of experience, […] the interactions are completely different and the experience is completely different, and where you might play that is completely different". Quote from an interview with a researcher. **R03.**

Keywords: Diversity, Many diverse games, serious games

Who will find this scenario particularly interesting? Developers, Educators, Policy makers, Researchers

Description

During the project, participants talked of the need to understand games as complex and multiple, rather than acting as if there is anything like a 'generic' video game. One participant even suggested that it was the responsibility of researchers and other professionals to re-write the canon by turning the focus of their gaze towards games that were less commercial or less readily writte
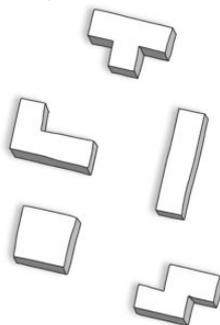
n about.

The view of gaming as a complex medium assumes that under the broad umbrella of gaming there is a multitude of different themes, mechanics and content, in the same way as 'film' is a medium that incorporates anything from video art, to documentary, to Hollywood blockbuster. This view is increasingly accepted but still faces some resistance which, perhaps unwittingly, seems to originate in the so-called 'gamer' cultures. Here, rather arbitrary distinctions seem to exist between real games, usually focusing on player mastery, competition and clearly defined win/lose states, and 'non-games' or 'artistic games' which experiment with and sometimes subvert those categories.

The identities and professional profiles of those who make games are also changing, reflecting a diverse range of personal, educational and technical backgrounds, and different design priorities are not necessarily aligned with those of large commercial publishers and the so-called 'mainstream' industry.

Meet Steven, a journalist and Daisy, a game developer

Daisy is an independent game developer. Her trajectory started while she was still at university, studying in a game development course. She put her studies on hold when she got a job in a large development studio as a junior animator. Nonetheless, Daisy thinks her university experience is a valuable source of inspiration and cultural diversity. She fondly remembers attending extracurricular seminars in the sociology department, meeting and conversing with students and lecturers about different topics and interests. Over the past five years Daisy has worked on many games, but always felt that the focus on specific tasks within large projects was too narrow. This year, Daisy decided to 'go indie', setting up a small studio with a couple of trusted friends. Her first project is based on a personal exploration of issues that matter to her personally – she wants to create an interactive experience that challenges expectations of what a game can do. They are conscious that such a game wouldn't necessarily have mass appeal, and they are ok with it. With her friends and colleagues, she decides that crowdfunding offers the best chance to ensure creative independence and a direct connection with their intended audience. They hope to make a small profit to support their livelihoods and continue doing what really interests them. Days starts by tapping into her networks to do some marketing and raise the profile of the studio and the first game. After some time she lands an interview with Steven, a freelance journalist who writes about

technology and games for a number of online and printed outlets. Steven is a keen technology enthusiast and a gamer. Immediately, the interview takes a slightly disappointing turn for Daisy...
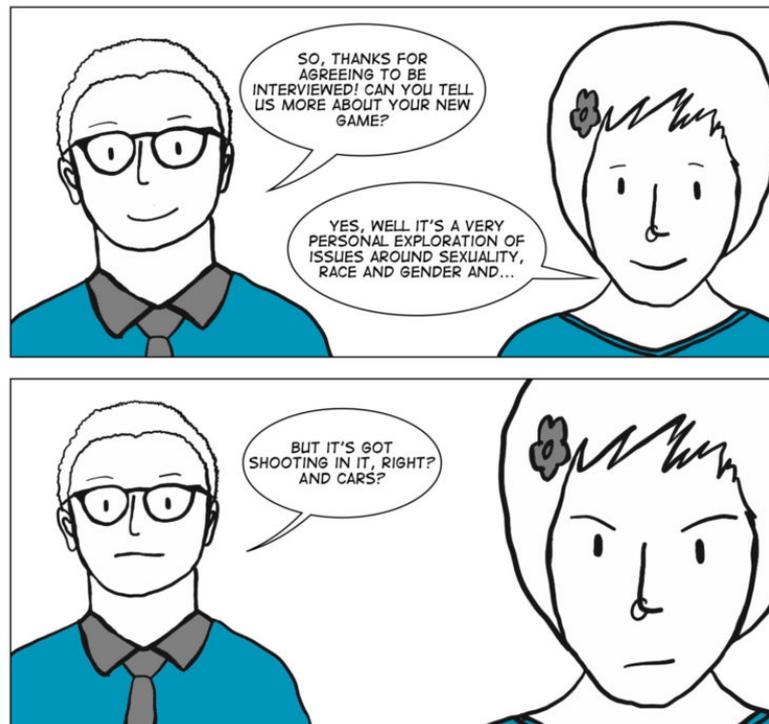

 A more mature approach towards gaming, coupled with an acknowledgment of the complexity and multifaceted nature of this medium, could boost efforts to develop, understand, research and use video games in new, innovative, exciting and relevant ways. Dominant ways of understanding video games, and what they are, need challenging at all levels in order to generate more generous and nuanced understandings of the medium and its possibilities, in relation to education, culture and society.

In a nutshell

Although we often talk about video games as a singular entity, they are, in reality, diverse and complex. As a medium they offer a range of different features, experiences and opportunities to players in a varied range of contexts.

By considering games as singular, however, we are potentially simplifying debates and maybe even lowering our expectations. Funders, researchers, educators and developers are all responsible for advocating a more diverse and multifaceted notion of what a game can be or do. Funding Social Science and Humanities (SSH) research projects that survey the representation of cultural themes would allow the development of video games studies in curriculums at all educational levels, and increase their future relevance.

Resources
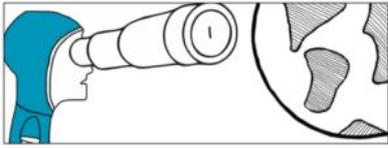
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Partners