

https://dspace.org/

The Intersection of Systemic Racism and Technology and the Consequences for Video Games

Flusk, Timothy

2023-08
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/40342
Flusk, Timothy. (2023). The Intersection of Systemic Racism and Technology and the Consequences for Video Games. [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/40342

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

The Intersection of Systemic Racism and Technology and the Consequences for Video Games.

Name: Timothy Flusk
Student Number: 685327
Supervisor: Mr. Kieran Reid

Abstract

The paper documents and reviews the process by which consequences of systemic racism is found in video games through the medium of technology. The principal idea of technology is used broadly to accommodate all media produced by society as tools for wielding and enforcing capitalist ideology. This is used as a means of revealing and mapping the cultural epistemic domain that dominates the West and its former colonies.

The principal methodology is drawn from D. Fox Harrel's *Phantasmal Media: An Approach to Imagination, Computation and Expression.* The process focuses on using the idea of the phantasmal generation within media, by individuals within systems. As such the process of these phantasm expressing or revealing themselves in various media is tracked and studied from both sides of the process: where they come from and how they are expressed.

The principal approach situates the discussion of developing video games within the West, specifically the United States of America. The case studies used to illustrate and apply the methodology include *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* and *NBA2K17.* These are placed in context along side their appropriate phantasmal sibling and representation. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is interrogated through the lens of capitalism and the representation of Black criminals in media. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* is placed in context of fantasy genre and colonialism. *NBA2k17* is placed in context of traditional racist perspectives of Black, athleticism and sport.

All case studies utilise the principal twin approach of separating phantasms into

hegemonic teleological expectation and ontological racist assertions. This allows the encapsulation of ludic systems as well narrative and character representation within the games.

Acknowledgments

1. Hanli Geyser and Angus Davidson for crafting and facilitating the educational and academic space to allow for this research to be possible.
2. Kieran Reid for infinite and supernatural patience, and providing various modes of emotional, intellectual, and administrative supporting as Head of Department and a friend. I really hope you get some sleep.
3. Kirsten Reid for being her lovely pushy and annoying self. There is no friend who has not been more effective in helping me ways that I could never expect.
4. Ammaarah Noormohamed for getting me over the line.
5. Vuk Vucetic for being my most reliable co-lecturer in the most surprising ways.
6. Romeo Molongoana and Alice Tokelo Seremane for providing support the void.
7. My parents, Patrick and Nicolette Flusk, for providing my early communist and racial education.
8. Daniel Mendelowitz for being such a pleasure to live with.

Contents

1. Introduction.....6
2. Literature Review.....15
3. Theoretical Framework.....28
4. Methodology.....33
5. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.....37
6. *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim and the Redguard Race.....60
7. NBA2K17.....79
8. General Analysis.....91
9. Conclusion.....122

1. Introduction

The methods by which society facilitates and propagates culture are varied, layered and complicated. Observation and documentation of such phenomena in society are essential along several agendas. For one, they are a limited but valuable tool for contextualising our past and present, hopefully providing an understanding of how our society has reached this point and grounding us amongst the complicated systems around us. Secondly, they can provide a localised understanding of our world, allowing us agency in how we choose to organise ourselves.

Attempting to encompass the whole structure of humanity is obversely a never-ending task - as such, we have an entire field of researchers imbued in studying it. This particular project is focused on bringing together two primary components of our society to understand the slice and intersection they create together. Furthermore, this is used in an even narrower application. This project aims to unpack and track how systemic racism and technology are connected and how they are expressed in upholding each other. This intent is not to suggest they always or perpetually perform that action, but instead that a specific position is being sought when investigating their intersection: Where and what are the ways we see technology revealing or propagating the ideals and agenda of racism?

To place this question into context, it is a part of the more significant research question, which is:

> “How and to what extent has video game technology been influenced by a

legacy of systemic racism (including economic and social factors) to prevent the effective virtual representation and rendering of Black people in video games?”

The approach to tackling this question is broken down into several approaches to accommodate the different presented ideas.

The largest one that requires unpacking is defining technology. In an attempt to move away from immediate and colloquial ideas around technology (for example, technology is computers), this paper moves towards a more timeless, perpetual broader definition of technology:

“Techniques and tools used for changing culture and civilisation.”

The primary purpose of this definition is to ensure that we can include the colloquial understanding of technology (computer, spacecraft and other phenomena) as well as far more ephemeral and older forms of technology such as communication, writing or bureaucracy. The intention here is to allow grander objects, such as capitalism, to function as machines utilising several different technologies and phenomena which humans interact with.

The final component not expressed explicitly within the definition is the dynamism of technology - society changes technology through the way technology changes society. This statement is implicit in the way that many different types of technologies are evolved, harnessed and possible through previous development.

The other important aspect when considering the definition of technology is that media becomes more prominent as a permutation of technology. The implication here is that

all platforms, media and the thoughts conveyed through media (particularly the way the medium frames them) all function within the realm of technology.

The broad definition allows for the blending of these ideas far more naturally. In particular, the simplest definition for technology is anything that is developed. However, the last important fact in the selection is that any technology (whether centralised in its application or through more anarchic approaches) is assumed to have an impact on a society or - more structurally - a community.

One potential perspective with the broadness of the definition is that racism, or more precisely, systemic racism is a form of technology. Based on the above definition, it is a technique that certainly changes civilisation. For the sake of completeness and clarity (and definitely simplicity), I would like to assert that ideology is a technology and that systemic racism is an ideology. Within the paper, the ideas synthetic chain of ideas provides clarification that will demonstrates the process of production of media through technology for the purposes of representing capitalist ideals. In other sense, the technology and media form the vector of capitalism wielding its many tools, one of which is systemic racism. There are a other crucial reasons why this distinction needs to be made. For brevity (attempting to avoid deep sociological analysis or psychoanalysis), I apply the traditional Marxist approach to ideology, where ideology is described as "the 'production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness,' all that 'men say, imagine, conceive,' and include such things as' politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics.' Ideology functions as the superstructure of a civilisation: the conventions and culture that make up the dominant ideas of a society" (Felluga, 2011) where Felluga quotes and expands on the works of Marx and Engels from The German Ideology (Marx, Engels, 1846).

The quality of ideology as technology is different from the other technologies. Its form as a superstructure indicates that it is a tool and technique that certainly changes all aspects of culture and civilisation. In particular, it is a tool the hegemony uses to influence and control how society functions. As such, this quality of ideology, and by extension systemic racism, is a patina that invades and filters throughout society. In particular, the premise of this project is to assert that systemic racism is a technology that fundamentally and entirely affects all other types of technologies.

The application of these ideas will be demonstrated along three case studies utilised for different purposes to allow for the nuanced unpacking and application of the principles. The case studies are:

1. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar Games, 2004)
2. *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim (Bethesda Entertainment, 2011)
3. *NBA2K17* (2K Games, 2016)

The spread is chosen to illustrate the persistence of specific ideas and allow for the development of video game technology proliferating through and from society. The surrounding social, economic and technological environment for games has changed drastically over 12 years. Nevertheless, the expression of the zeitgeist, ideologies and systemic racism still exist within these games, although they experience their own evolution. There is, of course, an expanded timeline for video games. The first widely accessible game was Pong, produced and distributed by Atari in 1972. The first constructed games return to Tennis for Two in 1958, produced at the Brookhaven National Laboratory using ballistics

software.

The specifics of video game history are less important than their placement within the media and technological context. Technology and the control of the technology are far more critical in describing the relationship between these ideas. Instead of zeroing in on video games to construct the problem space, there needs to be an investigation into media, industry and education alongside the discussion of computer technology. The narrow slice this paper seeks to investigate requires engaging with the surrounding space before a process of engagement can be used in tackling the question.

Six main topics require insight before constructing the overall idea. The astute reader will notice that they quickly overlap but are required to be understood in isolation before we interrogate that intersection:

1. Colonialism
2. History of Blackness and Technology
3. History of Race and Media
4. Capitalism and Video Games
5. Race and the Internet
6. Race and Video Games

These broad categories, along with the selected the case studies allow for illustrating the two pronged approach in understanding these ideas, namely (1) the racist ontological assertion and (2) the hegemonic teleological expectation. The racist ontological assertion are the ideas, assumptions and phantasms from hegemony to denote what Black people, including their properties and behaviour and how it is imposed on Black people

The hegemonic teleological expectation focuses on the function of Black people in society and how they should progress, maintain the system of our society and achieve success within it.

The utilisation of systemic racism through technology and as an ideology is a narrow slice of the prevailing reality of the above ideas, but are supported by several other ideas that are tangential to the overall system.

These ideas are expanded upon in the literature review, but I will briefly explain their presence in the paper below.

As cliche but necessary, the topic in discussing systemic racism is that the beginning of the process begins with colonialism. For obvious reasons, in particular, colonialism requires a particular ideology of expansion and denigrating native populations to be different from the coloniser (Veracini, 2010). This process constructs the ideological form of race, and as nations are built through oppression and exploitation, this grows into systemic racism. In contextualising the procedures and output I will be discussing, there is no choice but to begin here.

This flows into the history of Blackness and technology. This perspective is primarily set up for how these same processes or the consequences of these phenomena prevail in contemporary times and are often interlinked throughout history. The main components of this analysis focus on the technologies used as a tool for oppression, preventing Black people from gaining access to technology, minimising their contribution to knowledge generation and attempting to bring the two ideas together to provide further insight into the process (Sinclar, 2004).

The extension, or a more specific discussion around technology, is the consideration of media. The development of media arises out of the progression of technology. One of the driving forces of technology is the need to facilitate communication and travel. Media is one of the main tools in the distribution of ideology by any hegemony. It is the platform by which hegemony reinforces and upholds the ideas of racism and other ideology that allow and protect its power (de Peuter & Greig, 2009).

To further describe power, I provide a moment to illustrate the structures put in place through capitalism for the production and distribution of capitalism. Some of these structures are concrete and tangible, whereas other exists and are put in place as ethereal means for the expansion of Empire. The discussion focuses on the infrastructure used to set up and advance profit within the games industry and the content produced to expand that ideology into the player (de Peuter & Greig, 2009).

The last two sub-sections, “Race and the Internet” and “Race and Video Games”, are presented to address some of the issues at play that speak to untangling the web of race, technology and video games that provide ideas for providing greater clarity in framing the application of the project. These two ideas sit next to each other in discussing how racism has propagated into contemporary times. They both elucidate the two perspectives on broadcasting media and ideology and consuming media and ideology. By viewing these two phenomena next to each other, we can visualise the cycle by which hegemonic ideology is upheld. As inferred from the games selected for the case study, there is no particular study of the Internet for the case studies themselves. However, the analysis of the case studies is informed by society’s relationship with the Internet (Nakamura, 2002; Leonard, 2003).

The particular approach to gathering these broad components of research to apply to such a narrow field is inspired by the work of D. Fox Harrel’s *Phantasmal Media* (2013). The intention behind collecting this information and research is to construct and identify how computers have inherited the phantasm of racism, capitalism and oppression. Harrel posits that computers have incredible power to construct and demonstrate phantasms. I would push these ideas further and suggest that computers are also very effective at revealing how we believe we have hidden our phantasms. Through struggle, revolution and legislative lobbying, it may be possible to believe that many Western societies have progressed quite enormously past racism and their old habits of bigotry. I believe that is nonsense, and the ties to capitalism prevent the West from moving past this process. Nevertheless, this subterfuge is a phantasm in itself and has no choice but to bleed into the media constructed by society and the system.

The paper is divided into the following structure:

• Background and Literature Review which elaborates on the above topics

• Theoretical Framework which utilises the literature review and other examples placed within Harrel's ideas of *Phantasmal Media*

• The explanation of the methodology

• The application of these ideas applied to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim and *NBA2K17*.

• A summary of the analysis from the various case studies to illustrate significant similarities and differences

2. Literature Review

The work that facilitates this investigation is divided into several interlinked components. The main attributes that require interrogation are the colonialist history of these processes, leading to the history of the technology and media that have facilitated them. The link between all of them is systemic racism that exists between all of them. This is also placed in the capitalist context where these components exist.

Colonialism

As cited in in Veracini (2010) a seminal definition of colonialism is provided by Georges Balandier from 1951:

> "…the domination imposed by a foreign minority, racially (or ethnically) and culturally different, acting in the name of a racial (or ethnic) and cultural superiority dogmatically affirmed, and imposing itself on an indigenous population constituting a numerical majority but inferior to the dominant group from a material point of view."

This provides the useful framing device for understanding these principles going forward.

The presentation of Black people in media has a long history of analysis and criticism.

From colonialist depictions of African individuals and societies to the continued practice of modern-day Blackface, there is a through-line of colonialism into modern-day systemic oppression that continues to permeate society. This continues into the widespread use of new media and digital media, allowing for new permutations of racist (among misogynist and other hostilities to the subaltern) presentations and activities (Marschall, 2016). The investigation of this requires a comparison between many media to unpack how the current symptoms of racism mimic and differ from the legacy racism in media and the technology that supports it.

Society continues to feel the presence of colonialism to this day in the restructured demographics of the world, the concentration of wealth and - most relevantly - the views and attitudes towards people of colour and the systemic marginalisation they continue to experience (as described in *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*). European colonialism began in the 15th century and continued into the 20th century, with many colonies still existing from the years of colonialism (Stam & Spence, 1982, pp. 3-4). It is a necessary consequence, then, that the creation of media and technology is inextricably tied to the racist and colonist attitudes of the time, as any other social influence might be. The representation and treatment of Black people are reflected in the zeitgeist of this period with the existence of economies propped up by slavery, the presentation of Black people as inferior or ridiculed in art (novels, paintings, film, comics and others), as well as pseudo-scientific literature on the intellectual inferiority or hyper-aggression of the Black individual (Stam & Spence, 1983, p. 6).

History of Blackness and Technology

Bruce Sinclair posits the historical evidence of the separation of the American Black (or African American) from technology in society as primarily an assumption of inferiority. This is an extension of the ideas mentioned by Stam and Spence, where the assumption of the "aggressive African" extends into the assumption of their abilities. Enslavers in the Americas (and in the rest of the many empires) viewed the Black people as intellectually inferior, were provided with inferior education (enslaved people were legally forbidden from receiving formal training and education according to Sinclair) and as such were excluded from the sphere of technology and innovation discourse (Sinclair, 2004, pp. 8-11). As part of systemic racism within society, this idea has continued to permeate the structures of society, where Black people continue to be perceived as inferior. However, most importantly, their contributions to technology are erased, and their access to technology is limited.

Sinclair points out that this assumption about Black people is farcical by their very nature of how slave-reliant industries functioned. Although excluded from formal training, many enslaved people carried artisan knowledge about many industries through apprenticeships. As such, much of the processes around running farms and other industries carried many complex tasks requiring trained labour for such tasks.

Sinclair posits that many race historians have separated the connections between technology and race within societies through this bias. This gap in knowledge arises even though many of the racist incentives of Empire have been focused on industry building, technological and knowledge exclusion and cultural and empire-building. In this way, we need to be aware that technology is not just a final product. It is also a process (13-14). A

process which is supported by social, political, and economic matters. As such, the integration of the history of technology and the history of racism is required to understand both fields fully.

Rebecca Herzig reveals the connection between technology, race and society in her case study about the uses of X-rays for skin lightening and as a hair treatment, both very political topics with regard to the racist treatment of Black people in society. She reveals how technology changes what race is as society progresses with it. She calls for scholars to be wary about treating race as ephemeral and a social construct as it plays out in the real world through people's bodies (157-159). This approach is helpful for grounding and interrogating how Black bodies interact with technology and provides a means of assessing how Black bodies can be virtually rendered. Furthermore the principle ideas in place indicate an historical and continued presence in which the presence of the systemic racism in the development imbues the ideas of racism within the desire and development of this that technology.

History of Race and Media

For most of the 20th century, photography struggled to depict people of colour due to the way the cameras processed light and the techniques used to assess the correctness of the image produced (Roth, 2009, pp. 112-113). Most notably, the techniques used for assessing colour balance in photographs used "Shirley" cards, which usually only depicted white women in high-contrast clothing. Eventually, these aspects of photography were discarded as Kodak invested in depicting colours (and people) across a wide range of developed

technology, techniques and systems to allow for it. So-called “Shirley” cards are now created with different combinations of various races and skin tones. Technical aspects have also been improved with the development of light processors in digital cameras that can differentiate darker colours.

This evolution in photography illustrates the nature of biases in technology and systems. The members of the photographic community were undoubtedly capable of correcting for these deficiencies, yet the practice and education within the community funnelled development to privilege White skin tones. Roth quotes a Japanese video engineer, Toru Hasegawa, noting how ineffective American video cameras render Japanese skin (112).

Bell Hooks presents the dichotomy of the film made by a White male hegemony against other marginalised groups and the consequences of how Blackness is represented on screen. As is the case with hegemony, this dichotomy results in placing White masculinity as default in film, rendering the creation of marginalised media to a specialised category on its own (hooks, 1994, 86-89)

Hooks presents a critique of the film *Hoop Dreams* and reveals the ways in which Black representation by hegemony leads to a minimised critique of embedded racist ideas and provides race tourism for a White audience.

Hooks discusses the creation of Black content by White people for White people. By studying the documentary *Hoop Dreams*, she uncovers the process of how hegemonic media attempts to reinforce the narratives that support the marginalisation outside the group of White masculinity. In particular, she discusses how the location of the film places it in a

particular event where “white folks [are] wanting to see and ‘enjoy’ images of black folks on the screen”, and it “is often in no way related to a desire to know real black people” (p. 98).

