

Presence at History: Toward an Expression of Authentic Historical Content as Game Rules and Play

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to address the theme of the 2018 conference by examining the significant role game developers now have in mediating our understanding and engagement with history by placing players in historical events/scenarios thick with faithfully rendered artefacts, architecture, styles, and social encounters. In doing so, we argue for a new wave of historical games in which developers are no longer merely translating established scholarly perspectives on the past, but operating *as* historians through their practice-led research that attempts to bridge representational learning with more direct experience by historicizing the player's experience, gameplay, and interactions. This paper principally illustrates its argument via a range of contemporary game titles that demonstrate a proclivity for creating authentic living socio-cultural systems, game mechanics, themes, and goals that invite players to learn about the past, distinct from games that employ uchronic times, alternate histories, or simply use history as window-dressing.

Keywords

Meaning-making, historical authenticity, play as content, retrosapes, *Titanic: Honor and Glory*,

INTRODUCTION

The notion of historical authenticity or plausibility is increasingly being used to distinguish the relative merit of historical fictions produced primarily for entertainment. As writer Michael Hirst (2015) has claimed (*Elizabeth: The Golden Age, Tudors, & Vikings*), his work attempts to 'rescue' history from past 'clichés' (White, 2015). Regardless of those who seek to repudiate the historical accuracy of works of historical fiction they nevertheless serve to reawaken and cultivate an interest in history. The impact of television series *Vikings* on visitor numbers to the Viking Ship Museum in Bygdøy Oslo is testament alone to the way works of historical fiction can operate as a catalyst or 'provocation' (Zielinski & Custance, 1980) to learning and discovery. Many forms of historical rendering within entertainment have been dismissed as purely a source of aesthetic pleasure, downplaying their instructive and constructive potential. Humanities scholars from a variety of disciplines have been required to take up the challenge of reasserting the importance of historical entertainment forms (e.g. the historical novel) and the

Proceedings of DiGRA 2018

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manner in which “history comes to human consciousness in art” (Shaw, 1983, p.10). The strength of entertainment forms of inquiry into the past comes from the manner they represent an “ongoing negotiation with the chaos of history” (Elias, 2005, p.163) without necessarily reaching toward ‘completion’ or ‘fulfilment’ toward a ‘final knowledge’. As Hayden White (2005) argues: “A simply true account of the world based on what the documentary record permits one to talk about what happened in it at particular times, and places can provide knowledge of only a very small portion of what ‘reality’ consists of” (p. 147).

While this paper purports the beginning of a new phase in historical fidelity in digital games, the medium’s engagement with history has been evident since its earliest releases. Indeed, games such as the text-driven adventure *Oregon Trail* (MECC, 1971) compellingly introduced its players to 19th Century pioneer life, as they travelled along the historic 3,490km east-west emigrant trail established by fur traders. On their way west to claim land in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, players are required to budget and manage supplies, navigate difficult terrain and river crossings, hunt, and avoid fatal illnesses. Game writer Don Rawitsch (2014) researched the diaries of individuals who had journeyed the Oregon Trail, translating those into range of obstacles and their probability levels. As he states:

I decided that the thing to do was to create a scorecard of things they reported in their diaries ... So if the diaries, for example, indicated that on 15 percent of the days there was some mention of bad weather, then we could build into the computing code that there was a 15 percent probability of each turn of being victim of bad weather. I was eventually able to bring a more specific and focused historical research to the development of the program.

The game’s underlying educational intentions are also made explicit in the historical notes that explain how the challenges presented by the game are comparable to those faced by pioneers, plus the historical significance of every stop along the trail. Similarly, Koei’s much reviled Dynasty Warrior game-series situated in the Three Kingdoms period in Chinese history between the foundation of the state of Wei in 220 A.D. and the reunification of China under the Jin in 280 also attempted to offer some additional historical context to temper its otherwise exaggerated repurposing of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (itself a 14th Century historical fiction, attributed to Luo Guanzhong) within its gameplay.

