

## From pixels to pedagogy: using video games for higher education in the humanities

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### ***Abstract***

This paper explores how video games can enhance learning in the higher education Humanities classroom through play and critical discussions. Through the observation of two case studies, it aims to highlight important concepts and considerations and serve as a platform for future research and debate. The first case study utilised Sid Meier's *Civilization IV: Colonization* (Firaxis Games, 2008) and involved first-year History students. They were encouraged to take part in critical assessment and discussion by pairing gameplay with lecture content featuring the same moments in history they experienced in the game. This led to the students being able to better challenge historical narratives through holistic reflexive engagement. The second case study used *GreedFall* (Spiders, 2019) to encourage students to question historical inaccuracies and utopian diversity. Through connecting gameplay to module outcomes, students unconsciously adopted a critical eye which indicates how the game can be used to debate race, Western imagination, and imperialism. We conclude that gaming in the classroom is an engaging way to deliver content and it enables students to develop critical and reflexive thinking within playful spaces. As such, this article focuses on the students studying the humanities and discusses the video game as a medium to identify and analyse ideologies, and gaming as a way of developing reflexive critical thinking and analytic skills.

**Keywords:** video games; digital pedagogy; interactivity; critical thinking; engagement.

## **Introduction**

Digital pedagogy is understood as being ‘the use of electronic elements to enhance or to change the experience of education’ (Croxall, 2013). During the Covid-19 pandemic, digital pedagogy brought about a wealth of new teaching means in the Humanities (Markelj and Sundvall, 2023). Consequently, scholars have been encouraged to think about their subjects differently (Lippolis et al., 2021) and to take a leap towards digital methods and strategies, such as the inclusion of video games in their teaching practice. Buckingham (2013) identifies a reluctance within the Humanities to use games as a teaching tool because of the rigour of assessment needed in the past to secure subjects as intellectually crucial. Meanwhile, Hopkins and Roberts highlight the potential of some video games to replicate the ‘discursive sophistication’ of higher education (HE) (2015, p.224), and others comment on the usefulness of playful exercises in relation to engagement regardless of them being recognised as ‘proper practice’ (see James, 2021, p.9).

Whilst playful in nature, gaming does have the potential to make a serious contribution to active HE teaching and learning in the Humanities as it encourages the development of high order academic skills in students. As cultural texts rich in symbols and complex narratives (Shaw, 2010), video games allow for discussions that can touch upon a wide range of topics and themes that are relevant to the Humanities. Having students play video games in the classroom can transgress the boundaries and expectations built into traditional discipline-focused lecture/seminar teaching structures and can allow for the emergence of and access to, unusual or new arrangements of ideologies.

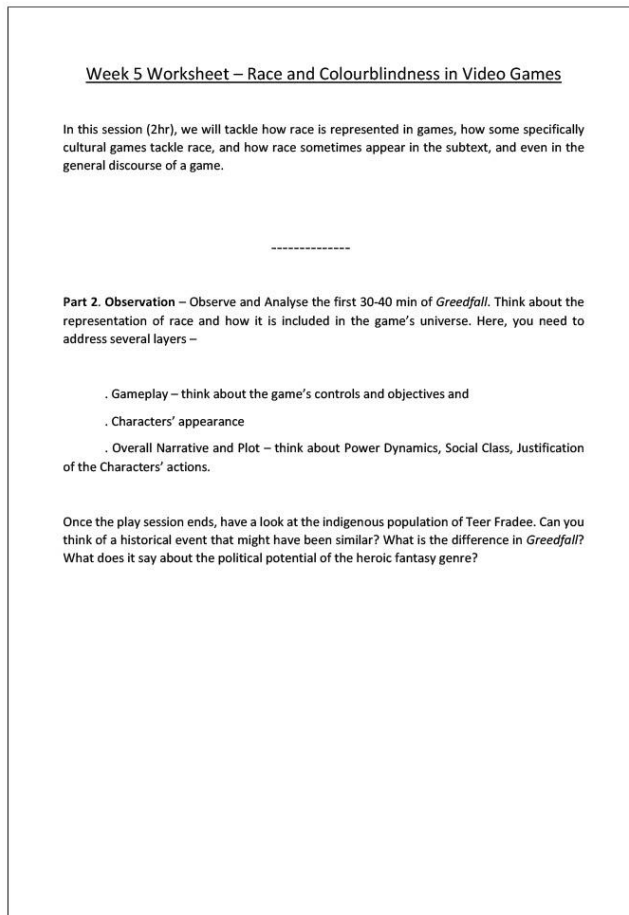
This paper examines the value in bringing video games into learning spaces to encourage playful engagement and interaction with technology in a way that enhances and supports learning. It serves to build upon a body of evidence which suggests that the use of commercial video games is beneficial to the learning spaces of HE and the Humanities, and thus argues for their inclusion in both traditional and non-traditional curricula. Focusing on the observation of two modules taught by two of the authors, this article first reviews how video games have been theorised in the classroom so far. It then presents two case studies. The first concerns a seminar from a History module in which students focus on the game *Sid Meier’s Civilization IV* (Firaxis Games, 2008) and critically examine the biases of the game’s historiography. The second focuses on a Media Studies seminar in which students played *GreedFall* (Spiders, 2019), a game that enabled them to reflect upon