The film *Hoop Dreams* also participates in the process of system erasure by ignoring many of the inherited issues that exist with attempting to succeed whilst Black, whilst also providing race tourism for the assumed White audience. Racist difficulties for the characters are ignored by the film but also slip into the subtle visual racism performed by the society, like with many situations when Black men are associated with sport, imagery of body fetishism and slave auctioning arise within the film in the process of dehumanising the main characters.

Such biases are prevalent in all technology and media. With the possibility of digital technology empowering people to communicate, share knowledge and spread discourse, there is a need to interrogate the ability of these technologies to cater to the people that use them. Otherwise, there is a risk that these technologies could be used to subjugate, oppress and marginalise those users.

Most remarkably, we are seeing an attempt in video games in the past decade at including a more racially (among other axes, such as gender, sexuality and ability) diverse cast of characters in the medium. This requires an investigation into what extent the tools the developers have access to can render these characters as effectively as characters with lighter skin.

Capitalism and Video Games

These symptoms of cultural, technological and economic imperialism continue to this day. In their book *Games of Empire*, Nick Dyer-Witherford and Greg de Peuter expand on Antonio Negri's and Michael Hardt's work in Empire to situate how games and the technology around them are vehicles of global capitalism (36-40). They posit that many of the massive companies that control most of the games industry (Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo, Electronic Arts and Activision) form part of a machine that facilitates the production of Empire.

The machine itself is global capitalism, and its shape of it is presented as the military industrial-media-entertainment network or MIME-net. This illustrates the need for the "Empire" (politically presented as the United States of America but working as a collection of different states working together to fulfil the ideals of the "Empire") to use media to facilitate two virtues, Military and Consumerism.

Many case studies are used to illustrate their point about how games are situated within global capitalism as well as an explanation of how players rebel against the status quo. Most notably, they analyse the company Electronic Arts (EA) in explaining Cognitive capitalism. In simplest terms, this "refers to a system of production in which knowledge plays an integral role" (36). When done in practice, there are several different avenues in which this idea comes into play.

Again, using the example of EA, we see the consolidation of "living knowledge" of current trends and technologies alongside the control of specific institutions. These

institutions include pieces of media in the form of intellectual property, partnering and funding with universities to turn their academic programmes into worker factories so EA can keep hiring more young developers and proliferating work sites across the world to consolidate their existence within the Empire. EA has many offices across North America and Europe to ensure the amount of work produced can be maximised and to ensure any failures in one team are subsidised by the remaining other teams.

The concept and practice of Cognitive capitalism are important and hearken back to Herzig and Sinclair's detailing of the erasure of Black people's contribution to technology and history. These tools of Empire - the companies controlling the industry - not only hold most of the knowledge, technology and wealth but also control the systems and channels in which they are produced. It also gives us an understanding of the greater systemic principles in which games are produced in contemporary times.

Through the marketing of these companies' products and brands, this - their agendas and philosophies - bleeds into how the consumers are encouraged to interact with the products and services of these companies. Through market forces and competition, a certain type of persona arises from these companies. Hardt and Negri, authors of Empire, say, "Machines and technologies are not independent entities. They are biopolitical tools deployed in specific regimes of production, which facilitate certain practices and prohibit others. (405)" Members of the Empire, who have inherited colonial pasts, target these "hardcore" members of the audience as a means of privileging their relationship to the consoles and the Empire. The pipeline of Cognitive capitalism to the consumer develops technology that facilitates the pipeline itself.

Games of Empire, particularly the concept of Cognitive capitalism, is essential for revealing how video games are produced and distributed. This, in turn, reveals the goals and agendas of the entities with the most significant influence on video game production and allows insight into what and how different technologies and games are privileged within this process.

The context that Dyer-Witherford and Peuter provide in *Games of Empire* is helpful in understanding the subsequent two researchers. Lisa Nakamura provides insight into the different ways people perform race tourism and minstrelsy.

Race and the Internet

Nakamura reveals in her ethnography around *LambaMOO* - an online community chat and role-playing service - the ways in which racism exists on the Internet. This reveals how the expression of the Empire is exhibited within communities (Nakamura, pp. 1-2).

Nakamura observes how users in the *LambaMOO* are assumed to be White, and the declaration of not being this default race comes into conflict with the social harmony of the community. Ironically, though, the MOO allows racial discourse through racial tourism, where users perform racist stereotypes through names and their behaviour. Within the community, role-playing and performance are encouraged for the sake of personal expression. However, this expression is aligned with what the assumed White and male community "default" believe to be tolerant and appropriate. These stereotypes - being a samurai or Chinese monk and the racist stereotypes of those identities - are allowed within

the community, but claiming one-self to be Chinese, Black or Latino is considered dissonant with the community's principles (Nakamura, 2002, pp. 3-5).

Construction of the MOO privileges particular identities over others - again, the White male with disposable income - through its technological architecture. Such political conflict reveals how the construction of the MOO upholds ideas that silence the self-expression of marginalised races and uplifts the values of hegemonic White masculinity.

Thomas details the history of racism within the game *Diablo II* targeted Koreans. Due to a culture of mining virtual items in the game and selling these items for profit over such sites as eBay for actual money by the Koreans - although against the terms of use of the product by Blizzard Entertainment - an effective race war arose within one of the game's servers.

Blizzard had set up geographic-based servers for the different time zones in that players would be active. These include USA West, USA East, Europe and Asia. As such, the expectation was that different servers would have high and low traffic times. Over time, the USA West server garnered high popularity, and Korean players flocked to the server to take advantage of it by collecting as many in-game items as possible (Thomas, 2008, pp. 157-160).

Over time this overpopulated the server leading to lags and long wait times for players. This produced cultures and communities of players focused on harassing Korean players. The most notable technique was sending a string of periods to the chat message box, instantly crashing Korean copies of the game. Players deliberately believed they had an

inalienable right to the server and were righteous in defence of their virtual land. This reveals how colonialist ideals of “land” and the idea of controlling the demographics of that land continue into online gaming.

Race and Video Games

Leonard demonstrates how the portrayal of Black people in games has been an extension of minstrelsy, even within games that appear to celebrate the achievement and cultures of Black people. He discusses this phenomenon in 2003 and makes Grand Theft Auto III (*GTA III*) (2001) the focus of his arguments, with supporting critique on the NBA series by Electronic Arts.

Like much discourse around the Grand Theft Auto series, discussions around the imperialist presentation of space arises. The presentation of historically Black communities and spaces mimics an idea about Black people in the mind of the hegemony (colonist, imperialist ideologies). This bleeds into the idea and stereotype of the Black person.

From Grand The Auto III to the NBA Street (1994) or NFL2K (1998) Series (many sports series in general), there is a spectrum of the faceless Black community, which function as cannon fodder for the White player character in *GTA III*, to racial tourism and fetishisation in performing the acts of the hyper-athletic Black avatars in the NBA series (Leonard, 2003, pp. 3-5). It requires noting that as controversial as the *GTA* series has been, it has also been incredibly successful and popular, with many Hollywood actors providing voice acting for the projects (Leonard, 2003, p. 3).

The control over Black bodies is particularly poignant when discussing the agency afforded to the players – and the characters they control – within games. Janet Murray describes the concept of agency as "the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices" (123). The concept of agency in games is considered an illusion (Tannenbaum & Tannenbaum, 2009, p. 3) as there is a limitation of available actions (also known as mechanics) available to players decided by the developers of the game. This limitation allows for the normalisation of what Black bodies are expected to do within games and contributes to racist tourism within games.

The fetishisation of Black bodies, particularly men's bodies, as muscular and hyper-athletic (and hyper-sexed) hearkens back to European colonialists' presentation of Black men. Video games provide a means of "cross-dressing" as Black people for White audiences. This speaks to the similarities when Bell Hooks critiques the film *Hoop Dreams* (hooks, 1996, pp. 86-89), where media depicting and representing Black people is for entertaining White audiences. This creates a simultaneous existence of disdain for the Black body but also objectification through adoration.

The focus on presenting Black bodies as genetically superior in athleticism provides access to another stereotype: the minimised intellectualism of the Black person. As such, the idea prevails that the White man is intelligent, whereas the Black man should be put to physical labour and work. This representation of men is significant, as Leonard elaborates that women of colour are ignored in this regard and are over-represented as sexual objects for desire.

The historical significance of this trend is essential as it highlights the hegemonic - he references Antonio Gramsci here - ambition to turn the ideas of the subaltern - athletic, muscular, sexual objects - into “common sense” within the public. As such, video games fall into a tool of general education about race and women and legitimise these biases in the eyes of society.

There are some fundamental texts that are necessary to engage with that provide further insight into unpacking and understanding the topic.

3. Theoretical Framework

Harrell presents the concept of the “Phantasm” for investigating the ability for media and all other images and objects to create expressive and imaginative understanding in the mind. The term arises from cognitive science and details the process of how the human mind generates understanding and perception of what we consume when we are exposed to the different artefacts around us.

Harrell posits that phantasms are generated within individuals and societies via two phenomena interacting: “Epistemic Domains” and “Image Spaces”. Epistemic domains encompass our knowledge about the world we inhabit, the history that produced the world, and our understanding of the systems that maintain and propel the mechanisms controlling the world. These epistemic domains comprise epistemic spaces, which map the different units of knowledge and associate them together (8-13, 79, 85). As such, the domains will contain all the knowledge an individual or community have, and an epistemic space will contain all the information (biases and misinformation included) about a specific artefact.

Image spaces function as external stimuli (including all possible sensory information) that activate the epistemic space associated with those stimuli. For example, seeing a dog evokes the understanding of the dog as a mammal (and the associated epistemic spaces and phantasm of that); a companion for humanity; reminds you of the Disney character Goofy; or evokes feelings of fear based on trauma associated with dogs. This evocation of ideas, associations, emotions and memories activates the phantasm through the stimuli.

The phantasm can exist in an individual but can also exist within a society and community. Harrell refers to this as the cultural phantasms. Epistemic domains exist in groups of people to influence the members of that group’s cultural phantasms. These phantasms are revealed by those that participate on the fringes of that society, who would

either experience different phantasms or the society's phantasms would be viscerally clear to them. Cultural phantasms are explicit in engaging with how the worldview influences and enforces epistemic domains. The more appropriate term for a cultural epistemic domain is "cultural model".

Based on the review of the perceptions and representation of Black people through history, we can construct a cultural model both for how the status quo and the developers of video game technology would view and represent Black people. The review allows us to gather and reveal the epistemic domain with which Black people have been historically rendered and the contemporary environment in which they continue to be rendered. As such, we can begin to understand how to generate more effective and authentic phantasms at evoking society's ideas of Blackness.

At a high level, the principles of world capitalism discussed in *Games of Empire* can be combined with the historical placement of Black people within the realm of technology. This provides context for assessing how games and digital technology support the same principles and ideas of how Black people were historically rendered and provides insight into the production philosophy and economics behind these technologies. These policies all form part of expressions of the continued systemic racism and imperialism within society, so it is essential to understand these societal effects from that perspective instead of isolated incidents.

Unfortunately, the placing the control of video game production and distribution within a North American context also places much of the critique and assessment of rendering quality of any video games assessed - which are detailed in the Research Methodology section - in a North American context. Although this provides a limited understanding of the technology applications by excluding Black practitioners of the technology on other continents (mainly Africa and South America), it does provide a

focused assessment on the context in which the technology has been developed and primarily used.

The concept of digital spaces seeps into considering social media platforms and the greater World Wide Web (shortened to Web). This is to allow for an understanding of the people using the Internet to express and spread their racism. How this plays out reveals the ways that race is handled by communities online and those with the power to moderate those communities.

By bringing these ideas together, the relationship between media producers and consumers, we can study the feedback loop of how marketing by the major companies upholds hegemonic ideas and attitudes of race and interrogate who and what ideas these companies are privileging. This allows for assessing several games and provides an understanding of the current state of rendering and representing Black people in digital spaces.

The principle of the phantasm will be the direct approach used in understanding and analyzing the work, but it needs to be extended so that the technique can be contextualized within the research. Mainly, this is the question of what are does one look for when finding or investigating the origin of a phatasm. As stated above, first there needs to be a process of situating that idea within the cultural epistemic domain. The final step beyond that is asking where this knowledge - whether true or false comes from.

With Harrel's ideas of the phantasm as the foundational principle - there are several ideas spaces with which I would like to build on top of that for completing the theoretical framework.

For the approach in placing these ideas within a grander fabric, the following principles will be applied on top of Harrel's principle ideas:

- Empire - Critiquing the processes of global capitalism
- Principles of creating and consolidating power
- The principles of system
- The psychological and psychophysical consequences of colonialism and racism.

I will briefly reiterate from my literature review in terms of theoretical application.

Games of Empire by Dyer-Witherford and de Peuter illustrate the ways in which global capitalism controls the production and distribution of video games in contemporary times. The principal ideas illustrate the vertical integration of the consolidation of power. Capitalism has interest surrounding the manufacturing of desire, access, development and application of video games. Through capitalism's desire for resources and profit production the system optimises itself to ensure the perpetuation of these ideals.

Capitalism utilises technology to distribute its media for manufacturing desire of capitalist ideals. Not only is this as simple as advertising, but also the acceptance of the tools of capitalism which include war, subjugation of peoples and nations and of course racism. These intents are then expressed in the media as phantasms, which can be used to reverse engineer the process.

Moving towards a more abstract layer, but also more precisely are the ideas from Foucault around exchange. These are around investigating the processes in which media, language and knowledge are used as a means of manipulating people. In parallel to the ideas of Empire, Foucault asserts that this produces a new type of state. In principle, this concept of the state is Empire. So we can approach both the research within the frame of understanding

the collection of components that are empire and how they operate.

To encompass the agents and populations within that exist as citizens of Empire, there is also the application of *The Social System* by Parsons (1951). This provides a model for understanding and delineating how a system works and processes the presence of societies. This provides a stronger understanding of where and how Empire is consolidating power, and how it maintains this power.

Finally, using Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* we can demonstrate the components and phantasms of Empire that are focused on maintaining power through systemic racism. This follows the process of understanding and investigating the consequences of colonialism withing a psycho-political perspective that is not as material as the conditions of pure Marxist reading of Empire. In principle, this allows for the psychological process of consuming media to be understood.

4. Methodology

The primary lens through which the case studies are analysed is through the concept of the phantasm as stipulated by Harrel in *Phantasmal Media: An Approach to Imagination, Computation and Expression*. He defines phantasm as:

"Phantasms are a combination of imagery (mental or sensory) and ideas. A phantasm is not simply the result of a specific neurobiological process; rather, the term "phantasm" describes a broad type of subjective cognitive phenomenon. The breadth of the term is useful because the idea of the phantasm poses a challenge to the way that many people view human experience." (Harrel, 2013, p. 4)

Furthermore, this is expanded beyond a single processor machine where he states that "[p]hantasms do not exist only in the minds of individuals; they are often shared within groups." (Harrel, 2013, p. 171)

One of the intentions or approaches of this project is to craft an understanding of how we see the applications of race embedded within technology. The principle assumption is that there are more subtle demonstrations of systemic racism represented within games that arise specifically due to the technology that crafts and produces them. The process is somewhat exploratory as it concerns the remnants of a "subjective cognitive phenomenon": race.

The process of gathering and synthesising the knowledge is focused around connecting the ways the case studies represent the various aspect of the intersection of systemic racism and technology. This approach requires placing them in their phantasmal context. The three case studies are placed in slightly different but related context that speak to the legacy of how racism is used by capitalism and experienced socially. As such they are interrogated as extension of media, social, technological and capitalist expression and utilisations of racism.

As such, the research has been gathered to examine the indications of phantasms in other media and technology. This selection provides the articulation for analysing the case studies within the specified framework. The basis of the approach arises from retrieving the patterns and themes from previous work (agriculture, photography and other activities or industries) and investigating how they apply to one of the most prominent examples of the representation of Blackness within games: *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas was then used to reify themes and patterns in video games regarding systemic racism and technology. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* provides a particularly effective collection of phantasms. The vast opportunity for developers, writers, artists and executives to express their phantasms within the game's production cycle allows for the significant opportunity for unpacking and revealing the patterns, intention and mutation of these phantasms.

The process of selecting *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* arises from the meta-analysis of the literature on the discussion of racism in games. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* continuously arises in the literature about the depictions of Black people in video games and provides a valuable primer for understanding and framing the legacy of Black people in video games. The game produced widespread appeal and controversy. Rockstar Games, publisher of the Grand Theft Auto series, reports that the game sold approximately 27.5 million copies, making it one of the bestselling games of all time. Its distinction within the literature arises from the high distribution of the game, which speaks to the large video game companies participating in the global capitalism of video games. Although it is unfair to compare the graphic fidelity of a game from 2004 with contemporary rendering technology, it does provide helpful grounding within the knowledge of rendering and

representing Black people within video games. The game provides a base comparison for charting the history of this process over the past 25 years.

Further, to expand the research, the other case studies were selected to speak to the other presentations of phantasm, utilising the insight gained from the analysis and study of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The first case studies are *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim, with a specific focus on the construction of the Redguard race within the game (the only Black representation within the game) but also as a selection due to two factors:

Fantasy as a myth-making mechanism

Differences in lighting technology in rendering the various human and agents

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim provides a traditional high-fantasy world filled with many people of different skin-pigmentations. The only explicitly dark-skinned group of people humans in the world are the Redguard. Throughout the game, they are exceptionally poorly lit compared to the light-skinned humans within the game. The game does not use an advanced technique for lighting skin, such as sub-surface scattering (Garcia, 10, 15-17). However, Skyrim is a practical example of another highly distributed and well-received game where there is an explicit effort that the art and graphics team had knowledge and tools to ensure effective and accurate lighting (no matter how faked within the processing) to make the light-skinned characters look appealing, but could not do the same for dark-skinned characters.