With the inclusion of specific historic events, campaigns, and settings within modern warfare games, the capacity of historical attributes to increase the appeal and enrich the game play experience became evidently clear. The term ‘retroscape’ was coined by Brown (1991), and applied to *Call of Duty 2* (Infinity Ward, 2005) by Cruz (2006), to account for the emergence of commercialized environments that explicitly recreate historical settings. Following *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Medal of Honor* (Dreamworks Interactive, 1999) was the first game to recreate the Omaha beach landing, depicting Allied invasion of German-occupied France on June 6th, 1944. In doing so, the game followed Spielberg into “new territories of verisimilitude” (Sturken, 1997, p.42), which employed a subjective sensibility and post-Vietnam representational logic to World War films in defiance of traditional “celebratory representational practices of Hollywood war films” (Owens, 2002, p. 259). Yet, Salvati and Bullinger (2013) are careful in their praise of the historical significance of such games and use the term ‘selective authenticity’ in their evaluation of both *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor* franchises in order to signal specific forms of accuracy that games employ. These they categorize under technology fetishism (weapons and vehicles), the use of cinematic conventions (e.g. newsreel cut-scenes) and presence of

documentary authority (photographs, maps, etc.) that reinforce the legitimacy of the experience provided.

Cruz (2006) highlights how, upon its release, *Call of Duty 2* publisher Activision claims for the game did not extend beyond an attempt to redefine “the cinematic intensity and chaos of battle.” Yet, this did little to prevent authenticity debates, which continue to rage on. For example, Keith Stuart (2017) recently argued in *The Guardian*: “There is nothing authentic about the way *Call of Duty*—or any other shooter game—depicts warfare. You can accurately re-create all the weapons, battles and locations (and *CoD: WWII* clearly does this beautifully), but this is not going to be an authentic evocation of the infantry experience. It’s going to be about running around with a machine gun, killing and respawning for hundreds of hours. And that’s fine.” Whereas, Holly Nielsen (2017a) takes a different approach to examining the historical value of games by countering with the argument that “engaging properly with games that depict historical events should extend far beyond simply picking apart their accuracy – it’s a matter of public history. Historians [are] interested in seeing where a huge portion of society is engaging with themes, ideas and material” from history. Indeed, the appeal of games like *Call of Duty 2* matter as much as whether or not they succeed in representing the functionality of the various weapons and equipment used during that period of warfare, portrayals of soldiering, comradeship, or the hardships of survival during wartime.

HISTORICAL ‘THEME’ PARKS

Despite examples of game containing greater levels of historical verisimilitude via location and setting, many games continue to draw on historical fantasy, romanticised or linear histories of the past, or use of history as a vehicle for ‘presentism’ to convey modern-day ideas, issues, and themes. The first games in the *Assassin’s Creed* series offer a notable case of drawing on, and creating historical fantasy narratives and motifs with its ten-millennia-long conflict between Templars and Assassins, evident also in recent games such as the Medieval-fantasy hack and slash action game *For Honor* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2017). This game pits players into a highly embellished and bloody gladiatorial-style death-match in a Medieval world as either a European knight, Viking or Samurai.

Modern war games, while not utilising the conventions of historical high-fantasy, nonetheless continue to rely on using the same narrative archetypes of individual heroism and a ‘just’ war. More recent releases, such as *Battlefield One* (EA DICE, 2016) and *Call of Duty: WWII* (Seldgehammer Games, 2017), have attempted to diversify war histories with the inclusion of different ethnicities, such as the participation of African American soldiers. Yet, such games continue to fall short in presenting situationally and socially complex accounts of modern warfare. Accounts that could include the role and impact of disease and hunger, problems of low supply of ammunition during intense fighting, weapon malfunction; narratives that explore the role of racial segregation amongst soldiers, and the nature of relationships and interactions between combatants and civilians; exploration of the themes of death and psychological trauma (see Schott, 2017 for a discussion on the trivial treatment of death in games). MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2007) have observed that historical games rarely convey morally challenging or intellectual representations of history. In their evaluation of historical representation in games they identify issues such as: the over use of linear accounts of the past that recycle traditional or static truths, discourses, and tropes, avoiding difficult or sensitive historical conflicts and issues, and a failure to mediate the tensions between the multiple functions of games (including gameplay, narrative, aesthetics, and play) with its engagement to history.