colonisation through a fictional lens. We then summarise some of the key discussions that occurred with students and reflect upon the potential for gaming to be used as a method for teaching critical thinking and for encouraging students to become creative and active learners in their engagement with course content.

### ***Methodological details***

This paper discusses seminal theories and concepts about the use of video games in HE through reflections on our teaching practice in the classroom. Both case studies consist of observing classroom seminars within modules which were taught at the same institution. Seminars had up to 25 students aged between 17 and 20. The scope of this article relates to the explanation of our teaching practice and student learning in our seminar classes, and summarised teachers' reflections about them. The first case study seminar was from Migration & Cultural Encounters (MCE), a first-year module that is part of the History degree (BA), which focuses on colonisation practices through the viewing of a playthrough of *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* (Civ IV). Students did not play the game but play-throughs of the game were screened on streaming platforms in the class and used as material for students to discuss. MCE is divided into lectures and 90-minute seminars, and the module introduces students to some of the histories of relocation, cultural encounters, and migration that have shaped the modern world.

The second case study seminar was from Challenging Gaming Culture (CGC), a third-year module that is part of the Media, Communication and Culture degree (BA). It used a comparative case study approach that involved games and gaming and offers insight into societal analysis through games and gaming culture. It focused on one specific theme related to Media and Cultural Studies each week, such as gender, race, sexuality or class, before moving towards more intersectional approaches through broader themes in game studies (game space, time, immersion, and empathy). The seminar took place during a week focused specifically on representations of race in games. In this session students participated in two-hour 'play sessions' in lieu of seminars, in which they played and analysed games in groups gathered around five play stations (one PC, four consoles with monitors) in a lab. Students were given a worksheet with questions at the beginning of each session (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Worksheet (Part 2) of CGC's Week 5.**

To remind students of the reflexive and academic purposes of these sessions, the handbooks for both modules and the worksheets emphasised the sessions' aims: to develop critical analysis of gaming mechanics, narratives, signs, semiotics, and politics. In making this clear, classes are rooted to analytical discussions of the gaming industry and its impact on society through play and spectatorship.

### ***A review of the field: learning through play and historical video games***

Video games allow the player and observer to deconstruct the familiar through a shared experience (James, 2021). They can encourage active learning (Zhang et al., 2021), which is student-centred and requires engagement with course material through various activities including game play. Playful methods encourage a connection between students which can foster debate and reflection. Thus, in gaming, 'students learn by actively challenging and critiquing concepts developed through their own experiences or the experiences of others, possibly under the guidance of a teacher who encourages the necessary cognitive

conflict' (Carr, Palmer and Hagel, 2015, p.174). This type of active learning fosters motivation and is at a premium when 'computer games are integrated into the educational process' (Wastiau, Kearney and Van den Berghe, 2009, p.11; Whitton, 2009; Subhash and Cudney, 2018; Troussas, Krouska, and Sgouropoulou, 2020). In turn, increased motivation improves attention and engagement with a given topic. Evidence indicates that there is a tendency for playful activities to transcend into structured debate, which allows 'the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action', and as such play is well placed to 'include seriousness' (Huizinga, 1970, p.19; see also Subhash and Cudney, 2018; Videnovik et al., 2020; James, 2021). In addition, these works praise the significant potential of the coupling of both playful and academic learning, highlighting the nature of this engagement and its capacity to foster spontaneous discussions as appealing.

