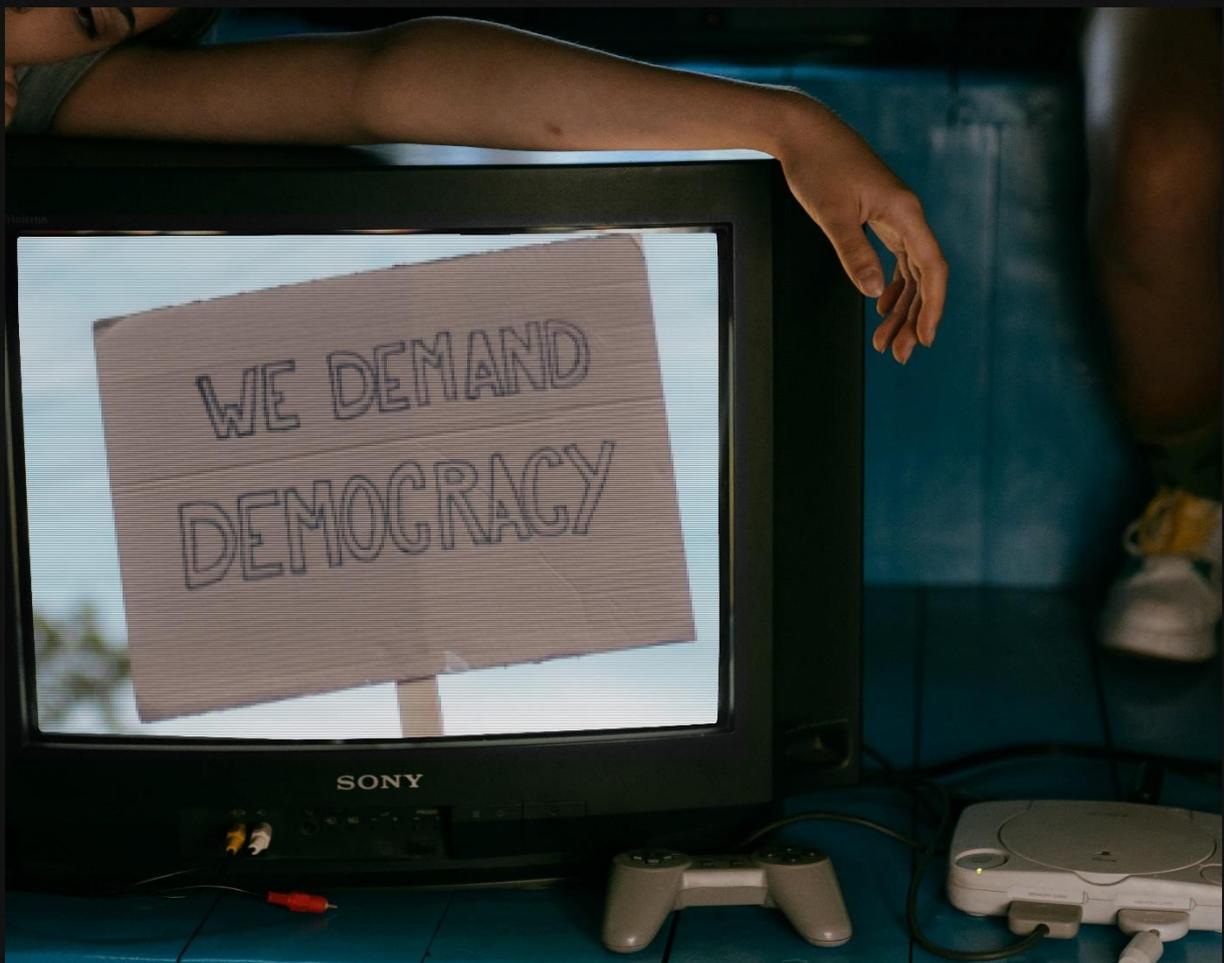


global network player authority PewDiePie god Let's Play angel undead with authentic me aratize on Sixii pvp contest
game rule system representation WoW ble sing nob skills lein or ace body fight experience with rebirth genesis clan digital
religion game analysis The Last of Us death resurrection funeral runes class tradition identity buff priest mag Xbox 360 PVE
simulation ludology narrative



Untitled. © Collage by Felix Zimmermann. Photos by cottonbro, Pexels, and Fred Moon, Unsplash.

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

individuals fighting against the seemingly unstoppable communist spread, the *Fallout* games produce a grand narrative spectators and players can relate to due to their previous experience of it in other media. This is also the reason why Milius' *Red Dawn* is still frequently referenced as the key work of popular culture that generates a bi-polar idea of the world through overt propaganda. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner have described it as “[p]erhaps the most audacious anticommunist film of the era” (Ryan and Kellner 1988, 213) by showing US authoritarianism as superior to Soviet communism despite the fact that both systems undermine democracy and the freedoms associated with it.

The influence of state-directed propaganda in the US is now considerably weaker than during the Cold War era, and according to Boggs and Pollard, its “hegemonic functions become the domain of established media and popular culture, their mission being to furnish legitimation for empire” (Boggs and Pollard 2016, 1–2). Cold War themed video games take up these forms of propaganda and use them in various different modes. The analyses of games presented here has shown that they incorporate mechanisms that have similarly been used in instances of state propaganda in order to appeal to the people’s emotions and morality. From this discussion of Cold War video games played from an American perspective we can conclude that these games tend to present one-sided images of the US by emphasising positive aspects of the country while largely ignoring its negative sides. This pro-American propaganda is similar to the propaganda that has been spread in popular media during the Cold War era. The discussion of Cold War propaganda mechanisms in the years between 1945 and 1991 has therefore defined the foundation on which Cold War video games proceed, namely ideas of domination and power.

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