Turn-based and real-time strategy games also reinforce popular perceptions of

history. That is, they do not necessarily strive to attain historical authenticity but offer a game-model of warfare that connects with the consumption of history from various media and textual works since the nineteenth century. In *Medieval II: Total War* (2006), for example, the game's trademark large-scale real-time battles that are played out in a historical setting reinforces players' perceptions of Medieval land battles as a common occurrence. Indeed, unit formations throughout the battle "appear in compact and relatively ordered blocks of ranks, with players able to order changes in the formation and facing their troops with ease" (Federenko, 2013, pp. 61-62). As Medieval historians, such as Gregory Federenko (2013), have argued, the plundering and pillaging of the Medieval towns and countryside, as well as siege battles, were not only more frequent but preferred methods of Medieval warfare. What this game's portrayal of war and conquest illustrates are nineteenth century ideologies of warfare and modern nation-states which act as anachronisms. Likewise, Myers (2016) has highlighted how real-time offers less realism than it might first suggests. In the case of *Empire: Total War* (Creative Assembly, 2009) he highlights the impracticality of micro-managing the number of units engaged in warfare, ostensibly simulating a 'real' battle. Yet, even in its automated real-time state, its time-frame does not correspond to the way The Battle of Waterloo, "took place over the course of several days" (p. 397). These examples indicate the degree to which games are "distorted according to the needs of both players and gameplay" (ibid.) and the care that needs to be taken in evaluating presentations of history.

Indeed, such examples have done little to foster acceptance of those who produce or give scholarly attention (e.g. Adam Chapman) to gamic presentations of history amongst more traditional approaches to history scholarship. Historian Robert Whitaker (2016), who embraces the opportunities that videogames present, also highlights the need to manage counter-factual practices and works from becoming accepted historical accounts. He has stated that:

Most game development studios use history as mere window dressing, and the few studios that do research the past often use inhouse research teams that do not employ a professional historian ... Should we assume that this lack of connection between gamers and scholarship means gamers lack interest in the work of historians, or might we see it as due to the absence of a compelling way to deliver scholarship to players?

In the example that follows, we discuss a game that would presumably fulfil Whitaker's desire for a more compelling means of presenting historical research. Yet, let us preface this example with the comment that it does not simply represent translation or articulation of scholarly narratives, nor is it driven by research-agendas. Indeed, increasing numbers of game developers' are now demonstrating a desire to "craft a stronger understanding of actuality (a perception that such games represent actual people, places, events, and/or processes)" (Poremba, 2011, p. 1) in ambitious projects that seek to produce living socio-cultural systems of otherwise past or dead civilisations. The example offered here is *Assassin's Creed: Origin* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2017) that has demonstrated 'titanic' ambition in its endeavours to produce authentic, rather than accurate, portrayals of history based on "a foundation of research and credible history" (Ubisoft Game Director, Ashraf Ismail, 2017), that the development team collated, funded and project managed. *Origin* maintains an awareness of the systemic nature of games in the manner it distinguishes between authenticity and accuracy. So while the statues and monuments seen in *Origin's* Ancient Egyptian setting possess authenticity, their positioning and function serve the

player, as they “can see them from afar and so locate themselves in a 3D environment” (Ismail, cited in Nielsen, 2017b).

The historical research practices attached to this single game production are however notable. In order to recreate several cities, and vast swathes of open country of the Ptolemaic Kingdom, the studio employed its own historian to collaborate with Egyptologists and bring on board academic advisors (e.g. archaeologist, architect and historical reconstruction illustrator, Jean-Claude Golvin who created 19 images for the game). Where there were multiple or conflicting theories pertaining to the period, Ubisoft’s researcher process sought to achieve a ‘consensual version’ (Durand, Ubisoft Historian). In instances where primary or secondary sources were limited, the development team began to facilitate its own *active reconstructive or envisioning practices* distinct from creative license and fictional superimposition. For example, in order to give the populus of the game a language Egyptologists, linguists and voice coaches combined knowledge and expertise to voice and perform a language based on Alan Gardiner’s 1927 text *Egyptian Grammar*, James Allen’s (2013) *The Ancient Egyptian Language* and the work of Raymond Faulkner (*The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts, Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*) that possessed a distinct rhythm from Arabic (Guesdon, Ubisoft Creative Director, cited in Nielsen, 2017b).

Ancient History scholar Evelyne Ferron also noted how her involvement in the production of *Origin* required research (not just expertise) and the adoption of different approach to researching. As she stated to the popular press, “to recreate Alexandria, the kind of research you have to do is not the kind I would normally do.” Indeed Ferron completed field-research in Pergamon, an ancient Greek city with ruins in modern Turkey believed to be inspired by Alexandria. The dissemination process for the research undertaken for this production is not going to be wedded only to the game *Assassin’s Creed: Origins*, but a planned ‘discovery tour’ that will dispense of the need to experience the world in game mode and its narrative and combat constraints, replaced with ‘tour guides’ that will explicitly highlight the research knowledge informing the game.

