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Establishment of a new AAR seminar "Video Gaming and Religion"

Kerstin Radde-Antweiler

Abstract

Report on the establishment of a new AAR seminar "Video Gaming and Religion".

Keywords: AAR, Video Gaming and Religion Seminar

Whoohoo!

It's time for a party! We applied successfully for a Video Gaming and Religion Seminar at the American Academy of Religion (http://www-aarweb.org). The AAR's Program Committee has accepted our proposal for a new Program Unit and established the Video Gaming and Religion Seminar (https://papers.aarweb.org/content/video-gaming-and-religion-seminar). Our application was even declared a "sterling application, which contained strong letters of support, concrete publishing outputs, and a clear vision of Seminar's purposes. This Seminar will hopefully be a model of international collaboration and engagement."

Now, we are authorized for a five-year term (2015-2019) and are allotted one session at each Annual Meeting. If you are interested in joining us at one of the next conferences, please look out for the seminar's yearly Call for Papers!

The steering committee consists of the following members:

- Gregory Grieve, University of North Carolina (USA), gpgrieve@uncg.edu (chair)
- Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, University of Bremen (Germany), <u>radde@uni-bremen.de</u>

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(chair)

- Christopher Helland, Dalhousie University (Canada), chelland@dal.ca
- Heidi Ann Campbell, Texas A&M University (USA), heidic@tamu.edu
- Rachel Wagner, Ithaca College (USA), rwagner@ithaca.edu
- Xenia Zeiler, University of Helsinki (Finland), xenia.zeiler@helsinki.fi

But what is it all about?

Just like films helped to illuminate and expose the religiosity of the twentieth century, video games now depict the religious within the twenty-first century. "Video games" we understand to describe electronic forms of play across all platforms, from personal computers, consoles to mobile devices. Often, in Religious Studies video gaming is not yet taken seriously. We aim to improve this situation by establishing and maintaining a multidisciplinary network for the discussion of theoretical and methodological approaches in the study of religion and video gaming. We will also collect, systematize and further develop the various recent multidisciplinary approaches in research and teaching.

There are two specific deliverables planned for the end of the five-year period. First, we will craft an edited volume, tentatively titled Video Games and Religion: Methods and Approaches, that will bring together the cutting edge work of leading scholars in this emerging field. Second, we will publish the results from our seminar in a special issue of the new peer-reviewed online journal *gamevironments* (http://www.gamevironments.org).

And now?

At our first year's AAR conference (2015 in Atlanta) we will have a pre-arranged

roundtable to present and discuss key perspective on religion and video games. In order to "craft" key perspectives, the discussants focus on the open sandbox game Minecraft (2009), an open world platform in which players find various materials, which they can then transform into almost any structure imaginable. Through a moderated conversation, each discussant will use Minecraft to respond to one of three questions:

- (1) How should Religious Studies concern itself with video games?
- (2) What methods and research questions do you recommend?
- (3) Do scholars have to play the game to analyze it?

On a more general level, the roundtable will address how studying video games and video gaming furthers Religious Studies. Analyzing video games is significant for example because just as films helped to illuminate and expose the religiosity of the twentieth century, video games now depict the religiosity of the twenty-first century. Panelists are Jason Anthony, Ian Bogost, Gregory Grieve, Owen Gottlieb, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, Michael Waltemathe, Rachel Wagner, Xenia Zeiler, and Michael Houseman (Responding)!

We will be delighted to see you in Atlanta!