

# STRUCTURES OF SILENCE: QUEERING SPATIOTEMPORAL DIALOGICS IN VIDEO GAMES

**Department:**

English Language and Literature

**Program:**

PhD

**Project type:**

Dissertation

**Project co-researchers:**

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## BETSY BREY

Betsy Brey's dissertation investigates the narrative and community of one of the most successful games of the last decade, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Brey examines the meaning of specific language using "dialogics", a tool for examining words and language in their present, past, and future social and cultural contexts.

Brey argues that the players of *Skyrim* form a "queered dialogic relationship" with how the narrative of the game represents time, space, economics, and politics which can either challenge or reinforce larger systems of power. In this context, "queered" or "queering" refers not to sexuality but to the process of creating relationships between narrative, time, and space that do not align with dominant cultural attitudes and norms. Games have traditionally been studied through a heteronormative narrative lens, which Brey argues is at odds with the inherently queer and fluid narratives of video games.

As one example, Brey examines the evolution of online memes and language that originated in the *Skyrim* community. One *Skyrim* meme Brey examines was initially about the fictional political and racial boundaries of the world of *Skyrim* but then was co-opted and used as a racist pro-Trump meme during the 2016 US presidential election.

While *Skyrim* seems to promote philosophies of freedom, choice, and liberation, it does so by reproducing colonial narratives without attempting to complicate or push back against them. *Skyrim* falls short of offering more than sympathy to those oppressed by white, colonial, and patriarchal systems. The ways that players engage with the time and space they have at their disposal within *Skyrim* often align with systems of oppression instead of critiquing them.

**Interesting fact:** Over the course of her PhD, Brey has played over 900 hours of *Skyrim*. Both for fun and research.