A number of forthcoming and recently released games are taking the next step in both historical portrayal and experience by developing a model of historically-authentic game development in which forms of knowledge, interactions, ecologies, social and cultural activities, and other experiences are the driving forces of gameplay, game design and the player’s emerging narratives. This model of history, which incorporates both the practices of historians and game designers in a co-construction of history, is neither a factual re-telling of the past nor a reliance on older forms of history that utilize linear, Hollywood-style versions of historical representation, but rather conforms with games studies scholar Manuel Martinez’s (2016) perspective that history is a “construction and not a set of facts” (p. 3). For example, *1979 Revolution: Black Friday* (iNK Stories, 2016), is a game concept developed by Iranian Navid Khosari (who previously worked on the Grand Theft Auto and Max Payne series) that asks players to adopt the role of a photojournalist in Iran amidst the revolution. In order to authentically depict a late-1970s Tehran, realisation of the game concept entailed a research foundation (much like the Assassin’s Creed example), including over 40 interviews with people who were on the streets from “fundamental Islamic supporters to communists to military groups”, (Khosari, cited in Osberg, 2014) in addition to consultation with academic experts in revolution and protest. For example, French photojournalist Michel Setboun, who documented the revolution between 1978 and 1980, consulted on the project. The relevance of this project comes from a desire on the part of its Iranian design-team to give the player the experience of “what it’s like to be a person in a huge crowd of protesters and how

your own morality can choose how to navigate that particular path” (Khosari, 2014). This model of historical gaming does not dissuade nor reject the discourses and elements of fiction, counterfactual history, or the semiotic components of video games. These elements serve to further enhance comprehension of the past by giving players a more complex and grounded representation of the past, and to connect, as well as legitimize, player’s experience and the act of playing within a historical setting, as a human present in those moments of history. As Osberg (2014) argues; “somewhere between the grand narrative and the individual photographs there were a thousand possible futures” with games possibly best placed to communicate these dynamic tensions of historical narrative.

CONTENT AS GAME-PLAY

Contributing to the theme of the 2018 DiGRA conference, specifically its focus on meaning-making and new modes of perception and engagement we forward the argument that approaches are being employed by game developers in an effort to be historically faithful that are beginning to re-define understanding and application of ‘content’. Until now, the principal method that game developers have used to draw players into their worlds has occurred through the utilisation of historical representation as aesthetics (Ankersmit, 2002). In contrast to what has been presented above regarding *Assassin’s Creed: Origin’s* representational adequacy, its developers have also yielded to the pressures of the current socio-political climate to present greater levels of diversity in its populations than historicity dictates. Going beyond analysis and evaluation of content, and how representative it is, one of the key concerns of the developing field of historical video games (led by the work of Adam Chapman, Anna Foka and Jonathan Westin) is the examination of formal structures of historical games. Formal analyses in this regard comprises understanding “the properties of the historical game form by examining its structures of representation, processes of narration, possibilities, predispositions and limitations and often also aim to search for an analytical meta-language to describe these formal properties.” (Chapman *et al.* 2016, p. 361). Form in games is said to have a “role in determining content, influencing what is selected, how this is arranged and ultimately what this therefore says” (Chapman, 2016, p. 19). This approach should also be extended to examine how forms of authenticity, and therefore historical practices can be translated to and articulated within rules, mechanics and modes of play. We suggest that history, game design, and forms of play can coalesce into an interwoven entity merging both historical and gamic scripts and structures while avoiding ahistorical mechanics from undermining experiences of the past.

Often player experiences and gameplay are at odds with the game’s historical world through its prioritization of genre (e.g first-person shooter, turn-based strategy). In explaining game mechanics and genre game designer David Mullich (2015) states: “Note that the game’s tone and setting doesn’t matter. A first-person shooter is a first-person shooter so long as you run and gun.” Likewise, discussions of the player’s emerging narratives in World War Two shooter games in terms of game affordances have a tendency to overlook the specificity of evidence and experiences from historical content that presents the past differently and has failed to inform the game’s mechanics, player choices, and rule structures. Treanor and Mateas (2013) highlight this issue more broadly when promoting a proceduralist perspective that seeks to embed meaning within game mechanics. From a historical perspective this would necessitate that the actions performed in play are themselves meaningful and align with the historical nature and context of the game. Treanor and Mateas argue: “games will often have processes that ... prevent the desired interpretation from being possible” (p. 7). They use the example of the way *Bioshock’s* environmental storytelling and philosophical foundation is “undermined by violent and conventional gameplay,” (ibid.). Indeed, player narratives in most World War Two games are

typically and exclusively driven by progress via violent counterfactual play and other formalist structures that favour ahistorical thinking and process over context. This over-use of violence through action is a pure mode of gameplay and not the translation of violence through gameplay from the historical context of twentieth century warfare.