James (2021) identifies the elements of gameplay that benefit learning as 'development of critical judgement; evaluating partial or misleading information; making decisions; [and] reflecting on experience' (p.17). The demand for students studying the Humanities (including subjects such as Media and Cultural studies, History, Literature, and beyond) to develop conceptual and theoretical skills is both challenging and onerous: it requires a significant level of commitment. In assisting with the development of these skills through immersion into an alternate online world, video games as texts are ideally situated to provide a 'hook' for the practical realisation of these skills (Fernández-Vara, 2019). Buckingham asserts that learning through play using video games may boost social skills, motivation, and critical learning, particularly when a space is provided, during and after a play-through, for the student to reflect upon existing learning while theorising their new contributions (Buckingham, 2013; Llorens-Largo et al., 2016; Subhash and Cudney, 2018). This reflective practice as part of the academic process is mirrored in actual video game play which provides tools to complete tasks, gain feedback, improve skill levels, and encourage teamwork. Through this mirroring, we can begin to grasp how video games can be used as effective tools to evoke new engagements with existing ideas and generate new learning practices which become solidified by the additional space for reflection and discussion.

Video games that include historical elements alone accounted for 10% of the total games market in 2017 (Kain, 2018). For instance, *Assassin's Creed* (2003-2020), a 12-game adventure franchise which sold 140 million copies in 13 years, is steeped in historical themes including Ancient Greece, Egypt, and the Crusades, but also includes discourses

relating to a variety of other disciplines, including Gender Studies, Media Studies, and Sociology.<sup>1</sup> There has been academic debate as to the historical accuracy of the content of these games (Chapman, 2012; Wright, 2018), however, this conversation should not overshadow the different ways historical games, or, more precisely, games with historical content, can add to the student's experience of learning. Apperley (2018) emphasises the role historical games have in encouraging reflexive thinking, which is important to foster in the HE classroom. He states that while historical games present the façade of an 'official' version of the past, they inherently encourage reflexive thinking because 'they also illustrate that official accounts of the past, however dominant, remain subject to localized interpretation' (p.17). The reflection prompted by engagement with the game 'impacts on the everyday understanding of history in a significant way, not just because it highlights the disjunction between official history and lived experience, but also because it makes transparent the power behind the official version of history' (p.17).

Challenging the *status quo* narrative of 'official' accounts, reflecting on the lived experience of self and others, and identifying hidden power structures that push a dominant narrative are all central to actualising the critical thinking skills we try to imbue in the HE classroom. Li (2020) emphasises the importance of play in creating a safe space for students to explore a subject, using the phrase 'edutainment' to explain the integration of 'play and education to create new models of learning' (p.8). Crucially, what makes engaging in historical games different from solely engaging with traditional academic texts is the role of *play* in defining and sculpting the learning experience.

There are three main types of historical video games, all of which could be used in the HE classroom to foster reflexive critical thinking (Li, 2020):

### **Strategy games**

These games are linked to how history is understood in popular culture and enable players to test counterfactual narratives. In the classroom, we need to analyse them through both an historian's lens and a player's lens to see how they combine to challenge established

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<sup>1</sup> Numerous scholars from these disciplines have drawn upon the representation of gender (Bondioli, Teixeira-Bastos and Carneiro, 2019), gender play (Steenbakker, 2022), the gamification of slave resistance (Lauro, 2020), or divergent politics of memory (Hammar, 2017) in the *Assassin's Creed* games.

