

Game Adaptation of Allan Poe's Novels: from Literature to Video Game

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AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

Pan Huajing, a master's student in Game Design at Uppsala University, Sweden. She graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. Her research topics include existentialism, game narratives and visual expression. She is the contributor of *Indienova*, a platform focusing on independent games in the Chinese market, where she writes game reviews from philosophical and artistic perspectives. She is also a freelance English-to-Chinese translator, with completed book translations including *Medieval Philosophy of Religion (Vol. 2): The History of Western Philosophy of Religion; Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars (Vol. 3): Conquering the Southern Plains*, both of which are awaiting publication. Her game design projects are available on itch.io: <https://egggrass.itch.io/>.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The paper presents a Research through Design (RtD) project, the game adaptation of Allan Poe's novels, aiming to explore the possibility and essence of videogames as an interactive medium compared to traditional art forms. Starting with a theoretical analysis, the first part clarifies how videogame contributes to the possibilities of reinterpretation of an original story through application of game verbs. The second part further explains why Allan Poe's novels are chosen as the sources for adaptation. The theoretical analysis serves both as the research question and the objective for the design project that turns the imagery of Allan Poe's novels into game mechanics (Hunter, 2018) with a poetic rhythm. The third part outlines the game prototype from three perspectives: visual art, narrative and mechanism.

FROM LITERATURE TO VIDEO GAME

Why Adaptation?

Different from transcription, a game adaptation is "to retell the story using the unique characteristics of the medium" (Lindsay, 2011). As a different storytelling medium, game adaptation can actualize "narrative potentials" of the original story (Kukkonen, 2011) through application of game verbs. For example, *Papers, Please* (Lucas Pope, 2013) applies the monotonous action of inspection, which provides a firsthand experience of a character's internal anxiety and exhaustion (Sanders & Johnathan, 2022). The vivid experience is rare in traditional art form, where audiences are only witnesses rather than participants of events.

The fact that videogame can actualize new narrative potential implies that there are some hidden possibilities in traditional art forms. This limitation can be explained by the critique of structuralism from the perspective of deconstruction (Derrida, 1988). Although videogame

involves the narrative potential that may overcome the limitation of traditional art form, it is noted that videogame can also be analyzed from a linguistic perspective (the interpretation by game verbs and game nouns), which means videogame cannot be essentially immune to concerns for the limitation of structure. Just like a reader “who must organize the words represented by ink dropped on paper” (Lindsay, 2012), a player also plays in the restricted game system. This phenomenon will be analyzed and reflected through the design progress.

Why Allan Poe’s novels as sources for adaptation?

Allan Poe’s novels contain abundant literature sources for game narrative. Moreover, they provide a method for metaphysical reflections on the relation between designers and players, which opens a possibility to a self-critique of the design project.

As the pioneer of detective novelists, the atmosphere of Allan Poe’s novels is mainly dark and suspenseful, though with different emphasis. For example, *The Black Cat* unravels the mental process of the criminal through simulation of first perspective; *The Purloined Letter* involves “a deduction by putting one’s self in another’s position” (Deloche & Oguer, 2006). Therefore, “Poe’s novels reveal a parallel connection with game theory based upon empathy” (Deloche & Oguer, 2006). *The Purloined Letter* also mentions an interesting reflexive thought that can continue indefinitely: “What B expects A to do also depends on what B believes that A expects what B will do, and so on” (Read, 2020). Such consideration can perfectly be applied to the relation between writer and reader, designer and player. An ideal design process is not hierarchical, but a dynamic and democratic co-creation that invites participatory design.

THE GAME ADAPTATION PROJECT

Generally, game adaptation is an issue of translation, translating text to visual art, plots to digital narrative and literary logic to game mechanism.

1. Visual Art

The visual art of the game prototype follows the most early illustration style of Allan Poe’s novels in the 19th century, adopting a high contrast black-white sketching style. The art techniques will be introduced, including application of animation and perspective switching, which aims to create a dark atmosphere, in accordance with Allan Poe’s writing style.



