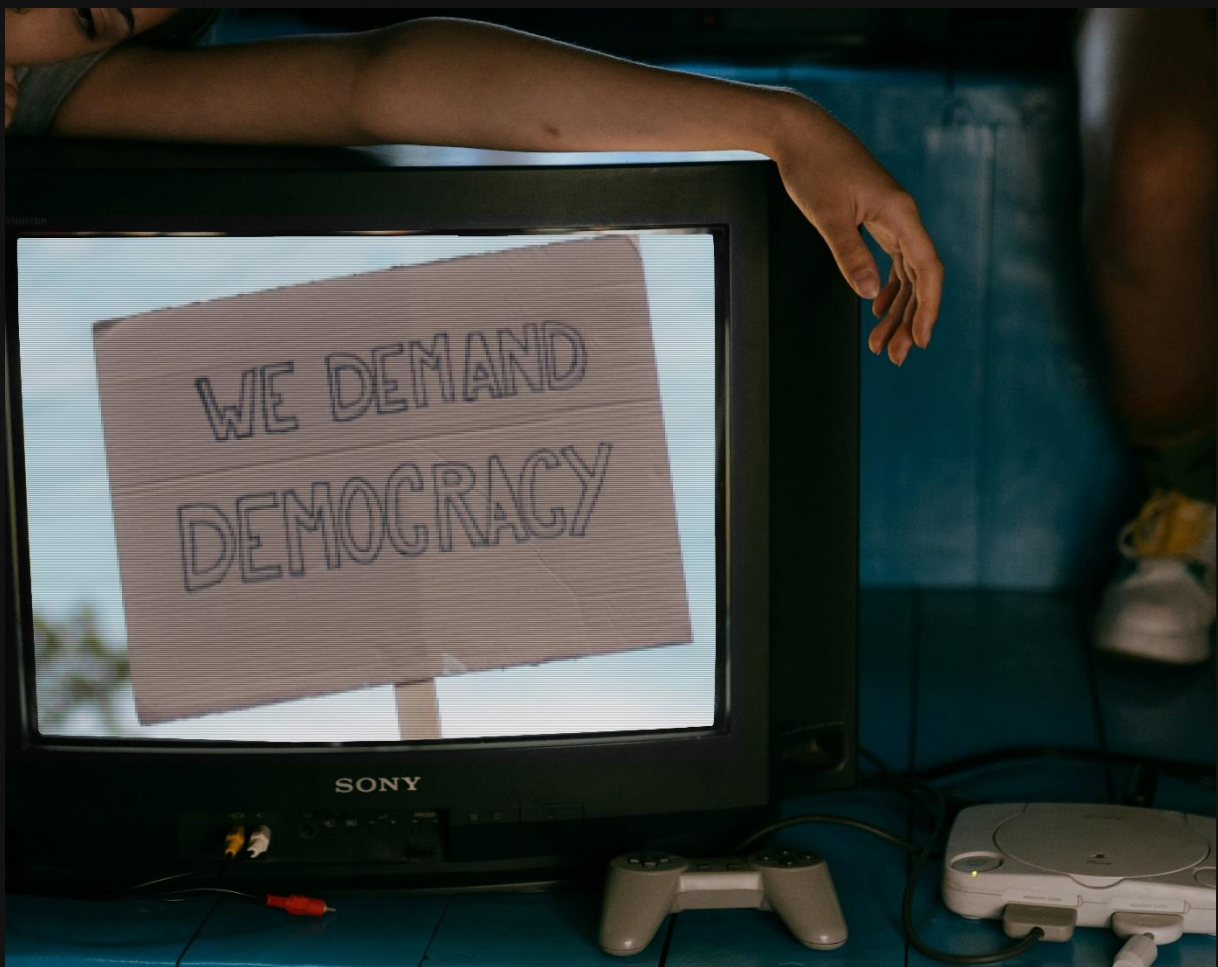


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Issue 13 (2020)

