This research attempts to use the brainwaves of human players as quantifiable indicators, employing quantitative methods to study how player groups are influenced by multiple factors when experiencing certain mechanisms in specific "poetic games," ultimately producing the designers' intended "defamiliarization" experience. Some games encourage people to reflect on their form in a way similar to poetry. These games are often referred to as "art games" (Bogost, 2011; Sharp, 2015). Alex Mitchell applied defamiliarization to the analysis of art games in 2014, introducing the concept of "poetic games," which he defines as: constructing the actions taken by players in the game and the game's responses to these actions to attract players' attention to the game's form, and through this method, encourage players to reflect and view the structure in new ways (2016) This War of Mine (11 Bit Studios, 2014). Pötzsch refers to this game-specific form of defamiliarization as procedural ostranenie, a strategy that "deploys formal devices to slow down and complicate the acquisition of play skills thereby bringing otherwise internalized frames for interaction with game-worlds to the sudden awareness of players" (2019). Alex Mitchell further identifies five categories of techniques for defamiliarization of player expectations through a close reading methodology: interaction, gameplay, agency, time, and boundaries.

Shadow of the Colossus achieves a slowed interaction loop to create a defamiliarization experience by dividing the action of triggering the core mechanism of slaying into two steps (Sicart, 2008). You do not need to repeatedly press the controller to slay; instead, you press the button on the controller once to raise the sword and then press it again to execute the "slay" attack. By disrupting expectations of the behavior of a sword-wielding hero, the game prolongs this simple action and encourages players to reflect on whether this is the right course of action.

Previous studies have mainly focused on how these formal means attract players' attention to the work itself, encouraging players to re-examine the form of the work. However, the potential uses of these techniques are not limited to "striving to preserve or regain a primal relationship with something that is now apparently lost" (Pötzsch, 2019, p. 247). But merely incorporating poetic gameplay mechanisms in games is often not enough to elicit an aesthetic response. Mitchell suggests that future work should include empirical studies of players' reactions to these mechanisms to refine the list of mechanisms and better understand how and when they successfully produce aesthetic responses in players. This study will monitor changes in players' brainwaves during "playing" and "watching" Shadow of the Colossus using electroencephalography devices to test how its "slowed interaction loop" design affects player experience. Compared to interpretive phenomenology, which focuses on individual experiential study of gameplay, quantitative research can present research results in a more data-driven and visual manner.

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Defining the unacknowledged videogame adaptation of the hero's journey

Abstract

The hero's journey is a popular topic among videogame designers and scholars but it is known more by its reputation than its contents. Little attempt has been made, by advocates and critics alike, to clarify what we mean by "hero's journey". Authors give "the hero's journey" by name without explanation (e.g., Kerttula, 2019), state a number of stages without names (e.g., Buchanan-Oliver & Seo, 2012), name stages without definitions (e.g., Delmas et al., 2007), describe stages briefly (e.g., Ip, 2011), or direct readers to find descriptions online (e.g., Brathwaite & Schreiber, 2009). Even detailed descriptions are inconsistent. Some describe a 17-stage version (e.g., Rollings & Adams, 2003), others a 12-stage version (e.g., Compton, 2018a, 2018b, 2019), and a few give shorter versions (e.g., Koenitz et al., 2018). Almost all cite Joseph Campbell's (1949/1968) *Hero with a Thousand Faces* as the definitive source and half cite Christopher Vogler's (2007) *Writer's Journey* as a reliable simplification, but this supposed baseline is also problematic because these two books present two different versions (Moran, 2021, 2024).

All versions of the hero's journey, from Campbell to Vogler and into videogames, are treated as a single hero's journey. This conflates histories, claims, and criticisms and leaves videogame discourse around the hero's journey vague and superficial. This paper does the foundational work of defining the hero's journey in videogame literature to clarify existing arguments and support future arguments.

Since the hero's journey is called a narrative structure, this paper uses structural narratology to clarify and compare the hero's journey given in three videogame texts: Compton's (2018a, 2018b, 2019) 17-stage hero's journey for GameDeveloper.com (the website formerly known as Gamasutra.com), Rollings and Adams's (2003) 12-stage hero's journey in their book *Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams on Game Design*, and Koenitz, Di Pasterna, Jansen, de Lint, and Moss's (2018) 6-item hero's journey in their paper critiquing the hero's journey at the International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling.

Structural narratology is an appropriate approach for this foundational work because it offers a formal organisational structure for a narrative's elements and their hierarchical relations (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019). Broadly, structuralism is concerned with the abstract deep structure of the chronological events that happen and the actants involved in those events. This paper will redescribe the hero's journey in terms of functions. According to Propp (1968/2021), the function is the smallest narrative unit. It is "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action" (Propp, 1968/2021, p. 21). Barthes (1977) says cardinal functions determine the story's progress along a particular path rather than an alternative.

When rewritten as functions, we can identify commonalities across these texts and make some initial observations about the hero's journey we often discuss. Firstly, it begins with the hero being compelled to leave the familiar and enter the unfamiliar. Rather than a "seeker hero" who departs to search for a goal, this hero is a "victimised hero" who departs without a goal and encounters various adventures after their departure (Propp, 1968/2021, pp. 36–39). Secondly, if a "sequence" begins with a cardinal function that is not causally dependent on a preceding function and ends when a cardinal function has no consequence (Barthes, 1977, p. 101), then the

hero's journey comprises two sequences: 1) travelling into and then out of the unfamiliar and 2) defeating a significant obstacle to gain a reward.

Rather than assuming the hero's journey has remained unchanged since Campbell first described it in 1949, we should recognise and analyse the changes it has undergone as it was adopted and adapted into videogames. This paper aims to replace incomplete assumptions about the hero's journey with concrete definitions and establish a foundation for more productive critique. This early analysis raises questions about what characterises the hero's journey in videogame discourse and will facilitate further engagement with narrative theory.