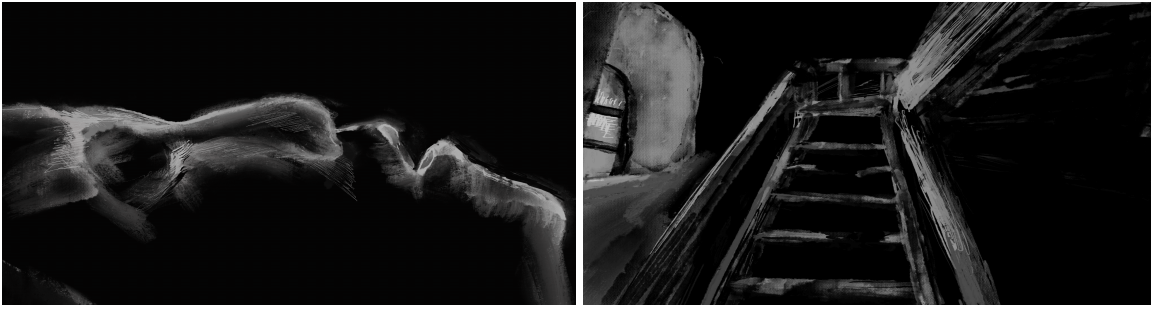


Figure 1: The First Draft of the Visual Art

2. Narrative

Game adaptation needs to reconstruct original plots, deciding what to include and what to exclude. The underlying logic for reconstructions is based on interpretation of the theme of novels. Therefore, a case study of textual analysis will be presented to clarify which atmosphere the game adaptation aims to create.

3. Game Mechanism

Essentially, the perceived theme is expressed through game mechanism. This requires us to “think digitally about dramatic and literary works”(Hunter, 2018). This design project will be a series that adapts Allan Poe’s novels into various game genres according to specific themes, exploring how different feelings can be delivered through specific game mechanisms. The feasibility of the prototype will be examined in playtests in an early stage.

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Ludic Shakespeare: Interactivity, Agency, and Adaptation in Shakespearean Gaming

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen a surge in screen-based Shakespeare adaptations, ranging from faithful reproductions to experimental, intertextual interpretations. However, video games remain significantly underexplored in academic discourse. Addressing this gap, this paper examines the interplay between the linear narratives of Shakespearean drama and the multilinear structures of video games. Building on foundational frameworks from adaptation studies, including Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation*, and Margaret Jane Kidnie's *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, as well as key insights from game studies (Jesper Juul's *Half-Real* and Clara Fernández-Vara's *Introduction to Game Analysis*), Shakespeare studies (Lucas Erne's *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*), and performance studies (Brenda Laurel's *Computers as Theatre*), this research bridges diverse academic fields to investigate the innovative ways in which video game adaptations reinterpret Shakespeare.

The adaptation of Shakespeare's works into video games represents a pivotal yet underexplored realm of intertextual engagement, highlighting the dialogic interplay between canonical texts and contemporary digital media. Video games like *Play the Knave, Elsinore, To Be or Not To Be*, and *Hamlet* demonstrate how video games recontextualize Shakespeare within immersive, interactive environments, extending theatrical conventions into virtual domains. These adaptations challenge the spatial and performative boundaries of traditional theatre by breaking the fourth wall and involving players as active co-creators. Transforming audiences from passive spectators into participants, these adaptations resonate with immersive theatre theories while interrogating how multilinear narratives and player agency influence meaning-making. Drawing on theorists of immersive theatre such as Josephine Machon and cyberdrama scholars like Janet H. Murray, this paper situates these video games within a lineage of performative practices that dissolve the division between audience and performer, redefining Shakespeare's works as dynamic, participatory texts.