Democracy Dies playfully. Three Questions – Introductory Thoughts on the Papers Assembled and Beyond

by Eugen Pfister, Tobias Winnerling and Felix Zimmermann 1

articles

Discrepancy Detected. Operationalizing Immigration and Borderzone Policy in *Papers, Please*

by David Kocik, 35

Autocracy for the People. Modes of *response-able* Action and the Management of Demise in *Frostpunk*

by Lars Dolkemeyer, 64

Turning Votes into Victory Points. Politics in Modern Board Games

by Torben Quasdorf, 103

The Face of Authority through *Sid Meier's Civilization* Series

by Ruth García Martín, Begoña Cadiñanos Martínez and Pablo Martín Domínguez, 139

The Missing Memorial. *The Division 2* and the Politics of Memory

by Joseph Meyer, 174

Play America Great Again. Manifestations of *Americanness* in Cold War Themed Video Games

by Regina Seiwald, 223

Videogames about Politics as States of Exception

by Yu Hao, 257

Likers Get Liked. Platform Capitalism and the Precariat in *Death Stranding*

by Ryan House, 290

Imperialism and Fascism Intertwined. A Materialist Analysis of the Games Industry and Reactionary Gamers

by Emil Lundedal Hammar, 317

It Was Just a Joke. Demagoguery, Humor, and Video Game Streaming

by Jacob Euteneuer and Josiah Meints, 358

At the Edge of Utopia. Esports, Neoliberalism and the Gamer Culture's Descent into Madness

by Thiago Falcão, Daniel Marques, Ivan Mussa and Tarcízio Macedo, 382

Code of Resistance. On the Potential of Digital Games and Game Jams for Civic Education

by Michael Laumer and Marcel Kabaum, 420

report

Projekt CH+ Games for Democracy. User-Friendly Political Self-Education through Entertainment Design

by Sophie Walker, 457

interview

Interview with Jörg Friedrich on Procedural Rhetoric in his Game *Through the Darkest of Times*

by Elisa Budian, 492

review

Wir sind das Volk! Agitprop between East and West Germany

by Anton Oehmsen-Clark, 508

(Chapman 2016, 16), i.e. games that are thematically based on real historical events or historical eras. The sub-genre of war games, for instance, is an area in which historical bias prevails in the storyline and the gameplay (Schut 2007). Nonetheless, these “[h]istorical simulation video games are,” according to Marcus Schulzke (2013, 264), “perfectly suited for capturing history as a lived experience; they immerse players in detailed, complex worlds that players can personally explore and interact with.” They therefore provide interesting case studies for the analysis of historical discourses. Many Cold War video games played from or affiliated with a US-American perspective use ideas associated with *Americanness* to imply democracy and political freedom (Weber 2013, Engle 2014, Fuchs and Rabitsch 2019). *Americanness* here is understood as a concept that is bound to temporality, in this case the sentiments generated during the Cold War era, which still influence the way we see the Cold War from today’s (nostalgic) perspective (Pfister 2017). It denotes ideas that are demographically connected to white ethnics, whose political outlook is marked by anti-communism as well as concepts of American Exceptionalism and the “myth of uniqueness” (Commager 1968, cited in Smith 2013, 114), meaning that America plays a special (or maybe even superior) role in world politics (Zake 2013, Voorhees 2014).

The focus of this paper is the analysis of manifestations of *Americanness* in Cold War video games. This is achieved by determining the relationship between narrative gaming modes, propaganda, and historical pseudo-objectivism in exemplary games. It also leads into discussions of the divide between core ideas of democracy and propagandistic/absolutistic mechanisms upholding it. The notions associated with *Americanness* were generated in popular media during the Cold War era and still frame our 21st-century understanding of this conflict. Cold War themed video games propagate democracy through appealing to the player’s morality and, as Clemens Reisner has argued, they “appear to actively partake in shaping the public view of the

Cold War as a historic period” (Reisner 2013, 247). These video games adopt a picture of an America that is highly stereotypical and often reduced to positive aspects, while downplaying the negative sides. They create an idea of a hyperreal American culture that is similar to the one created in popular media during the Cold War era. This is also what the players – within and outside of the US alike – might experience as being genuinely American. While this is true for many different video game genres, war-themed games in particular are prone to presenting stereotypes of America as the haven of democracy and freedom to the effect that a bi-polar worldview is brought about.

