

hel
global network player authority PewDiePie quirk god Let's Play angel undead wtf authentic mediati on Skill pvp contest
game rule system representation avatar WoW blessing noob kills demon fact body fight ingame pvp digital
religion game analysis The Last of Us healing lore scope soul dialo class transition experience with rebirth discussion wedding
simulation ludology death resurrection funeral runes ritual virtual identity buff priest genesis clan gamer
narrative



Untitled. Photographer: Pawel Kadysz (<https://stocksnap.io/photo/OZ4IBMDS8E>).

Special Issue

Video Gaming and Death

edited by

John W. Borchert

Issue 09 (2018)

articles

Introduction to a Special Issue on Video Gaming and Death

by John W. Borchert, 1

Death Narratives: A Typology of Narratological Embeddings of Player's Death in Digital Games

by Frank G. Bosman, 12

No Sympathy for Devils: What Christian Video Games Can Teach Us About Violence in Family-Friendly Entertainment

by Vincent Gonzalez, 53

Perilous and Peril-Less Gaming: Representations of Death with Nintendo's Wolf Link Amiibo

by Rex Barnes, 107

"You Shouldn't Have Done That": "Ben Drowned" and the Uncanny Horror of the Haunted Cartridge

by John Sanders, 135

Win to Exit: Perma-Death and Resurrection in Sword Art Online and Log Horizon

by David McConeghy, 170

Death, Fabulation, and Virtual Reality Gaming

by Jordan Brady Loewen, 202

The Self Across the Gap of Death: Some Christian Constructions of Continued Identity from Athenagoras to Ratzinger and Their Relevance to Digital Reconstitutions
by Joshua Wise, 222

reviews

Graveyard Keeper. A Review
by Kathrin Trattner, 250

interviews

Interview with Dr. Beverley Foulks McGuire on Video-Gaming, Buddhism, and Death
by John W. Borchert, 259

reports

Dying in the Game: A Perceptive of Life, Death and Rebirth Through World of Warcraft
by Wanda Gregory, 265

Interview With Dr. Beverley Foulks McGuire On Video-Gaming, Buddhism, And Death

John W. Borchert

Abstract

Dr. Beverley Foulks McGuire speaks with editor John W. Borchert about her new research on video-gaming, death, and Buddhism.

Keywords: Buddhism, death, games, board games, gamevironments

To cite this article: Borchert, J. W., 2018. Interview with Dr. Beverley Foulks McGuire on video-gaming, Buddhism, and death. *gamevironments* 9, 259-264. Available at <http://www.gameenvironments.uni-bremen.de>.

Q1: In addition to thinking about death and video games, you have published on Buddhist board games. What about play or games draws you to them as a place to think about religion or religious practice?

When I first encountered Ouyi Zhixu’s (1599-1655) *Selection of Buddhas* (McGuire 2014), I thought that it was a divination board, and after I discovered it was a game, I began thinking about the similarities between ritual and play. I agree with Michael Puett and others who suggest that both ritual and play can create worlds where people can refine dispositions and rebuild relationships “as if” they were so. Games provide a kind of low-stakes environment for people to rehearse rituals and explore these kinds of “as if” worlds. Rachel Wagner (2014) makes a good point when she distinguishes between the earnestness or insincerity in one’s engagement with the ordered worlds evoked by religions and games. Boundaries between ritual and play are more permeable than we might assume: divination boards could easily become board games if approached insincerely, and vice versa. In my current research on digital games, I have found that enthusiastic gamers can become frustrated by those

preparatory function for religious rituals. Habituation really requires repetition, and I find it interesting to consider whether something that entertains might also be able to develop spiritual or religious sensibilities.

Q4: Is there an aspect Buddhism in particular that draw in ideas of play or gaming?