Examples are however emerging of contemporary ‘historical’ games that incorporate content as game play derived from robust historical research. Forthcoming Medieval game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (Warhorse Studios, 2018) will be set in a relatively unknown and under-researched period in 1403 Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic). The research undertaken to produce the game has informed representation, performance, and functionality of late Medieval armor and weapons and the fighting techniques representative of those employed in Central Europe at that time. The re-construction of techniques and body movements employed in late Medieval Bohemian fighting came about from the integration of late-fourteenth and fifteenth century Medieval fighting manuals, such as the manual of German fencer Hans Talhoffer (c. 1410-1415 - 1483~), together with expert Medieval European martial art-practitioners, to represent little known techniques such as ‘half-swording,’ in which the fighter grabs the sword by the blade and uses the pommel in a hammer to beat on full-plate armor.

Titanic: Honor and Glory

Although the fate of the RMS Titanic constitutes a well-known historical event that has been portrayed in several fictional adaptations, what distinguishes *Titanic: Honor & Glory* (Vintage Digital Revival, 2018) from previous portrayals of the tragedy is how its design, structures and organizational properties as a game envelop and fuse with the structure of the vessel and how it contained and managed a microcosm of society. That is, the game offers a spatial-temporal experience of how movement, barriers, privilege and degrees of freedom are structured and contained. Indeed, social class and gender had a significant role in determining passenger survival in this event (Hall, 1986). Like games, control in this historical event was an illusion as outcome was in part determined by factors such as the number of lifeboats, the prevailing weather, the capabilities of captain and crew, the unreliability of its Marconi radio system, the proximity of other ships, the class of ticket and the temperature of the sea. Indeed, as if following a Baconian approach to the construction of knowledge, such factors develop greater meaning when they determine the likelihood of success (survival) and failure. As the game’s director, producer, and writer Thomas Lynskey (cited in Peterson, 2016) states: “When you’re working in 3-D models, and when you’re working on a real-time timeline, you start to see everything fit together like a puzzle piece. You start to understand more and more about the reasons behind certain things.” Brædder et al. (2017) make a similar point when discussing the practices of historical reenactment movements, when they state: “Doing *reenactment* and making *historical replicas* sometimes engenders a critical approach to *historical* sources, triggering a realisation that the evidence does not contain all the information needed to recreate medieval life. Not everything in the past has been recorded.” (p. 177).

The game’s integration of historical data and passenger accounts with principles of game design in the construction of rule-based and ludic structures, combine to offer players an authentic historical experience. A key historical attraction of the game is its claim to have recreated the ill-fated 882-foot long, 91-foot wide and 12-story of the liner RMS Titanic to the closest possible detail. Creating a possibility for the player to explore the entire interior (and upper decks) of the ship. The game however provides players agency to engage with a rule-governed context that simulates the periodic social scripts and structures that guided the nature of interactions, movement, roles and degree of freedom. It is through these structural components that the player re-

lives both the journey of the Titanic and its eventual sinking. Prior to impact, players of *Honor and Glory* do not simply savour the game's replication of the Titanic. Instead the game provides an occasion for players to sample what life was like for different members of society living on the Titanic embracing the structure of daily routines. Citing his senior historical consultant, Thomas Lynskey (2016) claims that *Honor and Glory* "isn't a game. It's an experience." With impact the sinking of the ship is then experienced in real-time over a 2hr 45min timeframe.