Cold War themed video games are notably interesting in the context of historical bias because the Cold War era itself was marked by emotive stories concealed as facts to portray the enemy as a threat from which the nation (and the *free world*) has to be protected. Looking at various instances of propaganda masked as cultural products allows us to draw parallels between pro-American propaganda in popular media during the Cold War era and how it is depicted in video games. Like state-directed and civilian propaganda found in other media during the Cold War era, these games appeal to the player’s morality and ethical compass while fighting for the freedom of the West and the world (Bastiansen, Klimke and Werenskjold 2019, 4). This happens through biased references to historical events or within their subtext, often relying on Western stereotypes of Eastern characteristics (Wolfson 1992; Andersen and Kurti 2009; Briant 2015, 9). Indeed, just like most Western history books, these video games depict the Cold War era as a “Soviet failure rather than success” (Wolfson 1992, 40, cf. Fukuyama 1989, 14). Furthermore, Cold War video games prove valuable for analysing propagandistically used manifestations of *Americanness* because they often demand tactical thinking and strategy (Pfister 2017). Cold War mechanisms, such as espionage, counterintelligence, and secret operations, are incorporated in their

gameplay and trust becomes central when engaging with other characters, which evokes morality.

The games forming the corpus of this study portray the Cold War conflict from an American perspective and are the *big hits* of Cold War themed video games. The reason for this selection is that, as argued by Adam Chapman, Anna Foka and Jonathan Westin (2017, 356),

“mainstream historical videogames seem to have a tendency toward deeply hegemonic interpretations of and perspectives on the past – particularly in terms of gender and ethnicity/race (with the games by far favouring the historical experience of white, European, males).”

These games serve many different functions in our contemporary world, which are tied to a (popular) memory of the Cold War world order and the articulations of *Americanness* derived from it. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama (1989, 4) has aptly captured this sentiment, arguing that the end of the Cold War is linked to

“the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

The way Cold War themed video games depict history makes them quite symptomatic of the Global North, and especially the US waking up from the prolonged post-Cold War triumphalism and struggling to come to terms with a post-9/11 world. This is a world of US imperial decline, which, while exacerbated by 9/11, was initiated by the US being the last superpower left standing after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Boggs and Pollard 2016, 2). This is entangled with a profound

sense of nostalgia that games like the ones discussed in this article cater to. After all, one of the most appealing conceptual tenets of a bi-polar world order, regardless of how distorted or manufactured it is, is that it provides a seemingly *simpler* world.

The games analysed for this study are, in order of appearance in the discussion below, *Freedom Fighters* (2003), *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010), *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction* (2010), *Alekhine's Gun* (2016), *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* (2001), and *Homefront* (2011). These games have been produced after the Cold War has ended, while there are a number of games, notably *Missile Command* (1980) and the controversial *Raid Over Moscow* (1984), that address the Cold War while being produced in this era. The reason why only games that were produced in a temporal distance to the historic era they address have been chosen is that a key interest of this study is the communication of stereotypical representations of the Cold War through popular media without the player's immediate experience of the conflict. This has to do with the presentation of a bi-polar worldview, which has been generated based on cultural narratives that enforce ideas of friend and foe images. This creates a double-filtered presentation of history in these games because firstly, history is experienced through a second-hand and thus subjectivised representation and secondly, the historical discourses displayed in those games tend to be influenced by Cold War images formed in popular media of that time rather than historical documents. Furthermore, the selected games share that they are played from an American perspective and mostly depict the period between the end of the Second World War and the 1990s, while some games only allude to this era.