The Parable of the Burning House in the *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* (1975) really captures the problematic aspects of games: they can divert us from spiritual pursuits but they can also entice us towards liberation. The parable tells of a father who tries to save his sons from a burning house. They are playing games and unaware of the fire. Although the father urges them to come out, they are so absorbed in their games that they ignore him. Ultimately the father lures his sons out of the house by saying there are goat-carts, deer-carts, and ox-carts outside the gate for them to play with. This exemplifies the idea of "skillful means" – that even if a teaching or technique is not ultimately true, it may nevertheless be expedient and capable of liberating people. Games have the potential to be a "skillful means" of easing suffering, conveying Buddhist teachings, or even leading people to enlightenment.

One could also argue that because Buddhists understand karma to encompass our thoughts, words, and actions, games have potential karmic consequences. Playing competitive games could fuel ignorance, attachment, and aversion that keep sentient beings trapped in the cycle of birth and death, while cooperative games could encourage the three wholesome qualities of wisdom, generosity, and loving-kindness. Peaceable Kingdom, for example, has produced a variety of cooperative board games such as Hoot Owl Hoot where players work together to help owls return to their nest before the sun comes up.

Q5: What aspects of death or dying can be transformed through play?

I think that play can offer a space for those who are confronting death and dying to feel what they feel without fear of stigma or awkwardness. Death makes people uncomfortable, and it can be an incredibly isolating experience when one is grieving. For those who grieve, games can provide a virtual reality where one can explore feelings and environments. There is a process of defamiliarization that can happen when one plays a game, and that can provide solace for those who view their reality as suddenly unfamiliar in the wake of death. For those who do not grieve, it can provide a kind of preparation for death, allowing people to engage with the death in a low-stakes environment, or as some would say, within the magic circle.

Q6: Conversely, what aspects of play are transformed through death and dying?

I think the experience of grief can make the world seem suddenly unreal and the reality of death loom large. It can make certain types of play or entertainment seem utterly divorced from one's experience and frivolous, and one can become incredibly sensitive to situations and people, which brings a certain weight to play. But this vulnerability can also create an openness to play that might otherwise seem morbid and game environments that mirror one's sense of desolation and emptiness. One can "play" with various perspectives and worldviews after experiencing the death of a loved one.

Q7: Would you describe yourself as a gamer? There has been some discussion around if researchers need to be proficient gamers to study video gaming – what are your thoughts on gaming competency and research?

No, I would not describe myself as a gamer, and I definitely think it is a disadvantage insofar as gamers have a level of competency and terminological fluency because of their experience. However, my husband is most certainly a gamer, and as my research has ventured into his terrain, it has afforded us the opportunity to play digital games together. When we do, I can see that we experience the games very differently because of our relative adeptness, and I have relied on his expertise to give me an alternative perspective about the videogames that I am studying. He has an insider’s perspective whereas I come with an outsider’s perspective, since my gaming experience is limited to video games that I played as a child in the early 1980s, such as *Pac-Man* (1980), *Donkey Kong* (1981), *Frogger* (1981), *Super Mario Brothers* (1985) and *Tetris* (1984).

References

Cloud, 2005. [video game] (Windows) Kallee Santiago, USC Interactive Media Division.

Donkey Kong, 1981. [video game] Ikegami Tsushinki, Nintendo.

Frogger, 1981. [video game] Konami, Sega.

Katō, B. and Soothill, W. E., 1975. *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, New York: Weatherhill.

McGuire, B. F., 2014. Playing with karma: A Buddhist Board Game. *Material Religion*

10, 4–28.

Pac-Man, 1980. [video game] (cross-platform) Namco, Namco/Midway.

Plate, S. B., 2010. Religion is Playing Games: Playing Video Gods, Playing to Play. *Religious Studies and Theology*, 29 (2), 215-230.

Seligman, A. B., Weller, R. P., Puett, M. J. and Simon, B., 2008. *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Super Mario Bros, 1985. [video game] Nintendo, Nintendo.

Tetris, 1984. [video game] Alexey Pajitnov, Andromeda.

Wagner, R., 2014. The Importance of Playing in Earnest. In: Campbell, H. A. and Grieve, G. P., eds., 2014. *Playing with Religion in Digital Games*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 192-213.