The second case study selected was *NBA2K17* which provides a more significant and more direct mimicry of the processes and assumptions within reality. With Black athletes dominating basketball in the United States of America, it is clear that the representation is entirely valid within the game. As such, it provides helpful insight into how the phantasms common to digital games appear in real life.

More so, *NBA2K17* perfectly illustrates the ideas of Leonard when he discusses video games as a means of creating a high-tech Black face. On the other side of the spectrum, graphic fidelity moves into a space of fetishism. The NBA series, and many sports games like it, prove that there is knowledge and technology available amongst specialists in the craft of rendering Black people in games. However, there appears to be a minstrelsy that comes about from the process. Real Black players are digitally transposed into these games for the purposes of players interacting and controlling these avatars.

5. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar, 2004) is a seminal work and influential example of the representation of Black people in video games. Notoriously considered an experience in Blackspoitation in video games (Green, 2006), the work has been highly enjoyed by many of those it represents. Regardless, there are several demonstrations of how *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (*GTA: San Andreas)* is enshrining and perpetuating the legacy of the representation of Black people in media.

GTA: San Andreas is a third-person action adventure game. The player takes on the role of CJ, a man returning to the fictional world of San Andreas, CJ re-enters the world of gang violence and gang politics and has to deal with the harsh environment of his childhood.

Although the demonstration of Black culture is widely spread throughout the construction of the world design - particularly the use of music and fashion, there is also a clear utilisation of a phantasm directed to those not represented within the text. Within the text, this is utilised for environmental, action, and character design.

There is a requirement for expanding on the definition of these tenets to reveal the process by which the game itself demonstrates these ideas. For all three, I will be approaching their application through a holistic lens, as all components of the medium are facilitating this process of constructing the phantasm.

Environmental design within the space is a discussion about urban representation and

the consequences of the planning of spaces. This is actively experienced by the player and allows us to question the implied underlying systems that the game activates in the player's mind. Although the game does simultaneously represent the cityscape in visual form, we need to question and appreciate the methods used to represent the fictional city of San Andreas in logistic and demographic form. This serves to contextualise the community that the game is commenting on. Although *GTA: San Andreas* is primarily focused on the player execution of the various actions of the main protagonist CJ. The various actions and mechanics and mechanics can only be contextualised through the spatial and systemic construction of the environment itself.

This allows for further analysis into the ways the game facilitates the user to interact with this perceived space. In all systems, especially highly controlled and constructed pieces such as video games, and other digital spaces, the decisions around what actions the user is allowed to and not allowed to enact are of particular importance in revealing the intention and biases of the developer and the context the artefact was built in. In the case of *GTA: San Andreas*, the mechanical set speaks to the common conventions of the genre, namely through walking (modified by sprinting), various vehicle controls, and combat (fisticuffs and shooting). These are actions that the game limits and allows for the player, informing the expectations of the character being represented. When catering to the whims of the designers and the expected audience as discussed in *Games of Empire (*Dyer-Witherford & De Peuter, 2009), and *The Order of Things (*Foucault, 1966) a - or rather hegemonic bias inherent in the pursuit of art and entertainment under capitalism - the space is designed for the consumption of White men. This contextualises and pushes the distinction between the consequences of playing as the main character - a Black man in his early twenties, fundamentally places the player in a role-playing context. Specifically, we move into how the game facilitates the

performance of digital blackface.

Further representation of Black American crime culture arises from the discourse perpetuated in film. Boyz in the Hood (Singleton, 1991) and Menace II Society (Hughes & Hughes, 1993) were popular films released over a decade before the release of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. Similarly, there is the rise of this discourse and culture in music through the variant of hip-hop music called “gangsta rap”. Gangsta rap began in the mid-1980s and then flourished in the 1990s (Viator, 2020). A particular interest for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is the inclusion of a simulacrum of Eric Lynn Wright (stage name being Eazy-E), who contributed to the cultural movement with his rap group NWA (shortened from Niggas With Attitude).

The Grand Theft Auto series - as the name implies - seeks to fulfil a fantasy in players where they inhabit the persona of a criminal overcoming various obstacles and executing various tasks. There are various moments, scenes, characters and storylines within the pieces that provide a particular demonstration of how techno-racism is being demonstrated. Whereas *GTA: San Andreas* primarily speaks to game development techniques, environmental design and primary interactions. I will look at the consequences of the capitalist trajectory of video game development in the 1980s and 1990s and the consequence of attempting to represent American Black culture in that context, using *GTA: San Andreas*.

The main characters presented in the game are:

- CJ (Carl Johnson) (voice by Young Maylay)

- Big Smoke (Melvin Harris)
- Office Frank Tenpenny
- Sean “Sweet” Johnson
- Kendl Johnson
- Ryder (Lance Wilson)
- Cesar Vialpando
- The Truth
- Mike Toreno
- Wu Zi Mu
- Madd Dogg (voiced by Ice T)

The trajectory of physics-based combat and ballistic simulations in Western video games allows for the consequences of gun and gang violence to be far more viscerally associated with Black American existence when used to represent Black culture in a video game series dripping with gun violence.

The contextual origins of using computers to construct video games have always been associated with violence in some way. Ever since the first engineers at MIT refitted a ballistics processing algorithm to be redesigned to simulate players competing against each other in *Tennis for Two*, computer games in the West have had a strong association with the simulation of objects in space, and - in this context - the process by which players can engage in combat. For measure, conversely, Japanese developers had a stronger focus on players being able to move through space through the construction of *Pacman* (Namco, 1980) *Super Mario* (Nintendo, 1983) and others. Even the Soviets were more culturally curious about the

organisation of multiple objects in relation to each other in the form of Tetris (Pajitnov, 1985).

The construction of computer games in North America provides insight into the cultural zeitgeist in which the technology was used and constructed. Although, of course, as more developers became a part of the industry in North America, we can see various additional creative endeavours. Fundamentally in the early years, we see a reliance on players using ballistic objects to interact with the world. Such pieces include *Pong* (Atari, 1972) the spiritual successor to *Tennis for Two,* and *Breakout (*Atari, 1976). In both of these games, the player has limited Euclidean movement options but is able to extend their engagement with the space through the manipulation of the trajectory of a ball that either allows for combat or conflict (Pong) or destruction in the case of Breakout.

The metaphor for conflict is more explicit in the examples of Asteroids, where the ballistic object becomes a weapon. This is not to suggest that there is no crossover in these creative endeavours across the globe (Space Invaders, a particularly violent video game made by the Japanese, and Dragon's Lair, a particularly narrative-focused game made by Americans). However, there are particular origins in America game development culture to represent the gun.

This process culminates in the development of not the first but definitely seminal - First Person Shooter game, Doom (id Software, 1993). With American culture having a constitutional focus on the desire for the gun (which Japan does not), this solidifies the environment of game development to sprout processes, representation and techniques of the memetic representation of interacting with the world through gun violence. The specific

representation of gun violence is not considered the fundamentally interesting endeavour of Doom. Many developers and designers discuss the exceptionally effective and elegant demonstration of a three-dimensional (3D) rendered environment produced by John Carmack and the groundbreaking level design implemented by John Romero. Regardless of the consequence of this technological and ludological contribution to the field, they chose to represent that insight in the form of a game where the players shoot enemies. Consequently, other developers and designers began copying and developing the techniques but maintained the mechanical interaction of shooting in their games.

Off the strong success of Doom, many developers began developing their version. The Grand Theft Auto Series began as a top-down, two-dimensional game where the players are able to drive cars and shoot people if the avatar ever leaves in the car. The first game was released in 1997 and was 3D by 2001 with the release of Grand Theft Auto III. The series sits comfortably in the realm of games that have the spiritual line of representing violence through guns (and other ballistic weapons). Of course, this is situated within a greater mechanical set and ludological system, but the interaction with the gun is a clear core focus of the action-set.

As such, in an attempt to represent the gang culture of Black Americans in Los Angeles, a specific meta-narrative and social discourse (cultural epistemic domain) is revealed. Although *GTA: San Andreas* is not particularly more violent or more satirical than previous entries in the series, this combination of game design oeuvre and social commentary begins to demonstrate the problematic and racist attitudes of the media the game is inspired by, the developers and the greater social context in which they are situated. Previous entries in the series either have the player role-play as Balkan immigrants or White men from the

United States of America - principally, members of hegemony within (yes, backwards) race discourse within the country.

Here is how we begin to see the ways in which the technological context, quite granularly the military industrial media entertainment network, although anecdotally as opposed to systemically expressed, bleeds into the representation of Black people within video games. Due to underrepresentation in the medium and the industry, this particular type of representation becomes highlighted and amplified. Although *GTA: San Andreas* was particularly considered a breath of fresh air (the very first time many Black Americans experienced any representation at all within a medium they particularly enjoyed, including successful artists of the community), there is a critical consequence for selecting this as the method for representing this demographic.

The following moments will be used to illustrate how the game crafts phantasms that seek to craft and expresses the cultural epistemic domain that begins the process of signalling a specific attitude to Black people. I will then demonstrate how the desire to consume these phantasms within a computer game further enhances the systemically racist attitudes of the culture surrounding the artefact.

CJ is introduced to us as he returned from Liberty City (in world representation of New York) to bury his mother in 1992. He is immediately accosted by Officer Tenpenny (and his partner Office Pulaski), who threaten to frame him for the murder of an officer if he refuses to work for them. The collection of corrupt police officers is referred to as CRASH. When CJ returns home, he is greeted by fellow members of the community, including Big Smoke, Sean “Sweet” Johnson (brother), Kendl Johnson (sister) and Ryder - an addict of

several substances. Sean Johnson is also the leader of the Grove Street Gang, which has waned in power in CJ's absence.

The narrative is opened to indicate how different types of criminal activity (somewhat perpetuated by the police force) have disrupted and harmed the city of Los Santos (in-world Los Angeles). Among the first missions assigned to the player is to engage with one of the drug dealers - specifically crack cocaine. CJ proceeds to participate in various crimes across three cities (Los Santos, San Fierro and Las Venturas), including robbery, murder, grand theft auto - obviously - and money laundering.

The summary of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is as follows: CJ proceeds to interact with various corrupt members of his society in an attempt to regain the prestige of the Grove Street Gang. This includes executing tasks for the gang, the Latino gang Varios Las Aztecas, and the corrupt police officers, CRASH. The rival gangs include the Ballas and the Vagos.

The plot eventually reveals that Ryder and Big Smoke have sold out to the rival gangs and the police and had previously attempted to murder Sweet, culminating in the death of the Johnson family's matriarch. There is a second attempt on Sweet's life which ends in Sweet in a prison hospital, CJ being exiled from Los Santos and Ryder dead.

The plot's second act proceeds to follow CJ collecting friends in San Fierro and later in Las Venturas. He finds himself doing various tasks for various entities (including the government, several organised crime syndicates and music labels). The game concludes with CJ's return to Los Santos to get revenge on Big Smoke and Office Tenpenny. This event is framed against within a simulacrum of the Los Angeles Riots after police officers were

acquitted after the assault of a Black man. At this moment, Officer Tenpenny dies, and the game frames it as a success against the injustices of Los Santos.

The narrative of the theme reveals the desires of the developers to discuss the value of returning to one's heritage and the loyalty of family. It is implied in the game that CJ left Los Santos for Liberty City after he watched the murder of his youngest brother (Brian Johnson). Due to his mother's passing, CJ is forced to return home and finds his community in disarray. His brother - Sean "Sweet" Johnson - is the Grove Street Gang's leader, but that organisation's power has also waned. Despite the obvious participation in crime and gang violence from an early age, CJ experiences a clear loss of childhood through his younger brother's death in 1987, his mother's death in 1992 and then the betrayal of his gang leading to the injury of his brother by the end of the first act.

The response to this is the process by which CJ discovers his found family. By the end of the game, CJ has rediscovered a family which includes his actual family (Sweet and Kendl), the leader of Varios Las Aztecas (Cesar Vialpando, whom Kendl is in a relationship with), Wu Zi Mu (a member of the Triad from San Fierro) and The Truth. With their help, CJ can bring justice and civility back to Los Santos.

The plot is split into several missions - specifically known as story missions. Although narratively constructive for the progression of the plot, the missions need to be more robust to the available game design techniques and the various possible capabilities of the game engine driving the game. Primarily, the missions' design is focused on traversing the world and either murdering non-playable characters (NPCs) or retrieving an item. The expanded mission styles include following an agent in the world, or the mission includes a

constraint requiring not to be detected, torturing an NPC and other actions. The one type of mission that is counter to the typical mission style is the occasional rhythm mini-game introduced into the system.

For clarity, below are the different types of missions I have identified to illustrate the style of available actions and intent in the game.

- Assassination
- Mass murder
- Robbery
- Delivery
- Torture
- Rhythm Game
- Spray Painting

The game also provides systemic expression, which rewards players for certain engagements with specific weapons. The avatar of CJ improves in the use of certain weapons allowing the use of those weapons to be more effective. This arsenal expands the game's interaction with the gun (ballistics) to be representational and engage with the gun in an algorithmic and systemic approach.

Below is the list of guns and other weapons available in the game.

- Handguns
- Pistol (Silenced option)

- Desert Eagle
- Shotguns
- Submachine Gun
- Rifles
- Assault Rifle
- Snipe Rifle
- Flamethrower
- Rocket Launcher
- Minigun
- Tear Gas
- Molotov Cocktail
- Frag Grenade
- Satchel Charges

For completion, so-called melee weapons are also provided below.

- Knife
- Golf Club
- Shovel
- Pool Cue
- Nightstick
- Baseball Bat
- Katana
- Chainsaw

Weapon skill proficiency is divided into three tiers: Poor, Gangster and Hitman. The

system is applied to all the guns, allowing for increased mobility or dual weapons wielding. The player can activate this system through accurate aiming and the use of weapons.

Despite the plot's breadth, the game is quite transparent about its content. The actions available to the player in the game are driving, shooting and committing crimes. The conflict that arises in the plot is not concerned about the act of performing these acts, simply the consequences of CJ executing these acts or being the victim of the crimes.

Although many games at this point had been able to facilitate various actions in games - this mechanical set was the most well-associated with AAA games. These games are considered the highest quality, with the widest audience appeal (despite frequently having the highest restrictions). In short, they produce the most profits quite easily.

This reveals how the ethnographic representation of a Black American society fundamentally is merely a patina or a homage without particular attention to the monad of games, the action (or mechanic) or systems (the consequences of such actions).

There is a clear separation of systemic theme and narrative theme present in the game. This separation is usually referred to as ludonarrative dissonance, as coined by Clint Hocking in his 2007 blog post when discussing Bioshock. Hocking asserts that the consequence of ludonarrative dissonance is that the game “seems to suffer from a powerful dissonance between what it is about as a game, and what it is about as a story. By throwing the narrative and ludic elements of the work into opposition, the game seems to openly mock the player for having believed in the fiction of the game at all.”

Ludically, the *GTA: San Andreas* enthusiastically discusses the need to dominate and overcome competing forces in the desire for territory, money and power. This observation is gleaned from the various ways the player can control CJ through the various tasks and missions the game provides them. Narratively, the game tries to frame these acts in such a way to discuss community, family, trust and the consequences of oppression.

Although the story appears to be quite evocative (Hocking himself mentions *GTA: San Andreas* provided "such a world transforming view of racial tension and inequity in early 1990's California, that I have been shaken to the core, and have been forced to re-examine a huge part of my world view."), there is a clear consequence of the encoded system at play here.

Beyond ludonarration, I would like to provide bastardisation of a term used in other storytelling media. Instead of "show, don't tell" as a stylistic convention, "do, don't show" is a warning of the consequence of interactive media. Although tightly facilitated - even more so than the sister medium of analogue games - computer games struggle to have complete control of the minute actions of players. This struggle is in contrast to other media, such as literature, cinema or music, where all events of the text are completely pre-rendered. The game system is only activated and only exists due to player action. The text of the game itself is the system, with everything else enhancing, but it is ultimately just set dressing.

To pervasively discuss an issue within the realm of interactive media and computer games, the constructed action and systems form simulations and metaphors that reveal and illustrate the underlying themes. The consequence of narrative themes (regardless of how evocative) existing in opposition to ludic themes places many players in the realm of

(literally) spending more time engaging with the consequences of the system. This process is quite insidious, as the actions of the player are repeatedly normalised in their engagement with the topic at hand but facilitated by the game system.

The game system fundamentally crafts an epistemic domain for engagement by the player. They learn the semiotics of the game design through play and are only able to overcome the artificial obstacles through a particular mechanical set successfully. The moment of intersection between play and story is where *GTA: San Andreas* reveals this particular consequence: the player acting as CJ, a Black man, is only able to revitalise his family and community through his own personal corruption and degradation of his community.

This particular epistemic domain is crafted through multiple layers of simulacra. The team of developers, Rockstar North, are based in Edinburgh, Scotland. The strong intermedial influence is Menace II Society, and they are discussing a period of time over a decade after the fact in Los Angeles. The simulation of the world (environment, action and system) reveals the historical output of the context in which the game was developed. The developers constructed fiction to illustrate their artistic intent, despite being structurally overshadowed.

This epistemic domain can be split into several components:

Race and the Individual, in which I will describe how the game is facilitating the process of digital black face, the dehumanisation of the Black body and the obliteration of the Black mind.

Race and capitalism, the use of race as a literary theme in the game, but as a tool

within the game system.

Technology as a Channel for the Ideology of Capitalism, how the production and process of video games under capitalism is mimicked in the ludic ideology of the game.