'official' histories to generate new understandings of the past. Players are often expected to establish a governing system that includes economics, religious norms, trade links, and a military, but also minority rights. Scholars like Apperley (2018) argue that this allows players to be more enlightened than historical figures, but in the act of determining whether minority populations get full rights, partial rights, or are simply enslaved for the benefit of the empire, one could argue that these games allow players to deeply explore the lure of power and supremacy historical actors actually experienced. There is no guarantee they will be more 'enlightened,' rather than simply take joy from getting extra points when an enslaved population brings wealth to an empire.

### **Simulation games**

Among the most popular of historical game types, simulation games have breached the medium and have been inspiring blockbuster films, indicating that there is a real demand for this form of historical engagement within popular culture. Players actively engage in learning about the past through role-play, all while testing their freedom, ability, and desire to change events. Galloway states that this type of game offers an 'ideological interpretation of history' (2004, p.39) and mimics how states traditionally 'see' the past, rather than how historians see it. White washing – understood as the practice of erasing people of colour through replacing a minority character with a white character, or more commonly representing a character from a minority background with Caucasian traits – is built into the very fabric of many of these games, with certain strategies being rewarded in ways that shape a player's actions and moral judgements. The simulation of colonial landscapes and characterisations of indigenous peoples in many of these games, combined with the rules/points-based play, present an uncritical white settler narrative of history, or a 'colonialist ideology'. Mir and Owens (2013) argue that these games feature histories that aren't as atrocious as they were in real life, so do not adequately engage with twenty-first-century historiography. We would argue that there is a real need for historians, both in the classroom and within other academic spaces, to challenge this 'middle road' and engage the public in reflexive gameplay that brings them into simulations of historical events rooted in current historiography. Ideally, these would be co-created alongside indigenous peoples, linking simulations of history to the real need for reconciliation in postcolonial societies today.

## Educational games

One of the key goals of this classroom-focused genre is to create engaging and immersive learning experiences for delivering specified learning goals, outcomes, and experiences (Yue and Zin, 2009). The game interface is designed to be as significant as the content to create a compelling game experience that keeps players/students engaged and teachers returning year on year. There are, however, problems with educational games, including the physical setting and technical problems, but also class expectations, teachers' backgrounds, and their pedagogical ability to prepare for a new method of content engagement (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2004). It is important to ask: how can we establish a 'playful' approach to gaming in the HE classroom that maintains the seriousness of our subjects? There's no easy answer, and these problems, combined with the reality of smaller budgets and less-visually engaging graphics, can make educational games the least popular type of game in the HE classroom, which should be cause for reflection. Despite these practical issues, Yue and Zin (2009) argue that in addition to interface and gameplay useability, educational games potentially help students to develop basic learning skills before they can play well.

While not part of Li's list, we could add action-adventure/role playing games: one of the most popular genres amongst blockbuster games, action-adventure games mix elements from both genre, such as puzzle-solving, complex narratives, and fast-paced gameplay with both physical and spatial interactions. The *Assassin's Creed* series is arguably the most popular franchise that bases itself on historical accounts while being very open about the liberties it is taking (Batchelor, 2022). The games have been praised for their popularity as case studies in the History classroom (Karsenti and Parent, 2020) and as a means to highlight the students' sense of empathy with the subject while playing these games (Gilbert, 2019).

While these types of games are well-defined, we'd like to challenge the rigidity of some of these definitions, particularly that of educational games, and suggest that in HE games which aren't officially 'educational' can be still be used pedagogically. In using more popular, mainstream games, whether they be classed as strategy, simulation, or even 'action/adventure' to engage students with topics, they can go on to develop critical thinking skills, and to see a reflexive, relational link between activities in the classroom and the world around them.



## **Lesson content: case studies**

### ***Civilization IV* in migration and cultural encounters**

Taking the example of *Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Colonization (Civ IV)*, we can begin to see the educational application of a mainstream historical game. *Civ IV* is a turn-based strategy game that aims to develop the 'best' civilisation across several historical eras. First-year students in a British university who were studying the history of colonisation in the Americas were asked to comment on an online video featuring tips on how to succeed in the game alongside a play-through of the game from the same channel (Mah-Dry-Bread, 2020). These tips included establishing communities, a system of government, natural resource-based industry, and a productive relationship with indigenous peoples. The video was screened during the seminar and related to the week's lecture content: a moment in history conveyed through decolonised historiography.

