

Project Summary:

Today computer games constitute an important branch of the global entertainment industry. Since the inception of this technology in the early 1970s, development and consumption of games and gaming platforms have been in constant growth. Presently, 'AAA' computer games require a budget similar to major Hollywood films and reach a comparable global audience. Children and young adults often spend more time playing games than reading books, watching television, or playing outside. Presently, a significant portion of young adults' social interaction happens in the interconnected arenas of online games. Given this apparent saliency of computer games in contemporary culture and society, continued research efforts into the possible consequences of this form of entertainment appear necessary.

Among the most successful recent 'AAA' games are war-related titles that invite players to adopt the role of soldiers or other fighters in a first person perspective, and guide player characters through the violent challenges posed by various virtual battlefields. Drawing on, and developing further, recent advances in game studies, the present project will focus on such first-person war games and investigate if, and how, they predispose player experiences, play into political and historical discourse, and affect player attitudes. A practical component aims at designing a critical first-person war game for education and training.

The main hypotheses of the project regarding possible impacts are tested from the theoretical and methodological vantage points of 1) a combination of narratological and procedural analysis, 2) discourse analysis, 3) empirical social psychology, and 4) critical game design. During a second phase, the findings of each respective component are correlated and critically reassessed and theory and methods are developed into an interdisciplinary framework. Produced results will further advance the field of game studies and lead to concrete policy recommendations.

Main Objectives:

The primary objective of the project is

to conduct a multidisciplinary analysis of first person computer war games and assess their potential individual and collective impacts combining methods from the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The primary objective is realized through a set of secondary objectives:

1. An analysis and formal description of first person computer war games' generic narrative and procedural design features

2. The historico-political contextualisation of the meanings and forms of engagement these features invite
3. The measuring of possible attitude changes in connection to extended exposure to such features
4. The design of a first person perspective game that engages such features and that critically addresses questions of war, violence, and the enemy in ambiguous moral and ethical terrain
5. A development of interdisciplinary approaches that combine narrative and procedural analysis with empirical social psychology, and critical advances in game design.