Race and the Individual

As with many games and other blockbuster media, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is a power fantasy. The game details the accumulation of power by the protagonist CJ, starting with him being harassed by the police and riding a bicycle until he can fly a plane and takes vengeance on the corrupt cops.

Los Santos and the various other cities where the game is set and placed in what is called a sandbox in the game. There are various locations and activities for the player to participate in. Structurally the game is driven by the series of “main” or “story” missions that push the plot forward and roll the game’s credits once the player has completed them. The player is given the freedom to return to these story mission moments when they wish and can participate in several side missions or activities in the meantime. The collection of side missions includes:

- Asset Missions
- Stadium Arena Missions
- Vehicle Missions
- Trading Missions
- Pimping Missions
- Training
- Street Racing

- Recreational Activities

Although a defined narrative structure exists within the game, the piece has clear facilitation and desire to provide players with a specific sense and type of personal expression. The player, although provided with the faculties and tools to explore and engage with the world of the game, can only do so through the ways in which the game has allowed. CJ cannot seek to support his community by pursuing a political career.

This limitation (a perfectly valid limitation) performs and speaks to the limitation of what the player is allowed to view CJ as, themselves and their relationship to CJ. The engagement (and entertainment) with CJ through his actions can only be done through a clear and distinct alienation from his actions. The player must be aware that they are not this character and not performing these actions, nor are they deciding to perform them. This verisimilitude and delusion are important for creating entertainment, as in the case where the player actually related strongly with CJ, there is a deep critique and mockery of the lifestyle in the game.

Instead, the player can enjoy the game with childish abandon. Where critical engagement occurs, the game's boisterous actions become enjoyable moments of jocularity that the player can laugh at and enjoy. This aspects of the game is another separation for the player. Although - in some cases - similar for many games, this shallow immersion of the player into the context and the life of a Black American gang member does not lead to players' contextual understanding of action or system within the representation of the world, rather it encourages the audience to perform the simulacrum. They do not choose to possess CJ to execute actions (there is little choice in that), but they do possess CJ's artificial

perspective.

In the process of CJ acting as the vehicle through which the player interacts and understands the world, the player (whether successful or not) seeks to understand the game through the perspective of CJ. In the principles of game design, some of this is a requirement (when the character is hurt or dies, for example). However, in other cases, as the player begins to try and understand CJ, the game begins to reveal the ways in which these two ideas intersect: Race and Capitalism.

There are two linked approaches for discussing race and capitalism within video games, particularly in the context of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. There is the somewhat obvious representation of the city planning, access and infrastructure represented within the game, which I have briefly already discussed. The other one is the structure in which the game was crafted and created.

Although less viscerally developed than it is today, the structure of the games industry at the time of creation was already moving towards its world-spanning structure (Dyer-Witherford & de Peuter, 2009). This structure includes the project's production, manufacturing and outsourcing to various studios around the world. This technique is utilised for two reasons. It firstly allows the project to “never-sleep”, allowing for a more consistent flow of progress (in theory) and studios to take advantage of cheaper labourers in poorer countries. This process is only possible in countries that have the infrastructure and labour to produce the games.

This process, due to the headquarters of the companies being situated in the USA or

Western Europe (which shall be referred to as the West) this process of expanding into other countries is a reflection of the process by which global capitalism wields the tool of cultural and economic imperialism - the tendrils of the Empire. The work produced by these subsidiaries needs to reflect the experience of the people working in these subsidiaries, allowing for a secondary layer of perspective ignorance regarding the construction of spaces such as GTA: SA. They have no choice (economically and structurally) but to inherit the biases of the people constructing the spaces.

There is the final layer to the perspective process, which is missing from the entire creation process. Through imperialism, several perspectives are removed from contribution to culture and value. They primarily function as people to market to or regions utilised for exploitation (either the environment or the people). Often, within the value chain for the production of video games, these regions (Africa, South America and South East Asia) are primary locations for extracting resources to support the development of video games. Rare earth minerals, cobalt (Central Africa) and lithium (Venezuela), are used to produce the components to create the computers. Oil (Nigeria, Angola) is used to ship the components. The structure of global capitalism is literal in the application of software and technology: the processes do not run without the exploitation of the entire planet.

This hierarchy of interest or investment into the game's development reveals the alienation of various entities within the process, from the game's production to the consequences of their labour. As we travel up the chain of this hierarchy, it becomes clear that the tools of capitalism are being inherited, down the chain, and magnified along the way. In particular, we will discuss the utilisation of race (and racism) along with the implicit economic and social consequences that arise from that. In the context of game development

stemming from the USA and how that country was developed and evolved (colonialism, genocide, slavery, segregation and over-policing of marginalised communities), we understand and appreciate how these phenomena are never criticised through the chain-of-command in the development cycle.

The desire for capitalism to control through race provides particular consequences within the technology and entertainment industries. These two industries are systemically designed to be exclusionary due to several factors. The main factor for technology is the historical and continuous process by which Black people and other marginalised races are historically excluded from access to the development of technology or control of it to ensure hegemony can maintain power (Sinclair, 2004, Foucault, 1966, Parsons 1951). This is a process that has existed since slavery existed in the USA, and its spectre continues to this day. There is a very simple relationship with why this happened: technology tools are fundamental in the machine the progressing capitalism, from the horse to the steam-powered engine to the Internet (Meiksins, 1996). These are vectors for increasing productivity within the industry they are utilised. Race, when used as a tool for control under capitalism, merges with the utilisation of technology to produce something uniquely bizarre: the marginalised race will labour within the industries but are excluded from the industry's driving forces.

Logically, this bleeds into the entertainment industry (once again, it is driven by technology.) Suppose the manner of the industries that capitalism is invested in (agriculture, manufacturing and software) are driven by technology. In that case, we can appreciate why the entertainment industry is fundamental to capitalism: Information. The specifics are that capitalism requires the control of thought and masses to propagate its ideas.

The exclusion from the production of media and entertainment enforces the assumptions of the existence of marginalised people. As the name implies, these demographics are marginalised within society, and as such, the notion of their existence is demonstrated with their presentation of media itself. With the vast majority of media being controlled by the hegemony (men, White people and similar hegemonic archetypes), their presentation of media is biased towards their perspective and the perspectives that allowed them to become the hegemony.

Technology as a Channel for the Ideology of Capitalism - media to provide propaganda for capitalism and racism

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas constructs a myth and multiple phantasm for the player to enjoy. The essence of all games is the presentation of joy through action. From a certain reductionist perspective, everything else developed in the game is about facilitating that process. The consequence of this process is that this does suggest that the player is the agent performing the actions in the game - not the character. The player can also choose not to play.

This is where the game gathers buy-in from players and encourages them to participate more within the system through the players' own enjoyment and their own sunk cost fallacy. The game begins simply enough: CJ - the main character - returns home to bury his mother. This opening event leads CJ on a quest for revenge, spanning several cities and states (in world versions of Los Angeles, San Francisco and Las Vegas), gathering allies, money and power. The story culminates in CJ murdering a corrupt Black police officer (Officer Tenpenny) in revenge for the destruction of his family. This results in the game

ending in riots and protests mimicking the riots in Los Angeles in 1992 after the death of Rodney King by police officers.

The process through which the player executes the plot and reveals the system of the game demonstrates an ideological perspective from the designers in which they are expected to dominate and control the communities in which they reside. The process illustrates the perceived understanding of the character supporting the community. In principle, CJ is demonstrated as a hero as he removes rival gangs, drugs and corrupt government officials from the community. It is suggested that the community is safe, with CJ as its most powerful entity.

This consolidation of power and the consequences are left up to interpretation by the player. The tonal implication suggests that the valid or correct state of the community has been restored. Nevertheless, this is contradicted by the processes of the game itself. CJ's struggle through the story is demonstrated as being against the gangs and police officers who took power away from the Grove Street Gang he belonged. We can understand the implication that the tactics and desire for consolidation of power are naturally destructive forces within the game world.

As such, the games demonstrate a microcosm of capitalist ideology within the game's system. CJ has to dominate rival gangs, gain their territory and recruit their gang members. These are minor victory conditions set by the game towards completing the piece. The player is rewarded for achieving these goals within the game world. Not executing these actions does not explicitly punish the player, but the pacing of the game is halted. There is no consideration that the player could not or would not choose to go through this process.

The consequences of setting the player to participate in this system when placed in the context of a Black community are particularly nefarious. The series of Grand Theft Auto primarily focused on White characters in predominantly White communities. Although these pieces similarly present the glorification of power and capitalism, this has different consequences when White men (which is the hegemonic perspective) are placed in these worlds. The pervasive saturation of content where White people are placed in various situations, roles and stories reveals the perspective on the marginalised communities (in this case, Black communities) by the hegemony when they are represented. In the case of GTA: SA, the racist perspectives of Black people being individually aggressive but communally weak is revealed far stronger than when presented in a White community.

The implication becomes that the systemic issues of these Black communities are self-perpetuating. There is a disregard for systemic racism within society as being an invisible or irrelevant factor. The tools of capitalism are considered innate to society as there is no other way for the player to proceed through the space. The player is expected to implement capitalist tools in order to achieve power and safety for the characters' families and communities.

There is no opportunity to change or subvert the system in an attempt to facilitate long-term communal change. Through the creation of the phantasm indicated by the riots mimicking the aftermath of the murder of Rodney King, the game does, at least, illustrate that CJ's actions have not changed the outcomes of society at large, only his individual story. The weakness of his community will still continue, as the policies of the capitalist state will still control and police his community for the benefit of maintaining a White controlled capitalist

state.

6. *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim and the Redguard Race

The Elder Scrolls V: *Skyrim* (TESV) is a game released by Bethesda Softworks in 2011. The game series began in 1994 with the release of the first entry, *The Elder Scrolls*: Arena in 1994 and, along with the five main entries in the series, has produced smaller expansions associated with the main entries. The series also has a massive multiplayer online (MMO) entry in the form of *The Elder Scrolls* Online. Each entry takes place on the continent of Tamriel, with each main entry (except the first and the online iteration) focusing on a few provinces of Tamriel. TESV takes place in the northern province of Tamriel called Skyrim.

The game demonstrates both concepts of the ontological racist assertion and the hegemonic teleological expectation within its presentation of the Redguard. The former is done through the graphical rendering technology used to display and represent the world, people and objects of Skyrim, whilst the latter is done through the the ludic system and lore of the world. Both of these ideas interact in the process of representation, and the method by which they are expressed arise from the same biases and ideas within the developers themselves. However as they would be fundamentally created by different sub-teams within the project I will be tackling them separately.

6.1 Ludic System and Lore

As with many fantasy content constructed in the West - deeply influenced by Tolkien - the continent, regions and cultures of the game are deeply inspired by the myths of

European culture that have developed, evolved and been appropriated over the past two millennia. Myth, in this case, is focused on the historical myths the “people of Europe” generally tell about themselves as European. The specific inflexion regarding the term people is used cautiously in this context - as the concept of a “people of Europe” is a myth.

These myths are in reference to the vague historical understandings used to detail and understand their historical and material context, from the Roman Empire, Arthurian legends, Holy Roman Empire, Middle Ages, Renaissance, the Enlightenment and other moments in history. For *The Elder Scrolls* setting, the designers are inspired by the mixture of Arthurian legends and the Middle Ages, which allows for the classical fantasy tropes of magic, dragons, fantastical races, and creatures such as elves, vampires and werewolves.

Fantasy is often used as a tool for critiquing or revealing aspects of the past with an anarchic perspective arising from current interests. Through the process, there are particular phantasmic evocations about drawing on the audience’s myths about themselves and how they came to be. The cliche statement “History is written by the victors” becomes more poignant through Orwell’sOrwell’s 1984 quote “, He who controls the past controls the present. He who controls the present controls the future” (1949). In particular, I would like to elaborate on these quotes by positing that the “victors” in the former quote are those of us who made it to the present. Our contemporary perspective and ideas are the driving force behind how the past is excavated and interpreted. At a particular practical epistemological level, we decided what history was essential to study, maintain and archive.

This decision is tied to hegemony because, as we have seen with colonialism, that history can easily and often be destroyed through genocide and assimilation. The more

interesting aspect of this process is how history is redrafted for the hegemonic class itself.

The question of what defines a civilisation continues to be debated among some circles in anthropology, archaeology or history. It will continue to become more complicated as astrophysicists and astrobiologists attempt to find evidence of extraterrestrial life. More precisely, the question of when a civilisation changes is essential for this argument. The myth construction of a people, especially the hegemonic class, is pervasive across the Empire - where even with evidence of centuries of war within Europe, the European Union has constructed a myth of peace and unity on the continent. This myth of civilisation development (note the use of the "developed world" for the Global North, and the use of "developing nations" for Global South - China included) is then imposed and expected and respected as gospel for the expectations of humanity. This definition is artificial, but its application is undoubtedly real.

In short, I think Yuval Noah Harari gets to the point quicker than I can in Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind:

"Yet none of these things exists outside the stories that people invent and tell one another. There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no money, no human rights, no laws, and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings" (Harari, 2011, p. 32)

The process of myth-making is particularly important for contextualising the setting and fiction of *The Elder Scrolls* series. For clarity, the developers of the series are focused on realising the nostalgia of what their cultural epistemic domain believes to be the heritage of the Western people. Of course, it would be impossible to construct any piece without the

experiences of the developer, and I seek to demonstrate how this is a consequence of systemic racism and the technology used to feed those ideas.

The first idea has already been implied: destruction and constriction of history, culture and perspective. There is a particular dance that happens here between colonialism and neo-colonialism. As already stated, one of the tools of oppression that are utilised under colonialism is the destruction of a people. The definition of "people" is deliberately allowed to maintain its arbitrary nature as the approach used by colonists varied across several axes. People were murdered or enslaved to foreign lands; culture was looted, reappropriated or destroyed; languages were outlawed, and land continued to be occupied by previously-foreign nations. (For the brevity of the argument, I will not digress into the process of coloniser or settler becoming native).

As losers to the victors, this history is mostly eradicated. The work of contemporary descendants, anthropologists and historians has provided limited but decent work in reviving these cultures and histories - but the consequences are felt regardless. The descendants of the colonised are massively removed from their ancestors' history through the second idea of the process: assimilation. The losers become victors but accept their colonisers' history as their own.

The consequences are felt through the propagation of human culture forward through time. The archiving, study and widespread understanding of this lost culture and perspectives are deeply limited or ignored. The contemporary understanding of humanity - the myth - is barely (to not all) influenced by these events. As such, when our myth becomes media - especially when done carelessly - the representation of the subaltern and the other (even in

fiction) is performing a virtualised Black face - even digital avatars have Black skin with White masks.

The myth is also embedded through education - in order to function as a labourer, one is expected to assimilate within the standardised education process. Of course, some families are able to maintain the cultures, but one'sone's citizenship within Empire. Empire requires an acceptance and understanding of the myth of Empire. As such, once we have craftsmen, developers and creators constructing these stories, the phantasmal touchstone is embedded. Even when obtaining knowledge, society's distinctive and ephemeral language is altered and geared toward maintaining this myth of Empire. This produces the reiteration of the marginalised existence only in terms of the hegemonic class. The simplest example of this is the artificial existence of "non-White" people.

This particular attention to race - although not unique to White people - is propagated strongly through their hegemony. The specific approach they use to discuss and categorise race - as opposed to more practical terms such as culture, ethnicity or nation - delineates race into a genetically inherited trait. The application in game development of this process - when trying to represent and speak to these genres - defines races in terms of inherited features (or stats) and abilities. Within *The Elder Scrolls* series, the primary playable races that the player can choose are Argonian (anthropomorphic lizard), Breton (human), Dark Elf, High Elf, Wood Elf, Imperial (human), Khajit (anthropomorphic cats), Nord (human), Orc and Redguard (human).

These races inherit the stats and abilities, and principles of the basic ludic system but

also from major table-top role-playing games, inspiring many of the video games produced today. In particular, the most famous and popular table-top role-playing game - *Dungeons & Dragons* (Technical Studies Rules, 1974) - utilise a player character creation system with six main ability scores categories or statistical points (stats) to become more distinct sets of skill which can be adjusted further. These are Strength, Dexterity, Charisma, Constitution, Intelligence and Wisdom.

These are mostly straightforward, but the ability scores that require some further explanation are Constitution, Intelligence and Wisdom. Constitution explains how likely a character is to survive injury, poison and other ailments. Intelligence allows for the ability to have knowledge, but in particular, it focuses on their ability to wield magic. Wisdom is focused on abilities associated with the environment or the deities of the world.

The Elder Scrolls Series has ability scores which are called Attributes by the designers. These are Strength, Intelligence, Willpower, Agility, Speed, Endurance, Personality and Luck.

Strength and Intelligence are analogues for their original form from traditional table-top role-playing games. Willpower is an attribute that represents the character’s ability to regenerate magic (magick), whereas Endurance provides a similar function for physical traits - regeneration of health and fatigue. Agility is an analogue for Dexterity. Personality is an analogue of Charisma. The final attribute, Luck, affects the way the random number generator within the game is utilised by the game system to adjust all moments in time when that is necessary.

In previous iterations of the series, the different races were assigned different initial bonuses to these attributes. All races were given the Luck score of 50. The unique differences between the Nords and Redguards were given the same:

Strength: 50

Intelligence: 30

Willpower: 30

Agility: 40

Speed: 40

Endurance: 50

Personality: 30

The Bretons were given an ability score as below:

Strength: 40

Intelligence: 50

Willpower: 50

Agility: 30

Speed: 30

Endurance: 30

Personality: 40

Furthermore, the Imperials were given attribute scores of:

Strength: 40

Intelligence: 40

Willpower: 30

Agility: 30

Speed: 40

Endurance: 40

Personality: 50

A particular mode of characterisation exists within the design of game systems. As a character can be constructed through text, visual, performance or oral (or audio) construction in other media - which is also used in games - there is a particular extra tool that can be used when working with games: action. Although “character is action” is a term that is used in all storytelling, only games have the ability to facilitate the player in defining the character through action.