This was not a passive exercise; it was designed to introduce students to an active learning environment in which they were expected to take part in a critical assessment and discussion. The video was introduced within the wider context of the game's popularity, but also the power of video games (see Figure 2). This situated the introduction of video games and play within a serious academic framework, and even students who did not play games as a pastime understood the rationale behind our use of the game as an analytic tool in the classroom. Not wanting to use leading questions in the exercise, the authors provided students with time (a 15-minute reflection followed by a 20-minute discussion) to think reflexively about video games and the historical subject, empowering them to respond in the way they felt appropriate.

**Figure 2: Framing of inclusion of Sid Myers Civilization IV: Colonization in first-year History module focusing on human migration. Video link:**

[https://youtu.be/k\\_BPU0U\\_fw4](https://youtu.be/k_BPU0U_fw4)



***GreedFall* in challenging gaming culture**

The selected CGC play session tackled race and colonising narratives in gaming through the playing and observation of the first 35 minutes of *GreedFall*. The game is an action role-playing game which puts the player in the shoes of De Sardet, a Legate of the Congregation of Merchants who is tasked to leave his home and set sail to the exotic island of Teer Fradee, where they might find a cure for the *malichor*, a mysterious illness that plagues their home world. *GreedFall* gives significant freedom to the player when it comes to the design of their avatar, but also their in-game choices. Students were asked to discuss a set of questions tackling the representation and inclusion of racial diversity in the first 30 minutes of the game through a multi-layered approach – the game characters, the world’s aesthetics, gameplay mechanics, and the overall narrative (Figure 1). They were then encouraged to reflect more broadly upon the political potential of *GreedFall* as a platform for discussions about race and colonisation, and the commonly received idea that the (heroic) fantasy genre is primarily grounded in a Western context.

## ***Student learning and discussions***

### ***Civilization IV***

When asked to respond to the video and the general concept of the game, students enthusiastically took part, and their perspectives varied in ways that illustrated their interest. One student pinpointed the practical elements of trans-Atlantic colonisation featured in the game, suggesting that the ‘collection of food, building of churches and skilled workers are all accurate to the needs of European colonisation as well as befriending some of the [indigenous people] whilst fighting against others for resources’ (anonymous student feedback, 2021). The emphasis on allyship as being integral to survival was a key insight which added to this student’s understanding of the past. Another student was more critical and stated that the game ‘presents the strategy used during the colonisation period well, though it misses out the violence and the conflict between the colonisers and the colonised’ (anonymous student feedback, 2021) – making colonisation seem like an easy thing to do. By highlighting the passive, bystander role the game assigns to indigenous peoples, this student was able to take part in a level of postcolonial critique not commonly achieved by students in their first year of study.

The fact that this type of simplified historical narrative was being presented throughout the game – and in successful strategies to win it – was something several other students highlighted in their responses. Indeed, the most cutting response was provided by a student who simply said that the game ‘represents a history that used to be taught, but really isn’t reflective of what we learn and discuss today’ (anonymous student feedback, 2021). This demonstrated deep critical engagement of the subject being presented on the screen, but also a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which history and historiography changes over time. Again, the degree of student participation in seminars through their spontaneous reflections and their desire to address the case study in a critical way, surpassed that of past iterations when more conventional illustrations and mediums were used.

### ***GreedFall***

The playthrough included several key aspects – the design of the avatar’s appearance, a sparring session in lieu of a tutorial for battles, and the exploration of the first city, which serves as narrative exposition. The player learns about the different factions of the game

and is free to fulfil side missions. Only Teer Fradee's indigenous people are absent and presented as hostile to the game's two main factions. Students were able to note the absence of racialisation in the game: non-playable characters boast a wide variety of physique, from the black noble woman the player randomly crosses in the streets, to the Middle Eastern scientist who asks the player to unmask a charlatan. While Teer Fradee's inhabitants did not appear in this game's section students were asked to look them up online and note that their outfits echoed Picts, Gaelic, and indigenous American tribes making them impossible to clearly identify. The game clearly presents the different colonising discourses at play – settling on Teer Fradee seems to be a given for most factions and is justified by different motives such as science, religion, or economics, whilst the word 'invasion' is never uttered.