This paper is part of a larger research project historicising the hero's journey.

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Jacqueline Moran received her PhD from Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, where she currently works as an education specialist teaching game studies and writing for interactive narratives. Her research focuses on the hero's journey, particularly Joseph Campbell's work and the way it is (mis)understood and (mis)used in game studies and design, with a special interest in narratological and phenomenological approaches.

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Mortis: Evolution of Death in Videogames

Death is pervasive. It is inevitable. It has various definitions that range from the biological to the ethical. It can be viewed as an event or a process, separate or united with the idea of morality (DeGrazia). The notion of death extends its presence to the realm of video games. Death in gaming is as plural in its form as in its function. Its interactions with players have evolved over time, from the medium's inception to the modern day. This paper's primary focus will be exploring and identifying these various interactions and tracing the evolution. This paper attempts to do that through two streams: the historical and the formal.

This paper attempts to trace the evolution of the medium from the days of the arcade to the modern day. During the days of the arcade, death was a method of monetary gain: from *Pac-man* employing a three-life system to difficult bosses designed to induce death, such as in *Sinistar.* This notion changed with the advent of home consoles, as death evolved from being a tool to encourage spending to being something that could be exploited with save systems (Curtis). Whilst Curtis, in their research titled *To Fatality and Beyond: The Deathsetics of Failure in Videogames,* primarily highlighted the evolution in the context of arcades and home consoles whilst looking at the broader picture of aesthetics, this paper attempts to expand the conversation to include devices such as mobile phones, virtual reality, and other developments such as autosaving or save states.

As gaming on cellphones has become more popular among consumers and lucrative to companies developing, the idea of death in games has shifted from being a barrier of narrative progression to once again becoming an agent of monetary expense, resembling the situation of the arcades. Virtual reality presents an interesting problem, as the notion of death in a game such as *Resident Evil 7* can be viewed on a metalevel—being both a death of the character, and a

simulated or mimetic death of the player. Autosaving has changed death from being a problem to becoming nothing more than a loading screen in games such as *Fallout: New Vegas*. Emulation and its development of save states have also begun to transport this notion from games of the present to the past.

The other strain of death is the formal, which corresponds primarily to exploration of death across the realms of single and multiplayer gaming. The reason for pursuing this strain is that death within a single-player sandbox functions differently than in a multiplayer setting. Single-player games such as *The Last of Us* use death as a part of their narrative delivery. A similar situation is seen in *Hades* (Aldehayat). On the other hand, a game such as *Dead Cells* would use death as a unit of experiential learning and unlocking meaning through interactions with the world of the game. In the context of a multiplayer game, death could disadvantage the player's team, such as in *Rainbow Six Siege*, or be nothing more than a momentary break in play in action. Another example of the difference between single and multiplayer would be toxic behavior resulting from dying in online games such as *League of Legends* (Nexø and Kristiansen).

The paper, therefore, attempts to construct a historical tracing of the evolution of the medium of death—akin to a genealogical survey. This paper ultimately attempts to juxtapose the Foucauldian idea of epistemes with the notion of death as a device within gaming. This juxtaposition attempts to further the conversation outward, from the sphere of gaming to the sphere of society and how it reflects changes of cultures and technology within it.

(609 words)

Keywords: Epistemes, Mechanics, Virtuality, Genealogy.

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Narrative and Canon in Contemporary Videogame Adaptations of Tolkien's Middle-earth

Adapting a literary narrative into interactive media is fraught with challenges unique to the medium. Although the shift from imagination to direct perception happens in visual adaptations as well, videogame adaptations involve an additional experiential setup of the adapted world. As Linda Hutcheon points out "The heterocosm of film is experienced in a game in a more intense form of 'vicarious kinesthesia' and with a feeling of sensory presence" (51). Due to the differing specificities of each medium, changes become inevitable in adaptation. Following its adaptation into various media, J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth mythos have naturally undergone considerable reconstruction as well. The massive success of Peter Jackson's movie trilogies on *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-03) and *The Hobbit* (2012-14) have played a significant role in reshaping how Tolkien's mythos is perceived now. It is after all, a "fact that any adaptation establishes for the audience a situated, semiotic companion relation to that work of narrative fiction, thereby inevitably transforming how the source is (mis) remembered and (re) interpreted" (Oziewicz 248).

Videogame adaptations of Tolkien's mythos like *Shadow of Mordor* (2014) and *Shadow of War* (2017) draw considerably from Jackson's movie franchises and offer a rich interactive experience of the heterocosm but with a newly minted narrative not found in the novels. The games use the unique Nemesis AI system which allows a personalised interactive experience with NPCs, while continually reconstructing certain aspects of the game storyline. Bainbridge comments how these games "totally reject Tolkien's values while placing in his imaginary world an enraged man who seeks to become personally and socially superior, with the goal of inhumane vengeance" (170). Do games with such emergent narratives *necessarily* have to disregard concerns of fidelity to the source material? What *is* original and what not? The very idea of canon in Tolkien has been further problematised by Dr. Corey Olsen, a Tolkien scholar, who recently commented that "there's no such thing really as canon in Tolkien. Tolkien's ideas were ever evolving" (Kain).

This paper seeks to examine how contemporary videogame adaptations (post Peter Jackson movies) of Tolkien's Middle-earth have transformed the perceived narrative of Middle-earth and how it would impact a contemporary audience steeped into participatory culture. Furthermore, this paper seeks to analyse how the change in narrative across various media

affect our understanding of canon in Tolkien's mythopoeia. Issues pertaining to copyright, fidelity and market forces will also be assessed.

Keywords: Tolkien, adaptation, videogames, narrative, fidelity, canon

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