Regarding the discussion at hand, the human-represented races within the game will be the focus of this analysis. However, briefly, the character traits of the various fantasy races will be discussed to acknowledge the tropes being utilised by the designers. The Khajit are inspired by Middle Eastern traits, such as that they are merchants and traders with the citizens of Tamriel.

As the above attributes define how the player can act through limitation and enhancement, it becomes clear how the designers perceive these characters through the game’s system. Explicitly this demonstrates how the Breton race is considered more intelligent by the designers and is selected for the purpose of allowing players to play human magic-wielders. The Imperials are mostly balanced but are particularly useful for players who

wish to play charismatic characters that solve their problems through talking.

From the attributes provided, it is evident that the Nords and the Redguard are considered warriors by the designers, with particular attention paid to their Strength and Endurance. However, there is further character building which is implied in the flavour text of the character builder:

Redguards:

“The most naturally talented warriors in all of Tamriel. The Redguards of Hammerfell have a hardy constitution and a natural resistance to poison. They call upon Adrenaline Rush in combat.”

Nords:

“Citizens of Skyrim, they are tall, fair-haired people. Strong and hardy, Nords are famous for their resistance to cold and their talent as warriors. They can use Battle Cry to make opponents flee.”

The specific representation of this within the game system is that the Redguard have the additional traits of Adrenaline Rush and Resist Poison. Adrenaline Rush is a racial power that the player can activate once a day, allowing the character’scharacter’s Stamina to regenerate ten times faster for 60 seconds. In other words, it allows the Redguard characters to be more athletic, run longer, and fight for longer. In previous iterations of the game, the Redguards also had enhanced Athletics and were the only class strongly limited in obtaining magical abilities - the abilities requiring intelligence.

The Nords have Battle Cry, Resist Frost and Survival. Battle Cry is an ability utilised by the player to calm non-playable characters (NPCs) down when in battle, similar to many of the other racial powers, it can only be used once a day. I bring attention to the similarities between the Nords and the Redguards to illustrate the designers' perception and the Black representation they have in the game.

The Redgaurd are the race in the game that serves to be a representation of Black people. Redguard names are Arabic to Arabic-inspired such as Amir, Alesan, Majid or Fihada. They are associated with desert biome, often wear head scarves in various designs and invaded the land of Tamriel from another continent. Based on their lore, description and the various names of the different non-playable-characters (NPCs) that are Redguard in the game, there is crafted phantasm that inspires images spaces of North African (specifically Moroccan) invading tribes in Europe (specifically the Iberian Peninsula). The Redguard lore in the game describes a tribe of people who lost their continent, Yokuda - to the West of Tamriel - sunk into the ocean. They were able to find refuge on Tamriel and conquered the native inhabitants of the initial provinces they colonised (Hammerfell) and, for many years, were isolationists in defending their new land, similar to the moorish occupation of Spain (Scott, 1904). It has been noted that one of the writers of the game was inspired by Black Panther Nationalism - which reveals not only the apparent association with Black people in this game but also a deep and ignorant appropriation of the ideals of the Black Panther Party. The specific reference to the Black Panther Party comes from Michael Kirkbride, a Bethesda writer who explained it in a now-lost forum post. The full text is below:

"No, I was actually referring to The Black Panthers and their radicalism.

As some people know, I am not really a fan of the United Colors of Beneton approach

to Tamriel's creation, which smacks of white guilt and offensery rather than some holistic form of beautiful inclusion. Thus, it is my fault that the Asian analogues got eaten. Oops. Looks like others are bringing' 'em back, though. But I promise my choice had nothing to do with Yellow Peril, it had to do with co-opting "coolness of color" without thinking about it intelligently and compassionately.

(Hunkers down for the flame.)

That said, when I started writing Redguard, I really thought about how unique the black people of Tamriel were: they came in and kicked ass and slaughtered the indigenes while doing so. They invaded. It was the first time I had encountered the idea of "black imperialism",...and it struck me big time as something 1) new, 2) potentially dangerous if taken as commentary, and 3) potentially rad if taken as commentary.

Who knows. AVault did say it had a story worthy of being on stage, and Michael Mack (Cyrus) once thanked me for giving him words that "Black folks don'tdon't get to say" (referring to Cyrus' speech and the reversal of Son to the Father)... which broke my heart and made me puff my chest all at the same time.

Which is a long way of saying: panther-love."

This particular, although the creatively inspired, interpretation of the Redguard illustrates the various modes by which the Redguard are constructed. There is no need to stop the creativity of these writers, but their execution provides a clear opportunity for critique. The misrepresentation of the Black Panther Party and even the imposition of Kirkbride's own perspective on history illustrates the bizarre nature of their creation. The personal intention of the writer is to uplift and represent Black people positively. The execution is their imposition of White success through colonisation on Black people. As stated earlier, especially within a virtual world, Black existence is controlled by a White creator.

The culture of the Redguard is martial and warrior focused, and they have a distaste for magic. Their biome of Hammerfell is mostly desert, which is reflected in the construction of their architecture and clothes. They are described as having a light brown to black skin tone, with wavy to wiry hair. Based on the descriptions of other races, this makes them the most diverse race in the game.

This amalgamation of phantasms when constructing the Redguard reveals the specific decision around constructing the ways in which the designers choose to represent these characters and the simulacra of races within their fantasy setting. The Redguard have lore, description, and characterisation that reveal them to be more diverse than other races. This uniqueness to the spread of diversity within the Redguard is a consequence of them being the only Black race within the game, whereas there are three other White races within the game (and then the Elves, who are always White people). This means that the designers are choosing to distribute any perspective within the game about Black people into one form of representation. The designers see the array of White people and Europeans as separate entities and thus are able to craft culture, language, religion and location intuitively and naturally within the world. To briefly reiterate the diversity of the White cultures within the game system:

Bretons are magical and intelligent.

Imperials are charismatic

Nords are warriors and strong.

Implicitly it is apparent in fantasy that Elves are often some form of White - or, more

specifically: Scandinavian through Tolkien's influence on fantasy. This implies and further reveals the approach to diversity within the designer's construction of the demographics in the world.

Furthermore, as opposed to the more passive or ignorant forms of racism that we can observe regarding the construction of the Redguard in relation to the other races, there are more obvious and insidious components to the way the Redguard are constructed.

A few principal components are essential for understanding the Redguard within the game's system. These are strength, warriors, weary of magic, limited in magical arts, by extension limited in intelligence, and athletic. Racism is almost uncreative in its approach. Their representation of Black people is illustrated as a combination of invaders (they are not supposed to be in this land) with aggression, strength and uncivilised superstition. It is as simple and primitive as the concept of the noble savage perspective utilised by colonialists.

The use of these ideas is akin to the essential components of racism that are inherited by these designers as a function of their inheriting technology and media from their industry ancestors and the society in which it is constructed: We fear them, but we are still better than them.

There are various moments within *The Elder Scrolls* V: *Skyrim* that attempt to respond to a contemporary climate through constructing character in an individualistic fashion through storylines or quests that allow for individual characters regardless of race to act on consequences of their local or personal circumstance and desires. Nevertheless, there is a straightforward consequence of inheritance and tradition in constructing the design system

that can only be changed with a radical redesign, rethinking and recontextualisation of the expected audience. The assumptions of media and technology within the space and the education of the developers within the space arises from their forebears (within games, technology and media), providing a constructed space that does not lend itself to challenging the regressive ideas of racism that lie within the development process itself.

6.2 Rendering the Redguard Invisible

Within graphics programming there are several components that are taken into consideration when simulating and objects within the real world. In simplest term it is the branch of computer science focused on the techniques for producing images on to the screen. The specific technological subset that is applies to game development is the technology known as real-time rendering. This field "is concerned with making images rapidly on the computer" (Akenine & Haines & Hoffman, 2008, p. 1).

There are multiple items within the subset of techniques that are possible to investigate within this field that are utilised within game development, as the entire field is interested in the process of simulating the visual aspects of the real world. Advancements in this field are particularly interested in the development of photo-realistic worlds, which can then be used to understand the process in rendering objects in a non-photo-realistic style.

The two main expressions of this field of technology that I will be looking at within *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* will be ambient occlusion, specifically screen-space ambient occlusion. Ambient Occlusion is the technique of computing the lighting of three-dimensional objects within a space. The assumption taken into the calculation is that

the light evenly ambient or emissive in all directions (Akenine & Haines & Hoffman, 2008). As such it useful and effective when rendering objects in sunlight. The common type of surface that the technique is appropriate for are referred to as Lambertian surfaces. For simplicity, this Lambertian surfaces are matte surfaces with low reflectivity.

As such, this allows for the process to be applied very well to most of the objects that we can expect to see in any world as most objects are not incredibly reflective. In particular, within the natural world most agent (animals and plants) are not reflective enough for any further advancements of the technique. In the case of the demographics within the the world of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, this means that the skin of the humans in the world are rendered using the technique of ambient occlusion, particularly the optimised subset of the technology known as Screen-space Ambient Occlusion (SSAO).

The other method for achieving ambient occlusion is known as Object Space Ambient Occlusion, which decreases in performance within increased complexity of the world or scene. Due to the requirements in complexity of the large open world, Screen-space Ambient Occlusion is more computationally optimised for the needs of the design intention.

There are unfortunate consequences in the decision to produce a optimised experience for the player that can be enjoyed and produce a seamless rendering experience as the player as their avatar moves through the space and views the world through the virtual camera. These consequences - similar to the the production of cameras by Kodak up until the 1980s - are predisposed to the what the developers consider to be most important aspects for an enjoyable experience fro the players. This a common occurrence within the history and development of games due to the amount of resources they often require from the computer

they are running on. As such, it is vital for the experience of the player that certain parts of the simulation are removed if they are unlikely to notice the absence, or that those components are faked through a more optimised approach.

This is not neutral decision, and certain short-cuts that are taken are not always consciously removed by the developers. Within the case of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skryim* we can see the consequences of this process as represented through the visual rendering of the humans.

Below I have various screen-shots which demonstrate the the human playable races of the game in various lighting conditions:



Figure 1. Demonstration of Redguard (left) and Nord (right) in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*



Figure 2. Demonstration of Redguard (first), Nord (second), Imperial (third) and Breton (fourth) heads in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*



Figure 3. Demonstration of the Redguard (first), Nord (second), Imperial (third) and Breton (fourth) from the shoulders up in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

Due to how the calculation works (within ambient occlusion being the primary, but not only factor here) the three figures illustrate the consequence of how the technique as it is applied in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim.* As can already be seen within the well-lit conditions as represented in Figure 1, the Redguard model is already experiencing exaggerated shadow on the right side of their face, whereas the Nord model shadow is a better approximation to photorealism. This is due to the inherit consequence of Screen Space Ambient occlusion. The process is focused on the current two dimensional rendering of the screen and applies the colour blending to the pixels that are available. The darker skin model, as such, has significantly more shadow applied due to the lack of simulated light coming off the screen.

When placed under extreme conditions such as seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3, it is clear that the consequences of the developers rendering approach is seen across all models - not just the darker textures. The difference in this case being that Redguard are close to being impossible to see with the same effect occurring for the other models at different levels of intensity (in this case the Breton are also difficult to see).

As with the Kodak cameras in the 1980s (Roth, 2009) and the approach they used in correcting the engineering blind spot, although the technology itself is operating as expected, the decisions and foci of the developers is where this consequence arises. Both scenarios

produce phantasms that reveal the ways in which the research and communities around technology have not paid attention to the effectiveness of rendering darker skin within their development. In this particular case, the technological consequence of how darker skin is rendered produces two related ideas. The ineffective rendering of the darker skin suggests that the inability to see the character is either adequate, that it is of little concern within the context of the entire game, or that the developers do not believe players will be concerned. All three possibilities (and these ideas will be in some ratio with each other) form part of the domain that reveal the phantasm of how what we call “Blackness” is less important that what we call Whiteness.

The profit optimisation goals of capitalism prevent the craft from catering to a wide array scenarios. The intersection of systemic racism, capitalism and technology is felt strongly in the consequences of the decisions taken to produce the rendering engine for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* where the performance of the machine and the performance of the company places these engineers under pressure to produce software quickly that can execute seamlessly. This pressure causes the decision to cut corners where the rendering of dark skin is considered good enough, despite being worse than the fairer-skin models.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim produces two main types of phantasms in its game design, world building and its rendering engine. The game design and rendering engine produce a permutation of racism which indicates what the developers (most likely unconsciously) believe Black people to be - the ontological racist assertion. The game system considers Black people to be tough warriors, strong, athletic and intellectually inferior. Whereas the rendering engine demonstrates how there is less concern for effective

representation of Black people within the pixels themselves.

The lore of the world, asserts that Black people can find success through demonstrating ambition and motivation in the same way that White people did. This sparks historical revisionism where colonialism is considered an expected outcome of any strong or effective nation, and Black people could have gained power through exerting colonialism in the same way that White people did. This is the hegemonic teleological expectation - that Black people should simply become like White people to achieve greater quality of life.

Mixing these ideas together it becomes clear that the Redguard in *The Elder Scrolls* series are often are dumping ground for the (mostly) White developers of the series. There principal phantasm can be summarised thusly: Black people are inferior as civilisation, but the individual specimens are stronger and more athletic than White individual specimens. As a race or nation, they would be incredibly powerful, if they had the capacity to perform effective nation building or government.

7. NBA2K17

NBA2K17 is part of an annual series that seeks to represent the dynamics and expectations of playing basketball, explicitly focusing on the National Basketball Association - the basketball administration responsible for facilitating the various leagues in the United States of America (USA). The series has released games annually since 1999 and sits under the umbrella term NBA 2K. The series was initially published by Sega Sports and then changed hands to 2K sports in 2005.

I will be mainly focusing on NBA2k17 for specificity. However, there are attitudes and demonstrations across the series that speak to how the consequences of adding representation in the context of the games speak to the phenomenon in sports games - especially sports dominated by Black athletes - that DJ Leonard refers to as “High-Tech Blackface” or “Digital Minstrelsy”.

Leonard expands upon and applies the concept of “High-Tech Blackface” (although originally credited to Adam Clayton Powel III) to a far older game, NBA Street. The term speaks to a primarily archaic practice of White actor painting their faces black, their lips red and wearing white gloves. The practice was used to mock the cultures and behaviour of Black people. However, Leonard and Powel quite rightly point out that there are two more significant concepts at play concerning minstrelsy and blackface that can be applied more broadly:

The inhabiting of an artificial Black body to denote authority over all Black bodies

The dehumanisation of Black people through control of a Black body

In the application of the concept to NBA Street - a more ludicrous and cartoonish version of the NBA2K series - Leonard demonstrates how, even in this more fantasy-driven version of the game, Black athletes dominate and appear to dominate in particular to their innate athletic ability, and fundamentally, as a result, their appropriate genetics. The Black athletes are demonstrated to be strong, faster, more agile and able to jump significantly higher than their White counterparts. In particular, their few White counterparts appear to achieve success at the game simply through effort.

Leonard stipulates two ideas concerning this representation. The obvious one where Black athletes are naturally prone to strength and violence but are not adept at intellectual prowess. The more subtle suggestion is that the performance of the Black athlete is constructed for White pleasure. These two ideas are deliberately supposed to be in dialectical opposition to each other, where the White viewer both has envy and is repulsed by the Black body. Leonard asserts that sports video games provide a perfect mode for sating this appetite of the White viewer.

NBA2K17 provides two distinct modes to engage with the game. It comes packaged with the competitive mode and what is usually referred to as the "story mode" of the game - titled "My Career". The competitive mode allows the player to play a game of basketball against artificial intelligence (AI) or other players. The more exciting method of engaging with the game is in "My Career" mode. In this game feature, the player can construct an avatar with multiple physical customisation features. The player is able to sculpt the head, body, hairstyle and perceived race of their avatar and provide the avatar with a name. Within the plot of the story mode, the avatar is provided with the nickname "The President" (or

"Pres"). This is a common choice in games to minimise complications with voice-acted lines within the game.

Despite having the option to present the avatar as White, there are a series of choices within the construction of the story to indicate that the character crafted by the writers is coded as Black. The necessary phantasm for this process arises from several main consistent creative selections within the game. The avatar's voice actor is Sullivan Jones, a Black actor, and so are several of the main characters. This includes the avatar's two main friends and colleagues, Justice Young (voiced by Michael B. Jordan) and Grant Alabaster (voiced by Todd Anthony). The avatar's mentor is his high school basketball coach Washington Falls (voiced by Demetrius Grosse).

There are several other scenes within the plot that reveal the ways in which the story is coded to focus on the story of a Black character. There are interactions between Black characters, which show a difference between the interaction of Black characters, which is different than with Black and White characters. In particular, there is a particularly charming scene in which a White character attempts to understand a handshake between two Black characters. Beyond this, we are shown cultural touchstones within the story representing Black American culture beyond basketball.