The Cold War era can be split into three phases that mirror the degree of hostility and conflict between the US and the USSR. During the Confrontation Phase (1948–1962; Lightbody 1999, 19–35), the two superpowers were progressively moving closer to

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war. The Berlin Blockade, the Korean Conflict, and the Cuban Missile Crisis mark escalating conflicts, while Senator Joseph McCarthy's *witch hunt* and his focus on the *enemies within* created anti-communist sentiments in the US population (Halliwell 2007, 18). *Alekhine's Gun* spans this phase in its entirety and captures its tension, while it also depicts the slow rapprochement of the two superpowers through letting two of their intelligence agents join forces. *Homefront's* historical basis is located in this early phase of the Cold War, most notably in the Korean Conflict, while its main story is set in a dystopian future. The subsequent Détente Phase (1962–1978, Lightbody 1999, 65–80) can be described as a time of easement, despite the Vietnam War falling into this timeframe. This phase also marks the Sino-Soviet Split and SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty). *Call of Duty: Black Ops'* backstory originates in the Confrontation Phase, yet its core story is set in the Détente Phase, with memories of the Vietnam War dominating the game. In the Rapprochement Phase (1978–1991, Lightbody 1999, 81–126), the US and the USSR move closer together. Carter was not as antagonistic towards the USSR as his predecessors, while Reagan changed the tone again and saw an aggressive rhetoric as the only way to end the conflict. In Russia, Gorbachev's political outlook was more open to Western ideas in comparison to Khrushchev's attitude. *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* draws on this discord of clashing Soviet politics as the source of the conflict yet mixes historical events with fictive settings. Some games cannot be assigned to these three phases but capture Cold War sentiments in a timeless construction of history. *Freedom Fighters* and *Splinter Cell: Conviction* are both set in the present time yet depict a dystopia. These games thus approach pro-American propoganda differently and in recourse to their particular historical framework.

Cold War Propaganda and Popular Media. Hyperreal Versions of America

Pro-American Cold War propaganda has frequently been spread by means of popular media, such as movies, television shows, books, and comics, while not all media outputs were propagandistic. These media texts relied on the people’s emotions and attitudes towards ideas associated with *Americanness*, which still influence the way America is perceived today and how America is portrayed in video games. The reason for this is that, as Brian Schrank (2014, 1) holds,

“[t]he social anxieties and economic outlays of the Cold War were formative for many of the metaphors of power and domination that still frame videogames today. Contemporary culture flows in an elaborate and networked form of digital capitalism – a context that precludes some avant-garde tactics and affords others.”

American Cold War propaganda was mainly concerned with protecting American values rather than physical objects. Popular media heavily drew on metaphors and communicated that the annihilation of American beliefs and the people’s freedom was the core aim of the Soviets. For video games, this provides an interesting new approach to warfare because rather than focusing on actual physical conflict, socio-historical and cultural aspects feature prominently.

Cold War propaganda frequently blurs the line between politics and civilian life by communicating content through popular media. Propaganda is

“the deliberate manipulation of representations (including text, pictures, video, speech etc.) with the intention of producing any effect in the audience (e.g. action or inaction; reinforcement or transformation of feelings, ideas, attitudes or behaviours) that is desired by the propagandist.” (Briant 2015, 9)

The propagandist seeks to change the way people understand an issue or situation for changing their actions and expectations in ways that are desirable to the interest group. In order for propaganda to be effective, it is important to rely on emotions and never argue, to cast propaganda into the pattern of *we* versus an *enemy*, to reach groups as well as individuals, and hide the propagandist as much as possible (Biddle 1931, 283–295). This often goes hand in hand with censorship, which follows similar effects to propaganda.

