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Gamevironments from the perspective of an actant. ChatGPT (prompt: "gamevironments").

10th Anniversary Issue

Gamevironments Revisited

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Review of Tom Tyler's *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity* (2022)

Agata Waszkiewicz

Abstract

A review of Tom Tyler's book *Game: Animals, Videogames, and Humanity* (2022).

Keywords: Book Review, Animals, Video Games, Humanity, gamevironments

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Tom Tyler's *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity* (2022) is the first booklength study that offers to introduce animal studies to video game research – an effort which is long overdue, considering the growing interest of researchers in the representation of animals and the functions they inevitably play in video games (Chittaro and Sioni 2012, Hobin 2019, Navarro Remesal 2019, Van Ooijen 2019, Coghlan and Sparrow 2021).

In this sense, Tyler's book is both an invaluable resource for those interested in the political entanglement of digital animals – from their presence as social objects of care to the way their inclusion perpetuates the cycle of real-life exploitations and harm – and is also a bit of a missed opportunity to offer an in-depth, systemic introduction to animal game studies. Breaking away from the usual form of monographs in which the analytical chapters are preceded by the theoretical introduction, *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity* is instead a collection of

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essays that offer speculations about the role and presence of animals in video games, drawing from a truly spectacular range of disciplines including linguistics, philosophy, history, and literary studies.

The book comprises 13 chapters, seven of which have been previously published elsewhere – including "Meanings of Meat" (chapter 9), which, in its earlier version, has heavily influenced the typology of food representation I described in *Delicious Pixels:* Food in Video Games (Waszkiewicz 2022). Although the chapters have all been published in different outlets, they all follow a very similar structure, creating a sense of continuity that makes for a more enjoyable and engaging read. The author often begins with a specific game before taking the readers on a journey through linguistic associations and historical appearances of animals in a variety of media.

That keen scrutiny of the language (mostly English, but, at times, with a consideration for its French and Latin influences) is clearly the most important point of focus for the author. It is also what I consider the most interesting and valuable part of the book and the area where Tyler's expertise and deep knowledge shine the brightest.

This is, for example, evidenced in the considerations of the etymology of *bullshit* or the lengthy discussion from chapter 2 titled "A Singular of Boars." There, after a brief discussion of the representation of domesticated pets in video games, the author moves onto a discussion of wild animals. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that a mention of boars is only an excuse to ponder linguistic and philosophical consequences of "the philosophers' use of 'the animal' [which] blithely conflates all the many species of animal within a single, incongruous concept" (Tyler 2022, 12). He draws from Derrida and other philosophers to take the reader on a true linguistic

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journey through which he ponders the consequences of the linguistic uses of animal-related idioms or sayings.

Another strength of the book is the uniqueness of the discussed examples. Tyler skilfully avoids mention of the most well-known and mainstream examples of animals, looking instead into older and lesser-known examples in order to find fresh connections between games and animals.

One of the examples that portrays this very well comes from the third chapter, which looks at how games, by putting a focus on non-human player characters, can envision and depict non-human senses, such as dog's olfaction that becomes a crucial ludic mechanic (*smell vision*) in *Dog's Life* (2003). Consequently, chapter 12, which happens to be one of the book's lengthier essays, examines the figure of the player-as-everyman through Wolfgang Iser's (1978, 34) concept of the implied reader before turning to quite a captivating account of games that position the animal in the role of the player, thus challenging the anthropocentric assumptions present in the industry and, often, in game studies as well.

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By balancing points of view from all these disciplines, the book does not side with any, which both makes for an interesting read and can create a sense of lack for a reader who expects a slower and more deliberate introduction into animal studies – or game studies, for that matter. While the focus of the book is undoubtedly game studies, it does not seem to draw too much from that discipline either, rarely making a mention of the scholars who have already started to pave the road for the animal/game studies. Apart from the abovementioned research on the ethical connotations of killing digital animals (Chittaro and Sioni 2012, Van Ooijen 2019, Coghlan and Sparrow 2021) and the ecocritical context of studying digital animal

(Navarro Remesal 2019), the book could have benefited from interactions with Michelle Westerlaken's (2017) fantastic text about vegan playthroughs, Krzysztof Jański's (2016) categorization of animals in video games, Nicholas Hobin's (2019) conceptualization of animal characters through the adaptation of the concept of gaze, to name the leading contributions to the field.

However, it is crucial to keep in mind that this criticism stems primarily from the fact that *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity* is the first book (of, hopefully, many to come) introducing animal studies to game studies and vice versa. Even without the more structured introduction, it offers a fascinating overview of animal representation in video games. The book's strength lies in its selection of non-obvious, perhaps older or not yet discussed in detail, game examples that reveal how significant a medium video games can be – not only for engaging with the animal discourses in culture, but also for bridging the gap between humans, other animals, and technology. Written in a captivating style, the essays reveal Tyler to be a skilled storyteller with robust knowledge and an affinity for linguistic and historical investigations.

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