Black Players make up 8% of the video game player base (ESA, 2022), and Black athletes are overrepresented in basketball at 74.2% (TIDES, 2020). So (under liberal or capitalist ideology, at least), we can appreciate how the NBA2K series desires to represent at least a small part of its player base and the perspectives of the athletes they represent. Within cultural construction, this is undoubtedly an admirable ambition. Basketball, as with many

sports, is often framed as a practice and career that is governed by meritocracy. Leagues, cups and rankings are all designed to present as fair and transparent in their attempt to realise the best athletes in their field. As such, sports are considered egalitarian, allowing any and all to attempt to participate and compete. The implication, of course, is that other avenues (education, entrepreneurship, entertainment and other possible options) are separate from pure meritocracy and far more subjective in their distribution of success. This is incorrect (few power structures are based on merit), but we can accept this as the predominant myth.

Sports, particularly basketball, have been a space where Black athletes have excelled and achieved success despite (and sometimes to spite) facing systemic barriers and a lack of access to resources and opportunities (Edwards, 1971). This has created a powerful and inspiring narrative for Black players and fans alike, often reflected in the popularity of sports-related video games such as NBA 2K.

The appeal of sports video games to Black players goes beyond simply playing as their favourite athletes or teams. It also provides a sense of connection and representation, as the game's focus on the NBA and its players reflects basketball's experiences and cultural significance in Black communities. This can be a powerful source of validation and inspiration for young Black players who may not have access to the same resources and opportunities as their peers.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that Black players are not the only players who enjoy and play sports video games. The audience for these games is diverse and includes players from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds. By providing a platform for diverse stories and experiences, these games can provide empowerment and inspiration for players of all backgrounds.

The distinction for sports is that it exists as a place for Black athletes to excel, even

though lack of access and privilege, and consequence, allows for Black players to fantasise about a similar dream. There is an obvious caveat: Black players are not the only players who play these games, and they are not the bulk of the audience.

Despite their over-representation within the sport, most game players are not Black; in the USA, the vast majority are White (Entertainment Software Association, 2022).

I want to delve into the question regarding the consequence of players participating in a game that speaks so strongly to the Black existence being played mainly by White people. There are levels to which we can discuss this in terms of cultural appropriation, but this would not be accurate in defining the nuance of the phenomenon. Instead, it is a process of White people trying to inhabit Black bodies.

Compared to other representations of Black people in games, where there are separations of context or demonstrations of character (through the system) with regards to inhabiting a Black character, there is something nefarious when it comes to the process of inhabiting these bodies and characters in sports. Black people's over-representation within American sports (Gough, 2022) speaks to a few components within the structures of a racist society that are exacerbated when demonstrated through sports games.

Within capitalism, selling one's labour is often understood as selling one's time, skills, and effort to an employer in exchange for a wage or salary. This exchange of labour for payment is a central feature of capitalist economies, where production aims to generate profits for owners and shareholders. While labour can involve physical exertion, it is not necessarily the same as selling one's body. Instead, labour involves the application of

knowledge, expertise, and creativity to produce goods or services. Labour may sometimes involve physical tasks such as construction or factory assembly. However, the work is primarily mental and creative in many other fields, such as software development or marketing.

Although we can understand these labour components to be exploitative, an expression of this within sports comes across as particularly egregious. To participate in sports at the level of professional athletes, there are natural physical requirements of their bodies. For example, basketball players are taller than the general population, football (both America and Association) and rugby players have higher lung capacity and other capabilities. In selecting and trading players, players are ranked based on statistics (performance in games) as well as physical traits (height, speed, arm span and other me).

Consequently, the process by which players often select their players and even construct them focuses on producing perfect athletes for their experience. The players are able to construct Black bodies as avatars for themselves to possess. This intent and process are demonstrated in the “MyCareer” mode. Colloquially, this referred to a story mode for obvious reasons. The particular character - although coded as Black - can be physically customised to the players’ within the constraints of the customisation system. The particular focus of this research is within the *NBA2K17*. However, there is a clear focus on constructing Black American stories in these modes for the game, with Spike Lee having written and directed the story for previous iterations in *NBA2K16*.

The process, in particular, can be a strange construction of the being, or in ludic terms: roleplaying - the “other”. Although much like the process with many other attempts at

providing and constructing representation in media, material and historical consequences always become embedded in the attempt. The construction of the MyCareer mode certainly provokes and allows for the embodiment of fantasy for many Black players. However, race tourism also arises when we remember that White executives predominantly run these companies. The majority of the player base is White, as expected within the hegemony. Within the exclusion of race representation in the media, the process of representation is not balanced.

Through hegemonic control, the representation of White existence is expected and defaulted, whereas other experiences are not. The control channel within capitalism then demonstrates the purpose of this media construction - even if the developers are well-intentioned: The possession of Black bodies by White minds. In particular, this is particular nefarious with the spectre of representing Black men as more muscular and more athletic (similar to how *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim represents Black men), where the particular inhabitation focuses on the ability of their bodies.

Through the process of customisation of the avatar, the players are the ability to move beyond simply the possession of the body. They seek to control and possession of Black body parts. There is no process or desire to inhabit the avatar's perspective - merely to play. The facade is desirable, as is the consequence of function. This ties strongly to the process of African slaves in America being excluded from access to technology facilitating agriculture and the education required for it [Sinclair] despite producing or implementing much of the knowledge of agriculture through the function of being the practitioners of farming. The perspective is critical here: the enslaved Black people in the Americas could not have access to the technology, education or knowledge available to their labour because they functioned

as the technology for this industry.

The over-representation of Black athletes in sports demonstrates the particular nefarious capitalist domination over the proletariat. This illustrates how this is reproduced within the channels of control of global capitalism. Within the virtual space, the player is deemed to be the one in control (through the control of the avatar) but the player is controlled to desire this specific control of the avatar through the limitations and features of the game.

David Leonard demonstrates that these processes within video games are methods of producing "common sense". As demonstrated, the act of play does not take place within a vacuum, but beyond the machine that produces, constructs and utilises the artefact, such as something like *NBA2K17*, there is the context in which this all takes place. This is within the realm of how any player engages with the game. He asserts:

"Video games, in disseminating stereotypes, in offering bodies and spaces of color as sites of play, and in affirming dominant ideas about poverty, unemployment, crime, and war, contribute to the consolidation of white supremacist power. Ultimately, the images and ideologies offered through games elicit individual consent for structural policies, thereby legitimising White hegemony." (Leonard, xxx)

bell hooks affirm this point more aggressively in her critique of the documentary film *Hoop Dreams* (James, 1994), which is constructed through published in her article Neo-Colonial Fantasies of Conquest: *Hoop Dreams* (1996), where she demonstrates further that these processes are fundamentally an allowance for the consumption of the other [ADD MORE FROM bell Hooks]. The process of White capitalism co-opting and representing

Black people (and in particular Black men) allows for curiosity and a "voyeuristic pleasure at being able to observe from a distance the lives… of black boys [sic]" (hooks, 3). This spectre should be prevalent amongst all players of the game.

Systemic racism functions as an artificial epistemic domain that *NBA2K17* and others in the series of its ilk are designed as the phantasms that produce or enforce its ideology. In neutrality, this is understandable, as these are how we process and understand the world around us and express these phenomena. [Fox Harrel, *Phantasmal Media*]. When representing a cultural phenomenon such as sports or familiar stories of overcoming conflict, artists and developers are speaking about universal aspects of the human experience. When attempting to present the other in media, the caveat is the process by which the other is excluded from society and often the medium in question.

Through colonialism, slavery and segregation, Black minds (particularly in North America and generally within the Empire) are excluded from the bulk of society along several dimensions. In the specific example of video games, particularly the example of *NBA2K17*, we are approached with aspects and consequences of conclusion that reveal not merely a process of preventing access but railroading individuals into specific roles. As already indicated, an almost dull observation at this point, the ways in which Black men are considered hyper-athletic, incredibly strong, violent and hypersexed (the obvious observation for Black women is exotification and hypersexualised objects), the ways in which the processes of slavery and the lack of access to Cognitive Capitalism through segregation has disproportionately pigeon-holed Black men into this career and acts of labour focused on the body - as such the over-representation of Black men in sports.

This segregation causes a split in the cultural epistemic model for what is experienced in the phantasms created in playing the game. Distinctly, the limitation of agency (as is natural in all games) is the extension for the players of the hegemonic class and heightened for the marginalised classes. White players can experience the MyCareer mode and even - though selecting Black players if they wish - League Modes and Online modes as extensions of their experience in the wild. The fantasy of being a basketball player in the NBA is also extended with the voyeuristic or fetishistic fantasy of inhabiting a Black body.

The alternative experience is not as saccharine. The perspective of the other is filtered through a different cultural epistemic domain or model. This filtration elicits different phantasms due to the historical systemic racism associated with their class. They are not shielded from the consequences of racism in their lives, as it either affects them directly or indirectly if they are particularly sheltered from the consequences.

It would be irresponsible that there is no joy gathered from Black players' engagement in the game - to suggest otherwise would be condescending. There is wonderful enjoyment in participating in the fantasy of being a Black basketball player, with many enjoyable and well-written Black characters for the player to engage with. The assertion is that once this engagement is contextualised, it reveals a pair of assumptions of the realm in which it was created:

That Black people are most useful through their bodies

That Black people require monumental talent and success to achieve celebration

Again, in some bureaucracies, this has legally been removed. However, the epistemic domain remains, which allows for this not to be viscerally authentic for localised experiences,

but for the prevalence of Black existential celebration to be focused on athletic ability (again, hearkening back to slave markets), which reveals the dehumanisation experienced in this process. Under capitalism, this dehumanisation exists for all subaltern classes - through their exploitation - but the particular interactive process within the virtual realm represents not only the events, images or description of these processes but also the system it is spawned from. This allows players to act out the system and validate the system through their actions, as the game is unlikely to seek to challenge the system it is spawned from. Although the agency can be defined as "meaningful action" where one can enjoy the consequences of those actions, it is ultimately artificial. This is the ludic trap of playing within a manufactured and designed system, which is that agents (in real-world systems) and players (in games) believe their actions to be valid through "choosing" to execute these actions.

There is an unavoidable paradox of the escapism of these fantasies. The desire to be successful or extraordinary requires the lack of access to that possibility. This reveals a possible explanation as to why Black players are over-represented in these games: A representation of the closest they can be exceptional without the trauma of their racial and marginalised reality. Similar to bell hooks' critique of *Hoop Dreams* and how *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is and continues to be popular with Black audiences: there is the undeniable truth that they seek this (in fact, any) expression of their existence, but when churned through a process of global capitalism and systemic racism the musk of the agenda are unavoidable. *Hoop Dreams, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and ultimately (but not necessarily completely directly) *NBA2K17* (and the series as a whole) are crafted within the White perspective. *Hoop Dreams* attempts to document the perspective of Black people, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* attempts to satirise it, and the NBA2K series attempts to envision it. The creation of these pieces always steeps itself within the fetishisation of the

Black experience with (sometimes more and sometimes less) the minimised Black existence. The artefacts themselves are creations and utilise fetishes of Blackness. They are distant observations and alienated perspectives on Blackness.

8. General Analysis

The methodology required unpacking the necessary phantasms for engaging with the various case studies. The strange possibility of what those phantasms could be would initially be varied, broad and precise - especially since we are taking a continuous from the beginning of the colonialism of Africa up to the present day. Regardless as implied, technology, culture, and society ultimately provide a feedback loop and cycle which perpetuates its own ideology. In particular, self-sustainment would be the main feature of the intersection of technology and any ideology, as there is nothing particularly special about systemic racism as a spectre that looms over society. The self-sustainment also causes various other perspectives and features to come through - notably, how subtle these ideologies become. Through the various media (print, film, visual art, songs and eventually video games, but many others as well), they are almost designed to maintain the principles of ideology. The used definition for "technology" has been:

"Techniques and tools used for changing culture and civilisation."

Regardless, there is a more valuable and specific definition that can be applied for the sake of understanding our current global mode of operations:

"Technology are the tools, infrastructure, techniques and belief systems utilised by capitalism for the purpose of optimising production of goods, generation of knowledge and extraction of resources and the means by ensuring its own existential proliferation and consolidation of power."

This definition is not always the case and not always applicable, but it provides a specific interpretation that can be utilised thoroughly within the presented context. As such, there is tension in the previous idea that I suggested. I do not disagree with the outcome of my conclusion nor my definition of technology - I would suggest this allows us to extend the definition of the ideology. I previously mentioned how it is clear that technology is a specific kind of ideology that is different from agriculture, language or nuclear power. It serves a need and function that is less tangible than food, communication or control of energy. Instead, ideology is a technology that serves the needs of guiding the highly complex machine that is a human civilisation.

In principle, to briefly discuss this in terms of universal perspectives, ideology is not a technology that can serve a single individual. It only can be utilised by any entire society. As demonstrated by the case studies, it is clear that there is no possible single human mind controlling or facilitating the production, distribution and consumption of the media - especially video games in the current industry. This process is a collective and unconscious action and decision by the entirety of society. This is why the requirement of discussing it in terms of phantasmal media was vital - as it is not deliberate or specific acts that are important but the self-perpetuating education that is received from the hegemony to the subaltern. It is essential to address that although there is a hegemonic class that contains people, the hegemony itself is as intangible as any ideology. In contrast, the subaltern or any marginal groups are certain people that proliferate and exist alongside our material context.

Previously, I mentioned the timeline of commercial video games beginning in 1972 with the release of Pong (Atari). The original artefact that could be considered a video game was called Tennis for Two and was developed by William Higinbotham at Brookhaven National Laboratory in 1958. The development arose from Higinbotham taking advantage of the built-in ballistic engine or calculator to simulate the trajectory of a ball. It is not by accident that the intention of the machine was to calculate the trajectory of ballistic missiles at the beginning of the Cold War. One could even suggest that the natural comparison that can be made between two countries at war is similar to the dynamics of tennis.

I bring forth this anecdote to suggest that because of the various ways in which any technology is produced, that mechanism or machine will then be used to create fictional media. There is an innate human tendency to increase the efficacy of communication and transportation. There is a clear desire to express our perspective. Unfortunately, this saccharine perspective is lost within the general application of the culture and society we live in.

Unfortunately, this perspective and development method has also become embedded within the development of many video games. Due to the nature of what is possible and the strengths of computers, there are more prominent approaches to the design and development of games than others - like with any medium. As computer science arises from the field of mathematics (fundamentally, computers are highly advanced logic calculators), they are predisposed to providing calculation and control and storage transformation of numbers. As implied by the example of Tennis for Two, there are particular actions that video games are

predisposed to performing. In the case of ballistic calculations, the main fields of mathematics that are required linear algebra and the field of physics that is required is Newtonian mechanics.

This feels natural, as in any creative medium. Space and how agents move through space is quite essential. Unlike other media, though, there is a difference between linear algebra and text, shots, strokes or notes being your monadic element. Even compared to their analogue counterparts, video games are facilitated by the change of numbers, as opposed to the action.

As the development of games improves (advancement of pixel arrays and many breakthroughs of computer graphics, physics simulation, computer storage, the introduction of the Internet and networks and the like), it is not difficult to appreciate the ways in which game developers were indeed creative. However, there is a fundamental change from the limitation indicated by *Tennis for Two*, where all the agents in the space have their instantaneous motion controlled through linear algebra and Newtonian mechanics.

This analogy indicates how basic and fundamental components cannot be avoided and cannot be trivially disinherited (decolonised?) no matter how advanced the surrounding technology has become. Due to the society in which video games (and many other media) have developed, they cannot escape the ideologies that created them. I have attempted to avoid other hateful and toxic ideologies in this paper, but it is, truthfully, a faulty exercise.

The consequence of all other ideologies, such as misogyny, xenophobia, antisemitism and orientalism (and many more), are all embedded in the production of technology and media. Through the production and development of these tools and techniques, there has clearly been a heartfelt attempt to undo these mistakes and consequences. However, ultimately ideologies of hate and fear are tools of capitalism to control the desires and intentions of the people that exist within the system.

Disregarding the approach is an existential decision, particularly under a system such as capitalism. People need each other to survive, and our society has achieved impressive feats in the aspects of providing food, water, sanitation, shelter, archiving of identity, access to education and - as stipulated to being two of the main driving forces of technology - global transportation and communication. These systems and labour are facilitated through the presence of people.

Technology has been incredibly effective in ensuring the global assurance of life as well as access to the planet. To briefly move into idealist territory, people desire connection with each other and the opportunity to express themselves to each other. The consequence of a globally connected world is the proliferation of global capitalism and the fortification of Empire. The cost of global communication and expression is accepting the infrastructure of Empire as the bedrock by which to transmit that expression. Empire does not have to accept this cost; it already owns the means of production. Empire owns and facilitates, manipulates and controls the ideology that travels through various channels of information.

“There is no ethical consumption under capitalism” is a cliche critique of the economic system, but I must expand this idea in a slightly obvious way:

“The is no ethical consumption or creation under capitalism”.

I have previously mentioned that the development of technology is in a cycle between changing society and then society changing or developing the technology further in response. There are definitely ways for people to define the technology at hand - it is essential to appreciate that capitalists are not the only people who define the technology. In limited cases, the proletariat can also define what technology means to them and how it changes them. Regardless, as already demonstrated or stated many times in this paper, these localised anomalies do not change the ultimate momentum of hegemony.

To reiterate how this process has been pervasive, I would like to restate how even when the myths of liberty, fairness and integrity prevail within the West, the consequences of access and agency among the marginalised still continue. The Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment network has constructed particular processes and algorithms for the sake of highlighting the attention to the successes and perspectives of the Empire and minimising its continued neo-colonialism and exploitation of the planet.

Despite combat and war being incredibly popular - three of the five games of 2021 were games focused on military combat (

1. Call of Duty: Vanguard,
2. Call of Duty: Black Ops: Cold War, and

3. Battlefield 2042 (Entertainment Software Association, 2022))

I hoped to avoid the theme and discussion of war within this paper to maintain focus on the specific discussion of race, racism and technology.