During the Cold War era, the US government relied on an extensive propaganda machinery to generate images that portray the US as good, thereby justifying their actions, and the USSR, communist, and socialist forces as evil. This propaganda either emphasised American virtues, such as the family, capitalism, and free speech, or defamed communism. It was state-directed, yet rather than being overtly marked as produced by the government, it often has been incorporated into popular media and thus permeated every aspect of American culture (Marcus 1999, 2). The close link between the producers of popular media content and the government resulted in the “virtual military/entertainment complex” (Sterling 1993, cf. Pfister 2017). The intelligence services designed a careful picture of the ideal America, which was then assimilated into popular media. Nonetheless, the authorities “faced difficult choices in reconciling their symbolic *America* with the complex political, economic, and strategic realities of the early Cold War” (Belmonte 2008, 7). America was far from an ideal nation in the aftermath of the Second World War and marked by internal conflict in a fight against inequalities, epitomised, for example, in the Civil Rights Movement and feminist groups. This, however, did not stop the American information operatives employed by the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the State Department, among other organisations, from painting a positive image of America (Bernhard 1999, 179). This characteristic is certainly not unique to the US and is found for any

nation yet realised in different modes. American authorities promoted images of democracy, freedom, equality, and prosperity, while the reality was largely marked by social, racial, and gender inequalities in all these aspects. To account for these negativisms, discourses emphasising America’s accomplishments were spread, while largely ignoring any problems. Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard (2016, 3) have characterised this state as follows:

“A great font of information, opinion, communication, and entertainment, the corporate media is a linchpin of ideological hegemony, a vital repository of values, attitudes, beliefs, and myths that shape public opinion on a daily basis.”

This is as true for the Cold War era as it is for the present, and as a result, these positive ideas associated with America of that time are still problematic today because, as Sharon Monteith has argued, it is “a problem to define a decade [the 1960s] about which myths and images often masquerade as cultural history” (Monteith 2008, 1). What we, from today’s perspective, perceive as historical records of the time often rely on these stereotypically positive interpretations of public life during the Cold War era. This is notably the case if we experience history through popular media such as video games, which frequently privilege player experience and recognition value over historical accuracy.

These positive representations of America have subsequently shaped its internal as well as its external perception. Movies, such as *Red Dawn* (1984), *Rocky IV* (1985), and *Hunt for Red October* (1990), emphasised American heroism in their fight against evil powers that appear to threaten the free world. Situation comedies, such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952–1966), portrayed the family, consisting of the father as the breadwinner, the mother as a devoted housewife, and the children as obeying their parents, as one of the highest attributes to be valued. Even cartoons for children, such as *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends* (1959–1964) or

Roger Ramjet (1965–1969), highlighted the importance of defending American values against enemies wanting to destroy them, who, in both cases, are clearly portrayed as being Soviet. Pulp fiction, like Joseph L. Whatley’s *Purgatory of the Conquered* (1956), and comic books/graphic novels, such as *Is this Tomorrow?* (1947), further contributed to the population’s fear of communism as a threat to American values. Educational films like *How to Spot a Communist* (1955) were less reserved in displaying the tight relationship between government protocol and media content. The mechanisms used in these media outputs are still largely found in video games today.

As these representative examples show, popular culture has constructed hyperreal America(nness) during the Cold War era. Many dystopian scenarios, which threatened the integrity of the US democratic system, found their way into popular media, for example invasion and subversion scenarios, such as alternate history or, by way of allegory, in the form of alien invasions and creature features (Schulzke 2013, 261). The audience was also interested in interfering with or outsmarting Soviet machinations in those proxy (war) arenas, while nuclear holocaust scenarios painted a bleak picture (Pfister 2017). In all these scenarios, idealised articulations of American identity were created and disseminated, namely a caution against communist ideas as well as an emphasis on the American (democratic) way of life as the only right one and on American values as being superior. This propagation of American values in various popular media has largely led to a cultural system that resembles Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1994). These images of America are no longer a form of ideology that is grounded in reality, but they are, as Baudrillard has argued, “concealing the fact that the real is no longer real” (Baudrillard 1994, 13). It becomes difficult to distinguish between a simulated reality as displayed in popular media and real reality. Bearing in mind that mass media have gained unprecedented importance