What is more, racial dynamics are erased in this fictional fantasy renaissance universe, allowing the player to question an abstract colonisation process. This segmentation of the many atrocities caused by colonisation enabled students to better address the morals of the factions, 'pushed' to colonise the island despite themselves, as many before them have done. After some discussions, students pointed out that the story seems to privilege consensus between the factions and does not always engage with the settlers' motives. The player is often asked to appease the tension between a settling faction and the indigenous people, even though these are often the result of the abuse of the latter. In this, while *GreedFall's* developers have wished to stay away from the portrayal of historical colonisation, the game is never far from reality.

Conversely, students couldn't help but make fun of some of the disparities between *GreedFall's* world and the 'real' world. The sparring session previously mentioned was a highlight: two soldiers were here to help train the playing student, who had chosen the warrior class, which enabled them to alternate between two weapons – a sword and a firearm. Shooting the latter sparked instant laughter amongst the classroom which immediately questioned the game's concept of 'training', and deplored the poor soldiers, killed in the tutorials, who were 'just trying to do their jobs' (anonymous student feedback, 2021). The contrast between the game's tone (a jovial fighting tutorial) and the potential meaning of the actions taken in real life (shooting someone) immediately created ludonarrative dissonance, a conflict between the narrative told by the plot and the narrative that emerged from the gameplay (Hocking, 2007).

## ***Teachers' reflections: promoting playful learning***

As a shared cultural experience (Nørgård and Moseley, 2021), play improves engagement, motivation, and even performance amongst students. The unexpected and often unserious nature of play is often considered a training ground for navigating the neoliberal world through digital literary skills, but it first and foremost remains a distinguished and 'scarcely restricted' instance of 'human freedom' (Fink, 2016, pp.23-26). In this, play in the HE classroom shines with its hits and misses. Following Nørgård and Moseley, playfulness in the humanities is a key approach to keeping the university as an '*exploratorium, experimentarium and collaboratorium* for playful academic practice and a sacred, shared and safe space for free thinking' (2021, p.2). Using video games in the classroom elicits responses that can be unpredictable and unusual for an HE environment. The teacher risks losing the students' focus and communal play risks steering students away from the sessions' explicit objectives, but these difficulties can also be viewed as strengths, as students are encouraged to explore freely and gain some form of agency over their learning process.

In the case of MCE, students were allowed to go 'off-piste', even for a few seconds, which allowed a new depth of perspective on a given topic. This was observed with *Civ IV*, in which most aspects of the transatlantic trade were approached in a very practical manner. Students highlighted how 'good' in-game choices were often reflective and faithful to the approaches chosen by settlers at the time, but also highlighted, not without sarcasm, how the game disregarded representing the human consequences of its mechanics.

Presenting a simulation history game to students as an educational game helped them to draw conclusions and engage in discussion which led us to conclude that there is educational value in popular games. With the right amount of game knowledge and a flexible but encouraging approach taken by the seminar tutor, students gained an accessible way in to critically analyse and evaluate topics that might have otherwise felt distanced.

Mukherjee (2016) and Murray (2018) argue that game spaces in contemporary games are made to be explored, navigated, and transformed, and encourage the player to adopt a privileged and predatory behaviour. This can be observed in *GreedFall* as the player harvests Teer Fradee's resources and maps out and establishes camps throughout the

island. More broadly, the game provides a platform that tackles race and colonisation on several layers, making it a suitable medium for students to engage with. It addresses and runs counter to the overwhelming presence of whiteness in fantasy cultural products (Higgin, 2008, p.21), and presents a utopian and diverse vision of a fictional Western power from the seventeenth century. Firstly, this enables students to separate *GreedFall's* colonisation process from reality and better reflect upon the power dynamics at play. Secondly, students could then link back to past events while addressing the differences and similarities with Western cultural imperialism, and explore how it still impacts contemporary gaming culture.