These case studies investigate how Shakespeare's texts transform in video games while integrating theatrical elements like performers, audience, direction, spatial dynamics, design, and textual engagement. Central to this exploration is player agency, reframing players as co-creators who actively reshape the plays within multilinear narratives. This aligns with insights from Gina Bloom ("Videogame Shakespeare: Enskilling Audiences through Theater-Making Games") and Janet H. Murray (*Hamlet on the Holodeck*),

emphasizing how video games subvert traditional reinterpretations by positioning players as collaborators.

Play the Knave exemplifies this approach, transforming Shakespearean performance into a digitally mediated, embodied activity through motion-sensing technology. By decentralizing authorial control and introducing player-driven staging, the game destabilizes textual fixity, emphasizing performative agency as a central mode of engagement. This aligns with Machon's notion of immersive performance as participatory and embodied, demonstrating how digital interfaces enable multimodal interactions with canonical drama. Similarly, the video game *Elsinore* reframes *Hamlet* through a feminist lens, centering Ophelia as the agent of a recursive, time-loop narrative. This game interrogates gender dynamics and the deterministic themes of Shakespearean tragedy, encouraging players to actively participate in crafting alternative interpretations. Drawing on feminist and intersectional perspectives (e.g., Liesbet Van Zoonen's *Feminist Media Studies*), *Elsinore* reshapes Shakespeare's narratives to address and reflect contemporary cultural issues.

Meanwhile, *To Be or Not To Be* uses hypertextuality and parody to dismantle Shakespeare's gravitas, presenting *Hamlet* as a comedic, ludic exploration of existential themes. Its branching narrative empowers players to democratize storytelling, challenging the canon's sanctity. In contrast, the minimalist 2009 game *Hamlet* abstracts the play into a surrealist puzzle framework, prioritizing gameplay over textual fidelity. Drawing insights from Julian Novitz's "The Time Is Out of Joint" and Rebecca Bushnell's "Videogames and Hamlet," this paper explores how video games disrupt traditional linear narratives, presenting fragmented and enigmatic avenues for audience engagement. It examines how these games deconstruct Shakespearean texts through the use of interactivity and innovative aesthetics, reinterpreting their thematic and narrative foundations in transformative ways.

These adaptations illuminate Shakespeare's adaptability to experimental media forms, demonstrating his works' potential to inspire playful and unexpected reinterpretations. By examining games such as *Macbeth*, *Arden*, *Dream*, and others, this thesis highlights how video games integrate historical contextualization and postcolonial critiques to further extend Shakespeare's relevance into modern cultural contexts. These games exemplify emergent performative art forms like cyberdrama, internet theatre, and digital performance, challenging fixed notions of plot, authorship, and audience passivity while aligning with Murray's theorization of participatory narrative spaces.

Ultimately, this paper underscores how video games foster cultural engagement, creative production, and pedagogical opportunities, advancing their recognition as distinct

narrative mediums. The act of designing and playing Shakespearean games enables imaginative reinterpretations of canonical texts, offering new insights into narrative structures. By examining Shakespeare through the lens of video games, this study not only deepens our understanding of his works but also reveals the transformative potential of interactive media in reshaping literary and performative traditions.

Collectively, these adaptations represent the convergence of Shakespearean intertextuality and digital affordances, creating new modalities of immersive theatre. By collapsing spatial and narrative boundaries, these games position players as active collaborators, challenging fixed authorial intentions and reimagining Shakespeare as a dynamic site of participatory engagement. Embracing the multilinear structures of video games, these adaptations destabilize conventional notions of plot, character, and authorship, demonstrating the transformative potential of interactivity in meaning-making. This thesis explores how these adaptations bridge Shakespeare's theatrical traditions with digital media, establishing video games as innovative platforms for reinterpreting canonical texts in contemporary contexts.