within a very short period of time especially in the US during the Cold War era, it is not surprising that the audience had to get used to the reality-status (or rather the lack thereof) of the images presented to them (Baofu 2009, 11). In a state of hyperreality, fiction and reality blend to the effect that it becomes difficult to tell them apart. This new reality is thus, in Baudrillard's (1994, 1) words, "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality." The US propaganda machinery appears to have used this hyperreality in order to constitute discourses that distract from real reality to the effect that defined images of America have been created that need to be defended. Very often, this has been achieved through *ex negativo* approaches, namely by depicting bleak scenarios of how the US would look like under communism. The video game *Freedom Fighters* paints such a dreary picture and thereby resembles the Armed Forces Information Film movie *Red Nightmare* (1957; also known as *Freedom and You*) and Reed Crandall's graphic novel *The Godless Communism* (1961–1962). By way of contrast, the predominance of hyperreality is also evident in the game-like appearance of war, which Baudrillard (1995) has proposed for the Gulf War. The age of constructed reality therefore not only confuses video games with reality but also reality with video games.

Despite the state of hyperreality, it appears that in the process of getting acquainted with new media, audiences have learned to distinguish between fiction and reality. This raises questions with regard to the effects propaganda incorporated in video games has on players. It is proposed that gamers (and popular media users in general) are well aware of the difference between the game-world and the real world despite the high level of active engagement in it. Players know that what they experience in the process of playing is not real but only evokes "quasi feelings" (Walton 1990, 245). Nonetheless, video games that heavily rely on hyperreal images of America generated in popular media during the Cold War era influence the way

players nowadays perceive this historical era. It is the images, the narratives, and the values these Cold War popular media texts offered that are taken up and remediated in those video games. The reason for this is that we are used to those propagandistic images, which serve as familiar reference points players are likely to recognise (Pfister 2017).

Concepts of America in Cold War Themed Video Games

The media discussed above were mainly produced during the Cold War era or in its immediate aftermath, and their content possesses a strong link to then-current events. With video games, however, the situation is entirely different. They were mostly produced after the Cold War ended in 1991 and therefore do not bear a similarly strong temporal link to the period they are set in. Nevertheless, due to the positive associations with America and a simplified, bi-polar worldview generated during the Cold War era, the ideas connected to it are still desirable today. America as a gamer nation reproduces its culture in games and these games, in turn, produce and continue to produce (rather than solely reproduce) American culture (Wills 2019, 3). Cold War games in particular emphasise aspects of *Americanness* in order to create a strong contrast between America and the enemy. With respect to Peter Scheinpflug's (2014, 76) classification of game genres according to the pre-programmed conditions and possibilities for interaction in the game world, American Cold War games either follow an objective point of view (often in the form of turn-based strategy games) or a (semi-)subjective point of view (third- and first-person narrative games, mostly following one character). The games discussed below mainly fall into the second category, while some of them still contain elements of tactics and warfare strategies. Both kinds of games contain articulations of *Americanness*, yet the latter category engages with them more directly. The reason for this is that the

protagonist, directed by the player, very often displays his or her emotional reactions to them or even embodies some of their characteristics. In this context, the difference made by Britta Neitzel (2013) between the point of view in games, i.e. the perspective from which the plot is presented, and the point of action, i.e. the player's role in the action, becomes crucial.