With its structured worksheet (Figure 1), the CGC seminar provided a personal learning experience for students by making them engage with a game that allowed them to reflect upon topics relating to the representation of race and inequalities in games through visuals and gaming mechanics. In this, it illustrates McClarty et al.'s views on games as personalised sites for teaching real-world critical skills (2012). *GreedFall* is playful, but involves 'proper' (James, 2021) analytical and research practice on a given topic. With its imperfections and clumsy metaphors, it constitutes a rich cultural text that provides an alternative, engaging and yet sensitive way to approach complex discussions.

Thus, having fun during observation and analysis isn't necessarily counterproductive. By highlighting the cold statistical approach of *Civilization* and the incongruities of *GreedFall*, students unconsciously adopted a critical eye through engagement with the games: pointing at their weakness as a platform for social comments, but also recognising their strengths, such as acknowledgment of the economic dynamics at the time or their diverse casts of characters. Introducing games such as *Civilization* into a classroom setting serves to disrupt assumptions relating to how history is presented in popular culture and can deepen critical engagement with course content. With its surprisingly diverse seventeenth-century Europe-inspired setting, *GreedFall* addresses the remaining overwhelming whiteness of the (heroic) fantasy genre and can be used as a flawed but rich case study for debating race, Western imagination of the past, and imperialism.

Our observations and experiences in both case studies reinforce our opinion that games are powerful, immersive, and engaging tools and contribute to community-building in the classroom (Kain, 2018). Despite being perceived as unserious, video games enabled students to bond over the unexpected nature of play. Watching and playing the games

created a friendly and motivating environment to discuss the themes tackled in the module seminars. When approached as media texts, these games functioned as a platform to formulate responses to and reflections of Western society, as well its preconceptions and imperialist past.

## **Conclusion**

Reflections on our case studies demonstrate that how a teacher frames gaming and play, connecting the exercise to module material and learning outcomes is of fundamental importance. The two case studies illustrate how video games constitute a rich platform for discussions around our perception, understanding, and teaching of History and Media Studies. Even when they aren't specifically tailored for the classroom, video games can enable students to explore the similarities and disparities between the worlds depicted and the one(s) they live in. Overall, we observed students becoming empowered to use and further develop their critical analysis skills to assess both the video game and popular culture through an academic lens, questioning intent, narrative, and impact. In doing this, they gained a deeper understanding and awareness of more informal, and yet not less serious, ways of achieving learning outcomes.

The variety and accessibility of digital play allows for great flexibility in the implementation of a spontaneous, playful, ludic learning space. Many titles enable discussions surrounding key themes in the humanities. Games such as *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016), *Tomb Raider* (Eidos, 1996), or *Beyond Good and Evil* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2003) all feature strong female characters, and articulate stereotypes relating to feminist and post-feminist discourses, societal gender norms, and gaming culture. More independent games like *Octodad* (Young Horses, 2014) parody heteronormative suburban life (Ruberg, 2019) while *Not Tonight* (Panic Beam, 2020) depicts a dystopian depiction of Brexit Britain.

All these examples are not perfectly suited for teaching, they are not serious nor educational-based games, but correspondingly, it is for these reasons that they are arguably very well suited to active learning. While using games in the classroom necessitates a minimum knowledge of gaming culture, these reflections on our teaching practice aim to encourage scholars and teachers to adopt a more ludic, but also critical teaching style. Moreover, this paper has shown that the inclusion of video games does not

necessitate an entire reworking of pedagogical practices; instead, games can be approached as cultural 'texts' that allow for a deeper engagement as they are easily and readily accessible to students in ways that other types of text are not. This work opens the path for more specific and experimental analysis, involving a more thorough study of the implementation of games in the classroom. We maintain that ludic learning, as both a playful and an insightful method, presents an opportunity to revitalise contemporary approaches to teaching and engagement within the Humanities and in other subject areas.

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