Much like the compatibility between rule-based games and computers, so cogently outlined by Juul (2003) at the inception of game studies, a game such as *Honor and Glory* serves as an example of the compatibility between game structures (their use of soft and hard boundaries and levels, and agonic tasks and mimesis) and history as a form of cultural literacy. The era portrayed by *Honor and Glory* was still very much defined by the rigid class structures of the Victorian era (indeed the liner carried some of society's wealthiest people) yet touched by the optimism of increasing social mobility and new opportunities (e.g. emigrants). To this effect, history shares with games lessons in intention, movement, experimentation, and human production. The game seeks to present players with an experience of Edwardian era Southampton, England prior to departure and then via the social stratification on-board and the differences in the way different groups "dressed to the way they spoke and how they took their meals." Lynskey (2015) and his team's desire to re-construct Southampton in 1912 was to connect the Titanic to English society and "to put the ship and its story of the Titanic into context, bring[ing] it down to a human level ... [in order to remind] ... you that these are all people who had a life off the ship."

In order to avoid the structures, both social and systemic, preventing the player to experience the full spectrum of human experiences contained with Southampton and the Titanic, the fictional component of the game serves as an incentive and reason for the player to explore the ship first as crew (requiring the player to properly check in, perform duties, and earn tips) then as passenger (moving between classes). The historical fidelity of the structures remains intact, irrespective of a fiction and the determinism of gender, social class, and class of ticket when it came to survival on the Titanic. Implementing a fictional, detective mystery impels the player as Robert Owen Morgan to go places they would not otherwise seek to go in order to attempt to clear his name for a murder he did not commit and reveal the identity of the murderer who is known to be on the cruise-liner. This fictional plotline serves to add motivation to the player's transgressions of space and social boundaries, and engage with the full spectrum of the social world and human ecology contained on the Titanic. In the course of the game the player's experiences range from partaking in the ship's services (as ship crew), assuming different class of cabins, exploring levels or decks of the ship reserved for first-class (gymnasium, the dining saloon and the Turkish bath), to the eventual possibility of being able to aid in the evacuation of the ship.

The creation of *Honor and Glory* with a high level of historical authenticity also attempts to achieve a level of historical sensitivity that James Cameron failed to achieve with his film version of the same historical event. As Paul Heyer (2012) outlines in *Titanic Century: Media, myth and the making of a cultural icon*, with respect to James Cameron's depiction of Captain Samuel Murdoch, the film character is portrayed taking a bribe from Rose's (Kate Winslet) fiancé Cal Hockley (Billy Zane) and then shooting a young Irishman to prevent him occupying a place on a lifeboat before turning the gun on himself. Heyer states that: "Ignoring the initial protest firestorm, Fox, and Cameron eventually tried to make amends. Fox donated \$5,000 to a Murdoch memorial prize fund, and in Cameron's later documentary *Ghosts of the Abyss* (2003), Murdoch's behaviour in assisting passengers to get into

lifeboats is described as ‘heroic’” (p 159). The areas of the Titanic in *Honor and Glory* are not simply visually detailed empty spaces, for they are also filled with the depiction of at least 200 passengers that were known to have sailed on the liner, with whom the player can share in their conversations and activities. Bringing life back to the Titanic through interweaving the activities, attitudes, relationships, and stories of the passengers is appealing indeed, for this game not only presents the major or well-known figures such as Captain Edward John Smith and the chief architect of the ship Thomas Andrews, but also brings in the stories from the lives of lesser-known passengers that have been omitted from prior representations of the Titanic. These people include the only attended Japanese passenger Masabumi Hosono, the Italian brothers Alberto and Sebastiano Perracchio who were assistant waiters in the First Class A La Carte Restaurant, and feminist and author Helen Candee.

CONCLUSION

We are beginning to see the emergence of games that account for the way historical authenticity, content, and genre can combine in the presentation of a game world, infuse gameplay, and construct socially-determined game rules. This paper has argued that games like *Titanic: Honor and Glory* seek to express history through historically informed mechanics that express conduct, action, and the social rules systems in place at the time that games are set - moving historical games toward a mode of game design that requires historical research in order to “set the parameters for developing the rules” (Spring, 2015). While *Honor and Glory* ends in the sinking of the ship players are invited to partake in a travel experience beginning in Southampton and includes the four days leading up to the collision with an iceberg. In reviving the Titanic on a human level, history is employed as a “resource for empathy” (Rughiniş & Matei, 2016) that contributes to an understanding of “those who were on it, those who survived, those that didn’t. This is about humans” (Peterson, 2016). The nature of historical games to-date has made it necessary for examination of historical content ‘sited’ in the game rather than historical content as performance – its mimetic, social, and performative qualities in communicating and performing history. With the prospect of more historically grounded releases (e.g. *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, Warhorse Studios, 2018) we hope to see an expansion in the analytic and conceptual understanding of how historical digital games perform and present history.

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