Cold War themed video games played from an American perspective share that they present freedom as the highest good that needs to be defended. This emphasis on freedom is overtly represented by the idea of free speech as one of the fundamental rights of every American citizen, often symbolised through (allegedly) free media. However, various forms of media have played vital parts in circulating propaganda during the Cold War era and as has been argued above, their freedom has to be questioned as content has often been produced in collaboration with the Intelligence Services, the Department of Defense or the Army and continues to do so today (Ottosen 2009). In *Freedom Fighters*, the role of media as central facilitators for spreading propaganda is emphasised. The game presents an alternate reality, in which the Soviets occupy the US after dropping an atomic bomb on Berlin, thus winning World War II. The Cold War actually never happened. The media landscape in the US has been centralised into the Soviet Armed Forces Network (SAFN) media corporation and is now controlled by them. Posters and billboards throughout the city spread Soviet propaganda. Thoughts referencing the new system in power should stimulate a positive association with the occupiers in order to gain control over the population. This is also mirrored in the gameplay, since, as Jeff Gerstmann (2003) has described it, "most of the game's plot is advanced by a series of humorous Soviet-run newscasts, which cover your actions as terrorist activities."

communist or socialist tendencies. Against all odds, the protagonist saves the world from destruction, and in a sense embodies the American Dream, which essentially implies that if you work hard, you can achieve anything. *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction* engages with the question of morality from a distinct angle through focusing on an avoidance of direct conflict rather than encouraging massive shoot-outs. The player assumes the role of American agent Sam Fisher, who is dispatched to different regions of the world to complete set tasks. The game begins with Fisher heading to Valetta, Malta, to track down the man who has killed his daughter, Sarah, in a hit-and-run. Before catching the murderer, however, Fisher is caught by a Third Echelon Splinter Cell team, for whom he used to work. Back in the US, his former colleague Grim releases Fisher on the premise that he helps her investigate Third Echelon. This complex initial situation already points towards the complicated networks generated in the game.

The question of morality is a component of all the central themes in *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, which are secret agencies, double agents, and espionage, to the effect that the line between good and evil cannot be drawn based on the nationalities of the individual agents. Fisher – and the player – need to learn whom to trust and which sacrifices to make in order to get what they want. For the exchange of information, buildings that function as popular symbols of *Americanness* are used as meeting places, such as the Washington Monument or the Lincoln Memorial. The climax of the story takes place in the Oval Office, which stands for the place where democracy is constituted and defended. These places share that they symbolise a sense of freedom, independence, and truth that the US have tried to communicate to their people and the world during the Cold War era. In this sense, *Splinter Cell: Conviction* not only thematises aspects central to the Cold War, such as infiltrated spy networks, but also communicates and propagates features positively associated with

Although the NATO, as a conglomerate of states, seemingly moves away from a sole focus on America, the playable characters are still American. The game begins shortly after Gorbachev has been elected into power. The player initially assumes the role of David Armstrong, a Corporal in the US Army and fighting on the side of the NATO. He is stationed on Malden when the Soviet General Guba invades it in an attempt to take control over Malden and Everon. The player helps Armstrong progress in rank through completing various missions. Later in the game, other playable characters include Robert Hammer, Sam Nichols, and James Gastovski (who are all American). In contrast to many other Cold War themed games, *Operation Flashpoint* puts a strong focus on tactics and strategy rather than direct conflict. It aims at authenticity and a closeness to reality with regards to warfare manoeuvres, which is mirrored in the gameplay; the character's abilities, for example, are affected by physical exertion, which, in turn, might result in a shaking hand and thus in inaccurate aiming. One bullet in the right spot might be immediately fatal, while firing at enemies becomes a task in concentration. This rather authentic warfare experience creates a believable setting, which, in turn, makes the way the roles of good and evil are assigned to the two sides of the conflict believable as well.

Besides this fictionalisation, Cold War mechanics and the use of manifestations of *Americanness* to depict stereotypical representations of the conflict between the West and the East are also present in games that only loosely touch upon the Cold War as a historical era. That is to say, while they are set in other or even fictive historical epochs, they tend to represent a Cold War mentality through depicting a struggle between good Western powers and evil communist forces through articulations of *Americanness* and a focus on pro-democratic propaganda. One example is *Homefront*, which has been co-written by John Milius, who also scripted the movie *Red Dawn*, in which the US are invaded by Soviet forces and their communist allies.