Unfortunately, in the discussion of ideology, technology and capitalism, there is no escaping one of the oldest techniques of colonialism and capitalism: genocide and occupation. In the context of video games, I mentioned how linear algebra and Newtonian mechanics are some of the monads of interaction available within video games. I also described how the development of *Tennis for Two* arose out of the software used to calculate ballistic missile trajectories. So it is no surprise that the most successful games are about the domination of other nations and the process of achieving that through war. In particular - through the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment network, many of the games (much like the film industry) will receive funding from the United States of America Department of Defense to produce the game with the caveat that they are able to veto any particular themes or moments within the product if it is counter to their (the Department of Defense's) agenda (Lange, 2018).

This aggression and disdain for others from the hegemonic capitalist class makes the analysis of the games containing Black people less surprising. Both *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and the Redguard in *The Elder Scrolls* series stand out as an example of the White creators' mockery and ignorance of the Black existence. There is no desire to understand the perspective and experiences of Black people, nor is there a desire or perceived requirement to craft a meaningful representation of Black people. Black people only function and exist as props within the existence of these creators' lives to be an inspiration for their artistic

expression. As demonstrated by bell hooks in her critique of *Hoop Dreams*, Black people, communities, and bodies served "voyeuristic pleasure" for the creators of these games.

How these games approach their creative process are different - they do not appear to be malicious and the individual human level. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, in particular, is often considered celebratory of Black existence, including many voice actors and representation of famous personalities within Black American culture. It is unlikely to have any malicious intent as the ideology that controls - systemic racism - is not meant to be noticed by uncritical observers. Instead, the process is almost automated: nothing else can be done.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas provides satire and mockery of the types of character, behaviour and circumstance expected to exist within communities run by organised crime. The Black people in this space are not only unethical violent, and aggressive criminals but also cannon fodder for the player to kill within the games' system. The progression through the game's system does not allow for any discussion or analysis, or understanding by either the developer or the consumer in understanding or engaging with the phenomenon of these environments existing at all. It is accepted as an inevitable fact. In particular, through the system and interaction design of the game, the developer and designer do not wish for the consumer to engage beyond the superficial representation.

I want to briefly be precise on the ways that *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* engages

in producing these phantasms to demonstrate the pervasiveness of their construction, including in *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim and *NBA2K17*. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* places the mind and the actions of the player within the fictional character of Carl "CJ" Johnson. The player is given the opportunity to inherit the character's history, their relationships, and their ambition. In the context of how these media are constructed, there are inspirations and analyses that the developers would like to express.

Within the case of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, the entry is produced within the lineage of the work of Rockstar Games, with the Grand Theft Auto series being among their most prominent properties. The other major franchise they have produced is the Red Dead series which places the player in the context of a cowboy outlaw to achieve the character's goals. A particular circumstance and philosophy are presented to the player, which is being driven by the developers: A neo-liberal perspective on achieving strength to minimise the obstacles separating an individual from their desires. These obstacles would be about minimising any authority's power to prevent that individual from achieving their desires. In the case of Grand Theft Auto and the other games in the Rockstar Games catalogue, this is often a deliberate and non-neutral choice by the player.

I demonstrate this to return to the details of capitalism and profiteering present in how these games are developed and marketed. The market for these games is present, but there are also constructed through the ideology of Empire - even the citizens of Empire believe that these are valid philosophies to steer one's life. Even though they might act on it to different extents, the fantasy still exists. Rockstar's games are present and purposeful in illustrating a

possible way of life that exists as fact: the criminal or unethical exploitation of systems and people for the advancement of one's own power and wealth.

The observation and analysis of such a philosophy, system or consequence is banal -Marx published Das Kapital in 1867, 150 years ago - but is obviously quite pervasive. Fukuyama, although a little prematurely, considered the collapse of the Soviet Union to be "The End of History" in 1989. The Rockstar Games developers craft these ideas through inspiration from the London gangs as well as Italian Mafia mobs in America and eventually apply the same principles to Black American gangs in Los Angeles (fictionally referred to as Los Santos). There are various circumstances for individuals to choose to procure such a life. However, the reasonings and procedures arise from constructing ghettos through segregating Black people within these American cities. This demonstrates the enforcement of ideology, a colonisation of the mind performed by many different race oppressors (Biko, 1977). Rockstar Games (like many of its inspirations) inherits and perpetuates this legacy by representing these actions and systems through *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The player can enact this fantasy by performing these actions through CJ.

CJ is represented (and the men in his community) are represented as inevitable gang members. He returns to Los Santos after briefly exiting the Grove Street Families gang. He returns because his mother is killed in a drive-by shooting due to gang warfare. The plot of the game revolves around CJ - again, the avatar of the player - gaining power through gang warfare across San Andreas and other cities (primarily Los Santos, San Fierro, Las Venturas and briefly in Liberty City - Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas and New York,

respectively). The mechanical and systemic options for playing this out include the murder of primarily many other Black gang members and thievery (of course, including grand theft auto). Minor personal conflict is introduced through CJ finding a girlfriend with rival Hispanic gangs, and CJ achieves his success through alliances with Chinese gangs (the Triad) and possibly the CIA or FBI (the game is not explicit, but refers to the agency as "The Truth").

The game presents and allows players to execute these ideas as contextual gospel within the artefact. Despite presenting the players with what the developers consider an "open world," there is none. There is only one way for CJ and the player to achieve their goals and "correct" the murder of his mother to ensure the "safety" of his community: gang violence and the consolidation of power. This role is imposed upon CJ and his community through the construction of the piece by the developers. This is also a reiteration of what is imposed upon this community by Empire. It represents an opposition to the oppressor, but it is an opposition where the tools for rebellion are built by Empire and then sold to the subaltern. The representation is packaged, distributed, sold to audiences, and consumed on consoles produced by Sony Interactive Entertainment and Xbox Game Studios.

CJ himself - the developers' construction of a positive character - is seen by the developers as a powerful and compelling character framed positively. This is achieved through constructing a Black man that relies on his aggression, violence and dominance of other non-playable characters. The villains achieve their power through deception and intrigue. CJ is instructing the world around him what is correct within the world through his

domination - and is done so through the violence he inflicts upon the world around him. This is for the pleasure of the consumer. A powerful Black man must demonstrate physical dominance and violence and be celebrated for it. Uncreatively, the developers reconstruct the myth of the Noble Savage.

The satire of the representation proceeds to get pettier, with drug addicts, sex workers, and hip-hop artists mocked throughout the game as a part of the fabric of the community. Many are dehumanised for their profession, circumstance or behaviour without explaining the events or decisions that lead to these outcomes. One of the recurring characters within the game is Jeffrey Cross (OG Loc), who is presented as an untalented, delusional and petty criminal. He is mocked for his homosexuality whilst in prison is a plot point regarding one of the missions in the game. His character is further demonstrated as weak, as his decision to become a rapper is set up to be a result of him being unable to contribute to the Grove Street Family gangs that CJ is a member of. There are moments of humane and emotionally resonant writing and construction within the writing and creative development of the game. However, characters such as OG Loc clearly demonstrate that there is little to no respect for the people that the developers are representing within the piece.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas provides an apparent intersection and example regarding demonstrating the intersection due to its subject matter and age. This extends similarly into how *The Elder Scrolls* series illustrates their version of Black people within their games up to the systemic presentation of the Redguard. Within the writing of the Redguard, there is emphasis pointed on their heritage as incredibly powerful but restrained

colonisers within the fictional continent of Tamriel. Systemically, they are designed to be athletic and powerful warriors without the capacity (in the parlance of the system, without the "intelligence") to wield magic. In the lore of the world, their culture disavows magic due to their religious beliefs, which crafts and enhances the phantasm of the Redguard being desert-fairing people from another continent across the sea. The Redgaurd are clearly inspired by the Moors and, more loosely, the Black Panther Party. The difference between these inspirations and the representations is the ways in which colonialism is interpreted.

There is historical revisionism indicated in the way the Redguard are perceived and executed, especially with the Black Panther Party bent: the Redguard are presented as Black people who performed colonialism in the same way real White nations did. For clarity, it is crucial to indicate that the construction of differences between Black and White people arises from colonialism, different from how the people of North Africa and Southern Europe interacted. Even if other nations of Tamriel are perceived with hostility, there is less expectation of transforming humans into a commodity or further desire for dominance within their colonialism. The developers themselves consider the colonialism achieved by the Redguard to be positive and a demonstration of strength. They consider the Redguard a proud civilised society, a proud representation of Black people. This is a desire by the developers to indicate and present colonialism as an inevitable requirement of civilisation, as if colonial Europe had no choice but to dominate, exploit and colonise these people. From the Roman conquest to the rape of Africa, this is an expected, but necessary consequence of a powerful civilisation is the myth they have come to accept.

The developers then impose their perception onto their perception of Black people through two approaches:

- What they are - the ontological argument
- And what they could do to be as great of a race as White people - the teleological argument of what they should or could be striving toward

The developer, in effect, facilitates and creates a space for themselves and the player to create this fictionalised group of Black people - their only representation of Black people - as dolls or puppets for imposing White hegemonic ideology upon them. There is no assertion that this is not applied to other races in the game. However, those races are either represented as White already (and of course, their revisionism becomes a problematic statement within the game as it supposes Whiteness to be long lasting myth throughout history) or not human and are instead Orcs, anthropomorphised lizards (Argonians), anthropomorphised cats (Khajits) and Elves (High Elves, Dark Elves, Wood Elves)

This phenomenon reveals how *The Elder Scrolls* forms part of the apparatus of systemic racism as a tool of Empire and global capitalism. The Redguards' colonialism demonstrates the way colonialism is seen as an unfortunate but good phenomenon instead of demonstrating that its execution was brutal or dehumanising as the process factually was and continues to be through imperialism. *The Elder Scrolls* is part of a greater fabric of media that reveals the attempt to become the victor that writes the history.

The celebratory aspect not only attempts to diminish the acts of Whiteness and colonialism but is used as a critique on the perceived failings and struggles of the Black community, suggesting that the Black countries of Africa and the Black populations in the diaspora simply need to be like White people. The West and - through extension - White people have solved the problems of thriving in the world, and Black people simply need to mimic that and learn from their approach. The absurdity of this perception is not conscious through any belief system. However, it is observable through the myths and phantasm illustrated, constructed and expressed in the media produced within the system. The exploitation of resources and the desire for competition with others is expressed in the development of the ludic systems that represent these games.

As expressed earlier, the celebration of war is typical in games, but so are economic systems and resource management games, which are often about accumulating wealth and exploiting resources. The media represents the desires of the system it resides in, and hegemony desires homogeneity of thought through the marginalisation of the subaltern. As such, the representation of the community that CJ resides in within *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and the construction of the Redguard illustrate that marginalised communities can achieve success through emulating the perceived procedures of White people as well as giving media authority on what Black people are. The invention of race through colonialism indicates the historical precedence for this: manufacturing the myth of Black people, so they can all be labelled as inferior for the benefit of perpetuating slavery, oppression and exploitation.

Exposing how people should behave is mostly a neutral idea within society. It is an obvious consequence of the social contract, as suggested by Rosseau in 1762 in his book by the same name. As a society, we teach our citizens what is expected through what we reward and punish. Regardless, there are apparent contradictions that arise when the reasons behind those expectations are rhetorically stated to be around communal justice, dignity or freedom when it is clear that those ideas are only for a subset of the community.

The illustration of teaching consumers how Black people should behave is felt strongly in the *NBA2K17*, which presents an interesting foil when placed in the canon alongside *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. In this case, instead of constructing a Black character for fulfilling an anarcho-capitalist dream, it is about how one should behave well to better one's station.

Behaviour is one of the significant consequences of facilitating player action with games. The principle consequence of any system production of some outcome, and for an individual agent, is about constructing a set of expectations. This process is an education of the environment that the agent is placed in but also a means of control. For a comprehensive definition, I would like to take from Talcott Parsons in *The Social System*:

"It is a fundamental property of action thus defined that it does not consist only of ad hoc "responses" to particular situational "stimuli" but that the actor develops a system of "expectations" relative to the various objects of the situation. These may be structured only

relative to his own need-dispositions and the probabilities of gratification or deprivation contingent on the various alternatives of action which he may undertake. But in the case of interaction with social objects, a further dimension is added. Part of ego's expectation, in many cases the most crucial part, consists in the probable reaction of alter to ego's possible action, a reaction which comes to be anticipated in advance and thus to affect ego's own choices." (Parsons, 2)

Any intelligent agent within a system has to construct a mental model of what is being perceived and learns the consequences of their's and others' actions. They learn what is allowed and disallowed, and at a more granular scale, what is the output of engaging with the process. Activating a game is a natural and accepted process and a significant component of the engagement. In short, this is the game design of the experience.

Players are provided with a series of inputs that can be interpreted by the machine - pushing or holding buttons, swipes on a screen, talking into a microphone and so on. There are creative ways to construct this control scheme, but only valid input is processed by the system. Any input not mapped to be processed by the system does not result in any systemic response. Through this, the player can learn what they are supposed to do to drive a combination of their favourable outcome and the developers' intention.

Any rebellion to this format is considered anathema. The "conception of deviance as a disturbance of the equilibrium of the interactive system" (Parsons, 1991, p. 170) and

especially in manufactured smaller systems, the consequence the not progress. Within games, any consumer is effectively playing the game incorrectly. Within society, the individual becomes a pariah and is removed or excluded from participating within the system. The system desperately is hoping to maintain its intent and its purpose. The personification is provided to quickly illustrate how intelligent agents are there to uphold and contribute to the processes of the system that they reside in. The system - due to the presence of multiple intelligent agents existing within it - is a super-intelligence. The “super” suffix here refers to a collection of inter-operating intelligences.

This feedback that the system provides an agent is the process that occurs when demonstrating and discussing developer intent. To reiterate, it tells an agent “what they are” and “what they should be”. For simplicity and specificity, I will refer to these as the “racist ontological assertion” and the “hegemonic teleological expectation” This process is neutral in principle. However, in the application of discussing racism and capitalism, the mechanisms become clear to be a self-perpetuating tool of oppression and exploitation.

To demonstrate this within the realm of the selected case studies, I want to place them within convenient but artificial case studies.

The representation of the Redguard in *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim (primarily) demonstrates a sub-system (one component of the greater system of Empire) that denotes what Black people are. Despite the fictional setting, it operates to show the relationship between Black and White people. *NBA2K17* provides an indication of what Black people

could be. It informs and educates what is necessary for success and obtaining dignity within society. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* demonstrates components of both of these ideas more verbosely by indicating and suggesting the confines of the system one is allowed to exist in and how to take advantage of it.

All three demonstrate both categories. However, the selection of the categories illustrates the strongest intent of developers and representation of the system they exist in and perpetuating. The following application will draw from both - again, arbitrary and artificial - categories in discussing the case studies, but primarily within their specific categories to illustrate the point.

To demonstrate both ideas, first, I will reiterate some of the principles that apply to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* more ludicly within this context whilst still drawing on the ideas of representation. To briefly place representation within the framework of the system, there is a zeroth action that is possible and required for engagement; this is sensing (seeing, hearing, feeling and so on), with the expectation of vision being the most common component.

Within the game's system, several actions are available to the player. These are context-driven, as the different moments, scenes, or chapters have different goals within the development of the experience. In principle, as indicated by the development of Tennis for Two, the primary action in all games is regarding movement.

This process can be as simple as numbers going up. However, it is often positional, either through agents moving through a simulated space or more abstract as with more narrative-driven interactive stories such as choose-your-own-adventure books or table-top role-playing games. Within choose-your-own-adventure games, the movement is closer to a discussion of progress through various paths (again, the spatial metaphor is unavoidable) within the book, driven by the decisions of the reader and facilitated by the writers and designers. Within table-top role-playing games, the progress is presented two-folded. Systemic and narrative progress exist within the various permutations of these games. The narrative progress is fairly straightforward, where it is presented as the advancement of the characters through the generated plot. The systemic progress is catered directly to advancing the complexity and ability of the characters that the players inhabit.

Within the video games, both of these ideas are presented, but the more direct reference to movement is represented through the virtual simulation of an agent within the world. The player is presented with a city, a continent or a basketball court and their avatar - a controlled actor within the space - moves based on the input provided by the player.

The details and purpose of this are the first initial indicator of how the system is expecting the player to engage with the space. The actor’s movement is defined through several ideas. Their speed; any adjustment to speed; whether or not they can jump, and so on.

In the simulated world of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (and this will be applied in different ways to the other case studies), CJ is able to walk, and then he is able to run. This interaction provides basic navigation of the space (forward, back, left and right). Then CJ is able to traverse the world faster with the introduction of the bicycle and then, as is the name of the series, drives a car. These are in relationship to each other they indicate the phantasm of how and when we traverse spaces. It indicates the vastness of the city and the opportunity and ability to travel it.

Over the course of the introduction to the game - or the tutorial - the player is taught to steal vehicles (including planes), climb, spray paint, shoot, customise themselves by getting a haircut, collect items (primarily different guns and other weapons), talk to other characters (either for the activation of a cut scene or gathering information) even go on dates with women. Their micro-contextual actions are only relevant at specific moments in the game - such as dancing - are mini-games or sub-games within the greater system.

This is extended in the setting for how these actions are then expected to be utilised by the system. It provides inevitable consequences for executing them at different points within the system. Any form of locomotion or transport allows for the primary activation of the plot. CJ has to find other agents or characters within the space to activate moments in the story or missions for execution. He follows the orders provided by the system by moving around the world and proceeds to steal, rob, murder or speak to another agent, or perform one of the sub-games.