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Author Statement:

Abhik Maiti earned a double M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of Exeter, UK, where his doctoral work explored the connections between video games, narrative structures, and performance. While at Exeter, he gained valuable experience as a Teaching Assistant, refining his expertise in pedagogy and academic guidance. Currently, he serves as an Assistant Professor at Saint Joseph's University, seamlessly integrating his dedication to both research and teaching. Dr. Maiti has an extensive academic portfolio, with over 30 publications in prominent journals and edited collections, alongside presenting at more than 22 national and international conferences. His contributions often intersect the fields of gaming, literature, and performance studies. Expanding beyond his foundational research in game studies, Dr. Maiti is now focused on posthumanism, with a particular interest in the transformative role of artificial intelligence in theater and performance. His interdisciplinary work demonstrates a deep engagement with how emerging technologies redefine conventional ideas of authorship, creativity, and agency in artistic practices.

Reconsidering Adapting Eastern Practices in Mindfulness and Meditation Games: Pursuing A New Game Design Framework in Chinese Daoist Practice and Philosophy

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Bio

Haoran Chang is an artist, media art researcher, and experimental game designer. His current practice and research focus on feminist game studies, posthumanism in digital media, immersive media, and worlding and worldbuilding. His PhD research-creation project explores how the body can be healed with immersive gaming technology, approached from the perspective of Traditional Chinese Medicine philosophy and practice. His works have been shown in many international conferences and festivals, including ISEA, xCoAx, CHI Play, SIGGRAPH Asia, and HASTAC. He has published papers on peer-reviewed journals, such as *Refract* and *Virtual Creativity*.

Abstract

Why do we seek to adapt Eastern traditional mindfulness and meditation practices, such as Taichi, Qigong, and Yoga, into a gamified experience? In this paper, I will explore the relationship between these Eastern practices as spiritual arts and gaming technology as mechanical enframing. Rather than positioning Eastern practices and games as fundamentally opposed, I aim to explore the connections and resonances between them. By introducing my ongoing game project, which incorporates Chinese Daoist practices into game design, I consider the possibility of redeeming Western technology through Eastern traditions.

In this paper, I will begin by introducing the history of counterculture in California as an example of the convergence between technoculture and Eastern practices. The countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s in California looked to Buddhism, meditation, and psychedelics as forms of liberation from mainstream society (Turner, 2006). R. John Williams (2014: 6) conceptualizes *Asia-as-technê*, seeing this convergence as a necessity “to turn to the culture and tradition of the East in order to recover the essence of some misplaced or as-yet-unfulfilled modern identity.” In recent years, many mindfulness and meditation applications with gamified design have continued this lineage

of constructing a narrative of “the East” within Silicon Valley. Applications like Headspace and Calm incorporate Eastern philosophies, such as Zen Buddhism, into their design. While research supports the effectiveness of gamification in mindfulness and meditation applications (Ge & Han, 2021; Miner et al., 2024; Choo & May, 2014), the process of adapting non-Western cultures needs to be examined critically. Zeitlin-Wu (2023) critiques these applications for encoding assumptions of whiteness, where the structural logic and orientation of the design are framed as universal coping mechanisms devoid of racial and gender specificity. Furthermore, gamifying Eastern practices aligns with Western ideologies of self-realization and self-actualization, which conflict with Eastern practices that emphasize transcending individualism (Hu, 2022).

My on-ongoing research creation project in re-enacting traditional Chinese Daoist practice in a gaming environment reconsiders the framework of designing mindfulness and meditation game. Rather than motivating and rewarding player through the common gamification logic, this game explores mindfulness and meditation game design through an exploratory storytelling, responsive virtual environment design, and rhizomatic level design. I will use Zhan Zhuang Exergame as an example to demonstrate this framework in detail. This game is a VR-based physical exercise game inspired by Zhan Zhuang (standing meditation), a traditional Chinese practice rooted in Daoism. Zhan Zhuang focuses on self-cultivation through standing postures, emphasizing quietness and stillness. Through the process of game development, I will explore how we can pursue a new game design framework of mindfulness and meditation game in Eastern philosophies and practices, instead of for or by them.

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