This film had an impact on other Cold War themed video games, such as *Freedom Fighters* (Boulding 2003) and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009). *Homefront* alludes to the Cold War by establishing a dichotomy between the good US, which need to defend their territory from communist North Korean forces that have already taken over much of the East Asian region, including Japan and the majority of the Southeast Asian states. Producer Dex Smither said that the atmosphere of the game, its gameplay, and its story are heavily influenced by *Half-Life* (1998) in order to create a sense of an America that is perceived as wanting to have order, liberty, and peace, which stands in contrast to the menacing Korean occupiers (Schwerdtel 2010). In this sense, *Homefront* opposes games that emphasise action-rich scenes packed with special effects, such as *Modern Warfare 2*. The depiction of the rebel headquarters, called Oasis, for example, is portrayed in a calm and tranquil mode, which is supported by serene ambient music. Nonetheless, peaceful, quiet scenes are disturbed by the traces left behind by the Korean invasion, such as burnt-out cars and abandoned houses. Such scenes form the rationale for protagonist Robert Jacobs' actions because they define what the rebels are fighting for: An America that can enjoy the beliefs and values it has built over the years of its self-definition and that the communist invaders have tried to brutally annihilate. Similar to pro-American propaganda during the Cold War era, *Homefront* therefore utilises ideas of *Americanness* and presents them within a highly emotional framework in order to generate a dichotomy between good and evil.

Conclusion

From a historical perspective, propaganda has, in one way or another, always been linked to popular media. This became notably pronounced during the Cold War era, when American state authorities used many different media outlets to communicate

the ideas they wanted their population and the world to have of themselves, while simultaneously postulating menacing images of their opponents. The notion we have of the Cold War era is most likely not borne out of the accounts found in history books but is formed by our experience of how it is portrayed in popular media. The Cold War has become a cultural myth that works through polarisation and attracts our emotional response. Even today's popular media content dealing with this era draws on its ethos, which has, in a sense, become a matter of experience, at least for the West. Consequently, Cold War sentiments are not only utilised if this specific historical time is referenced but also if a dystopian conflict between East and West is presented. This is particularly true for the idea of *Americanness* produced in popular media, whose success is owed to a fascination with a straightforward black-and-white worldview. In other words, the ideas created in popular media during the Cold War era still attract us today because they present a very simple perspective on a world that is becoming increasingly complex. By repeatedly replaying this history in games, players share and re-enact the *triumph of the West* repeatedly to reassure themselves of their glorious (Western) past and sense of superiority. Furthermore, it appears that a sense of dystopia provides an alluring feeling for the viewers who know themselves to be safe. The *Fallout* series, for example, is, in a sense, a playable Cold War dystopia that draws on

“the consensus among postwar Americans that their society was essentially good and that given enough effort anything could be accomplished by it.”
(November 2013, 297)

This sense of superiority is communicated ironically and satirically by transforming the futuristic ideas generated in the US in the 1950s – nuclear-powered aerodynamic cars or art-deco furniture – into reality. These commodities have become objectified versions of American values and need to be defended against forces trying to destroy them, in this case China and its claim to world power. Through focusing on

The mechanisms of *Americanness* discussed here were either non-physical, such as free media, free speech, capitalism, heroism, and justice, or physical, for example the family, locations symbolising democracy (the Oval Office or the Washington Monument), flags, and Uncle Sam. The analysed video games have each incorporated them propagandistically, which has the effect that they produce a sense of a hyperreal American culture that is akin to the one created in popular media during the Cold War era. In our experience of American culture through popular media today, it becomes difficult to see beyond this idealised concept of *Americanness*, partly because we have become very familiar with it. This is the reason why (Cold) War themed video games are so popular because they present us with a simplified worldview we can easily recognise. Drawing on conventions of presentation, they establish a consciousness that distorts history in favour of stylised depictions. Whether or not these games are thus disseminators of (Cold War) propaganda or apolitical popular media outputs that draw on easily recognisable structures in order to increase their players' enjoyment becomes a question that cannot be easily answered.

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254

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