

A person wearing a hat and a jacket stands next to a brown horse in a virtual mountain landscape. The scene is set during sunset or sunrise, with warm light illuminating the rocky terrain and distant mountains. The person is holding the reins of the horse, and they are both looking towards the horizon.

# BEAST MACHINES: REAL ANIMALS IN VIRTUAL WORLDS

**Department:**

English Language and Literature

**Program:**

PhD

**Project type:**

Dissertation

**Project co-researchers:**

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## NICHOLAS HOBIN

Hobin’s dissertation explores the uncharted territory between animal studies and game studies, examining the representation of living animals in video games. Animals are just as prominent in digital spaces as in real life: they are antagonists, resources, decorations and – most interestingly – they are often defined entirely by their use to human beings. Why do animals exist as human resources? Why are they exempt from human morals?

Hobin’s work looks at video game environments as a reflection of human and nonhuman relations and how animals are treated by the human characters. For example, in *Red Dead Redemption 2*, animal bodies are often arranged into dramatic dioramas or theatrical taxidermy as opposed to other games using animals as craft clothes, items, or food.

By exploring how animal portrayals are transformed within digital spaces, Hobin aims to understand how video games reproduce cultural biases and assumptions which often exclude animals from moral considerations. Hobin’s research uses these various portrayals of animals to challenge how humans relate to, exploit, and moralize animals in real life.

**Interesting fact:** Hobin explores all configurations of what we think of as “animals” including fleshy, mechanical, and alien creatures alike from all genres of gaming including sci-fi, fantasy, and historically inspired realism.