CJ sometimes talks to people to alleviate a situation, but this is presented as an invocation of the system. The operation of the player seeking to talk to an agent and CJ talking is merely a consequence of the plot, not an action or mechanic demonstrated by the player. The other agents within the world are broadly split into allies, enemies and neutral parties. Allies will assist the player either systemically or narratively, whereas enemies are obstacles constructed to retard the player's progress through the system. Often, the player has to eliminate these obstacles by instructing CJ to kill them. The player then controls CJ to return to safety by driving away.

Other general tasks the player is expected to execute are associated with the control of territory. CJ eliminates and dominates other gangs through the consequences of how the system is reading and processing the player's actions within the game. These are systemic consequences of the game with the designers eventually deciding when the game system should terminate based on narrative construction.

The numeric consequences of the game leave a trail of dead bodies in CJ's wake, with multiple tens of thousands of agents "wasted" - the game's term for killed - and millions of dollars stolen. This is obviously not particularly unique for action games (or even action stories), but - as mentioned before - it reveals how nothing else can be done. The system is not concerned with any other approach possible in achieving the narrative setup of CJ's goals. There is no need for the game to be anything else, of course. However, the game manifesting as it does demonstrates the spiritual perspective of what the system is saying a particular personality or agent should do. The pieces of media - whether these are the

intention of the designers or not - educate the audience and the consumer on what they should do when engaging with their own systems and interactions. I am not asserting the dated idea that video games cause real-life violence. However, I am asserting that video games evoke archetypal systems and denote an opinion on engaging with them. Games - like with all media - actually experience the reverse process: they mirror the violence within the natural world and construct any opinion through their existence.

System presentation can be difficult to fathom, and as such, the game utilises shorthand through character, dialogue and visual presentation to emphasise the opinions of the system. The act of seeing and the act of hearing is a patina used to evoke the emotional connection to the numeric system that lies underneath. The player, through cut scenes and moments of dialogue within interactive moments, is then able to access the process that lies underneath. I would suggest this is done subconsciously but is also done viscerally. The constructed phantasms are built and consumed automatically at first, and only afterwards is a conscious decision made to either inhabit the ideas in behaviour or unpacked for critique.

Within *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, the Black existence - individual and communal - is presented with the racist ontological assertion through the setup for who CJ is and how the player is initially presented with interacting with the world. This is done through the educational component of the tutorial as well as the people that the player is virtually surrounded by in the game. Their attitude, behaviour and opinions are painted as a genuine part of the community and social landscape. The available actions define and reinforce these ideas, and the player is rewarded for executing these actions effectively. The player is

punished through the avatar dying in the world or the system inelegantly informing the player of their deviant behaviour.

This basis is then used to inform the player what ambition, attitude or action is necessary for overcoming their obstacles. The game crafts a fantasy but there is implicit (at least partially) acceptance of the opinions of the game through the execution. This hegemonic teleological expectation demonstrates the idea of utilising violence, aggression and corruption to achieve success. Within the real world, there is no ethical (or, at least, no law-abiding) process to facilitate this. However, a complete acceptance of this attitude can inform the attitudes of the consequences of successful Black people (Hip-hop artists, athletes and others) whilst also the implicit message of the medium: subservience to White capitalist hegemony.

To further expand on this point, I would like to explicitly indicate the similarity as represented in *NBA2K17*'s "MyCareer" mode. There is some credence to the developer's attempts to provide a meaningful and respectful representation of Blackness within the piece. Not only utilising many Black performers and writers but also - as already stated - the use of talented Black directors in the previous installation of *NBA2K16* with Spike Lee. The individual developers clearly produced the piece with intent - but due to the subject matter at hand, there is no escaping the consequences of providing fantasy within reality.

The game indicates the process for achieving success and recognition of players' mastery of craft (or systemic literacy) within the space. The demonstration of a good quality

of life is presented through moving and acting as an autonomous agent through the process within the watchful eye and system. Progress and performance are mapped and archived, and produced. The game - as the official product of the National Basketball Association of the United States of America - attempts to map the simulation of these processes and actions as favourably as possible based on the self-perception of the organisation and its contribution to society. This is the tension that exists in any part of the process - the delineation of power and capitalism through the system.

The presentation of sports as an avenue for providing an opportunity for members of the Black American community to uplift themselves. Of course, as with many of the tools of capitalism, this is not incorrect, nor is it an inherently devious suggestion. Sports, as with many activities for the youth allow for expression, creativity, education and socialisation, but those processes are not neutral as they exist within the system that allows for their presence.

Within the tapestry of systemic racism, as propagated by global capitalism, sports take on the form of placating Black and other marginalised communities in the process of removing them from Cognitive Capitalism. As stated in *Games of Empire*, "Cognitive capitalism is this situation where workers' minds become the 'machine' of production, generating profit for owners who have purchased, with a wage, its thinking power." (Dyer-Witherford & De Peuter, 2009, p. 37). There is an attempt to render these bodies to non-thinking positions, much like as stated by Laura Ingraham regarding Lebron James when she stated he should merely "shut up and dribble" when referring to James discussing politics in an interview (Sullivan, 2018). There is no suggestion that athletes are not demonstrating

high levels of intelligence when they perform, nor that Black people or the subaltern do not make up vast swathes of the Cognitive Capitalist labour force - as already indicated by the developers who contributed to this game - it is about the consequence of the message produced.

The MyCareer mode leads the player through crafting and customising their personalised character. It leads them through the bulk of playing a systemic design dramatisation of playing several basketball games. The game then informs the player of their performance and their consequences, providing opportunities, rewards and punishments for their actions. This is interspersed with narrative dramatisation - cut scenes again - providing an application of the game's beliefs to indicate to the player how they should perceive and receive the outcome. It is an exemplification of what opinions the player should have of themselves as well as on the experience, performance and behaviour of real-life athletes.

The over-representation of Black athletes in basketball extends into an expectation and opinion of the general Black community. As demonstrated by the Ingraham quote, there is an expectation of Black people to practice subservience to White hegemony. These moments indicate how the greater socio-political system seeks to reset this anomaly and return to equilibrium. The Black body is expected to expend physical and - when necessary - aggressive labour for the sake of entertaining the White viewer and the Black student.

These athletes obviously should be celebrated, and there is no suggestion for these

artefacts of the system not to exist, whether through the investment of sport or the representation through video games. They are an excellent demonstration of human labour, creativity, talent and intelligence. There is the unfortunate consequence of how the production cycle in which they are constructed allows the principles of Empire to move through these channels. In idealist isolation, they have the potential to purely provide a means of expressing a positive representation of Black existence.

With the expectation of what Black people should do, there is a demonstration of what they currently are. These two ideas - the racist ontological assertion and the hegemonic teleological expectation - are linked as they are developed as twin phenomena but are wielded differently. One provides a carrot, whilst the other provides a stick. To illustrate the point further, I want to indicate how these ideas manifest in *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim concerning the Redguard race.

The interaction of the assertion and the expectation exist more cyclically as opposed to the linear way it is represented within *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* or *NBA2K17*. Although all games experience the dressing of narrative construction on top of systemic construction, with the design of *The Elder Scrolls* V: Skyrim, this process has a slightly looser expression. Regarding the construction of the Redguards, the developers are not as focused on their representation of Black existence. Their presence serves to colour the tapestry of the history and social dynamics of the game.

Through system design inherited from table-top role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons and the fantasy setting, the Redguard are not merely a nation of people different from the other humans with their own culture, language and heritage. They are deeply genetically different. This extremeness of these differences arises from the need to represent them differently within the system itself, allowing for a variety of player engagement when selecting the race they would wish to play. Through the process of balancing the system for maximum alignment with the intended game design, these races have various advantages and disadvantages for different expected play styles within the game.

The Redguard are othered from the White humans through this phenomenon, which is emphasised within the lore itself. Much like how Blackness is represented in the two previous examples, the Redguard are systemically set up to demonstrate speed, strength and lack of intelligence. As mentioned in the chapter on the Redguard, the ludic genre of the games in *The Elder Scrolls* series is a role-playing game with a specific focus on presenting the player with systemic freedom for expression. Each player character is provided with the option of selecting classes and races, which then contribute to the way their attributes are adjusted. The eight attributes are:

- Strength
- Intelligence
- Willpower
- Endurance
- Speed

- Agility
- Personality
- Luck

The Redguards' highest attributes are Strength and Endurance, with their lowest attributes being Intelligence and Willpower. The latter two attributes are both associated with magic, and in previous iterations of *The Elder Scrolls* series, the Redgaurd were limited in their ability to perform any magic. They are further provided with an ability which allows for faster regeneration of stamina.

The series (as with many other role-playing games, although many often only have one human race) is choosing to naturally assert the ideas of race essentialism within their system design. This is being pulled from the fantasy heritage that the game attempts to evoke but there are now neutral processes in representation. Despite the designer's intentions for constructing a world that allows for player expression, the othering of the Black representation is felt deeply within the system and the lore.

This is how the ontological racist assertion arises within the depiction of the Redguard. As previously mentioned there are several variants of White humans and Elves within the game, but there is the only way to be a Black person within the world of the continent of Tamriel. The main feature of the Redguard as an audience member is to be violent, aggressive, brutal and then to run far and fast. The game believes that this is what

Black people do, as there is no demonstration or comparison of any other type of Black person within the game.

When placed together with how the game expresses its hegemonic teleological expectation of Black people it moves into the more nefarious territory. The Redguard are also placed as the colonisers and conquerors of the region of Hammerfell of the Tamriel continent. They are given the recent history and heritage of White people within the fantasy setting. The ontological racist assertion is expanded to suggest a position of imposing the idea on to Black people - reminding them of their power - and then, they too can be like the White man. The suggestion that the game or the developers must talk to a Black audience is to personify the process. The message is intended for other White minds that feel neutrally or already implicitly agree with the message. In particular, a message of colonial inevitability and the superiority of White identity. I do not suggest that the audience is consciously and expressly racist. Through this process of enacting the system, they accept this through the act of choosing to play.

These particular constructions and examples through all three games are sometimes subtle and sometimes theatrical and complicated in their construction. The somewhat surprising conclusion is that the opinion and assumption made by hegemony is always uncreatively the same edict: Black people are aggressive and intellectually inferior to White people. What is impressive is the varied and creative ways that this idea becomes expressed along various channels, modes and media. History and the technology that allows for the advancement of human civilisation is stained with exploitation through construction and application of control. This has bred a spectre and many phantasms that plague all media and

all technology, with video games having become a fascinating breeding ground for sparking the phantasms about progress and race under the Empire.

9. Conclusion

The union of systemic racism and technology is a pervasive method in understanding the development of both phenomena. This principle needs to be extended further to include the whole gamut of human social constructs. As a collection of integrated tools and techniques, technology similarly has its phantasms that need to be extended and unpacked within the broader cultural epistemic domain. It is expressed within its assumptions and is sometimes materially misrepresented when contextualised within human history. As such, this sometimes intangible concept is assigned a series of myths and reverences. Tools, machinery and techniques are placed within the category of technology, but this categorisation can also attempt to isolate it from the greater web of human existence. This isolation is the phantasm through placing it within this category but serves to assist the greater understanding of the concept we are discussing when the term is presented.

When placed within the context of Empire and global capitalism, the procedures become much more transparent regarding how it functions alongside and through human operations. I suggested an adjustment and extension to the definition of technology that allows for a greater understanding of technology as the collection of modus operandi of how capitalism operates and proliferates itself. The redefinition allows for more direct access into the ways systemic racism forms part of the driving factor in how media is produced and how industries are constructed.

European expansion beginning in the 15th century led to the brutality of colonialism and spurred their prevailing dominant ideology of mercantilism, which is considered the

precursor to capitalism. European progress and technological acceleration happen in a context and alongside colonialism and capitalism. Global capitalism and Empire cannot escape their oppressive past and thus continue to struggle with the consequences today. There is no possible other consequence that the artefacts that surround us in our world are not touched by these phenomena. Furthermore, the capitalistic class and White hegemonic order systemically seek to exclude the subaltern from these structures to maintain their power and existence.

The extraction of resources and food production has been a significant component in the primary control structure within capitalism. Slavery has been (and continues to be) one of the driving mechanisms of optimising profit production within capitalist pipelines. These people - often Black people - are alienated and excluded from the output of their labour, despite being fundamental to it. Under capitalism, the enslaved people themselves are a technological process in the flow of the pipeline. Enslaved people on plantations in the Americas were legally forbidden from receiving an education despite a significant part of the process. Bruce Sinclair indicated in “Integrating the Histories of Race and Technology” (2004) the ways in which many industries in the United States of America are through the labour of slavery. This aspect is prominent. The slightly more subtle consequence is how the technology is driven by Black labour.

Through minimised infrastructure across marginalised communities or the entirety of the Global South, we also experience how Cognitive capitalism, as described in *Games of Empire* (de Peuter & Greig, 2009), builds off the work of labourers’ minds. These marginalised groups are represented at the forefront of technological production through lack of education, access to resources, and access to the technological progress of capitalism seeks

to stratify the working class (now working classes) and inherit its colonial attitudes colonialism.

The exclusion of Black labour from this Cognitive capitalism (through education, access to technology and decision-making positions within the corporations themselves) is felt in apparent ways. Particularly within video games, this is through the minimised effectiveness of graphical rendering within the games. This is an inherited process from the work photography technology when Kodak had yet to test the feasibility of their cameras on darker-skinned people. This was the function of the technology itself and the means by which photographers could test their colour balances. The photographers would use reference shots known as Shirley cards, featuring a White woman in colourful clothing. Kodak was eventually able to correct this through the use of adding more colour processing units to their cameras. Simple having Black people on the engineering team could have solved this process.

Similarly, the same phenomena existed in video games and graphical rendering. Despite the impressive development of digital graphical rendering technologies, video game developers still struggled to render Black models as well as White models in their games. This lighting issue is seen particularly within *The Elder Scrolls* series and has produced particularly errant artefacts within the rendering. These include anomalies such as skin rendering of Black people becoming shinier under brighter light and significantly harder to perceive under darker conditions. The underlying technology can completely process this information correctly and accurately, but game development requires high levels of optimisation. As such, much of the engineering process in developing games requires removing ideal processing techniques for the sake of performance in the machinery.

Regardless, engineers who do not have the capacity to test the presence of Black models within their rendering engines lead to a perpetuation of what is expected to and able to exist within this world. Through Cognitive capitalism, these heuristics are passed down as younger developers enter the workforce and become more ingrained in the development process.

The way capitalism activates this approach is through the autonomous consolidation of power. The structures and markets are organised to perpetuate these ideas. One of the main processes of achieving this is through the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment network, where the ideas of where Empire, in short, feeds propaganda to the masses through the media to argue for its continued existence. This is structurally and tangibly set up in the ways that the United States of America's military has provided funding to the company that produces one of the largest game franchises in the world - Call of Duty, produced and manufactured by Activision-Blizzard. Yet, also through the perpetuation of media. Young media producers are influenced by the tapestry of media from the past and then reproduce the phantasms expressed in these media. Of course, it is not only influence from other media that is presented through the phantasm but also the world around them, but influenced through the self-perpetuating ideas of Empire.

The development of the Internet, computers, digital interactive media and video games led to the widespread opportunity for people to express and present themselves in many different ways. With the introduction of the MUDs and MOOs (Multi-User Dungeons and Multi-User Dungeon Object Orientated), people were provided with the opportunity to be different versions of themselves or different people entirely through the performance within the space. In these spaces, the principles of masculine White hegemony creep in because of perceived or assumed segregation. Within these spaces, communities assume a default

identity of masculine Whiteness among their members. Those who do identify with the hegemony roleplay as other races and identities take on racist stereotypical depictions as fed to them by the media. Nakamura illustrates the consequences within the constructed communities. Thomas extends this further into how these communities simulate processes of Empire with the example of how the concept of colonial territory was a principle enforced within the online game *Diablo II* (also produced by Blizzard Entertainment before merging with Activision), where players in the West violently and aggressively attempted to prevent Korean players from "invading" the servers they believed belonged only to them.

Leonard indicates the ways in which the process is also manufactured and distributed through designed media such as video games by expanding on the idea of "High-tech Blackface" or "Digital Minstrelsy". Leonard posits that there is pleasure in viewing and presenting the subaltern or the other. Further evaluation of this phenomenon is that there is pleasure in the other existing and enjoyment in enacting the systems for controlling their behaviour. With High-tech Blackface, Leonard illustrates how the enjoyment of what is observed when the Black body is viewed by hegemony is the performance of supreme athleticism and aggression by the Black body - particularly masculine bodies.

These ideas of control and "behaving correctly" trickle down in uncreative ways to video games. Across all the examples presented in the case study, there are two ways in which these presentations of Black people are exercised. I have called these the "racist ontological assertion" and the "hegemonic teleological expectation". To briefly elaborate, these can be explained as follows:

The racist ontological assertion are the ideas, assumptions and phantasms from hegemony to denote what Black people, including their properties and behaviour and how it

is imposed on Black people

The hegemonic teleological expectation focuses on the function of Black people in society and how they should progress, maintain the system of our society and achieve success within it.

The ways in which the racist ontological assertion is seen through CJ in Grand Theft Auto: San Andrea, the Redguard in *The Elder Scrolls* series, and the player avatar in *NBA2K17* (especially in the MyCareer mode) are straightforward. Black men have potent bodies and weak minds and interact with the world through aggression. To elaborate briefly on each case study, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* represents a world starting within the Black gang communities of Los Angeles (Los Santos in the game), and CJ is a leader of one of the significant gangs. The Redguard are presented as effective warriors with a disdain for magic, tied to the Intelligence attribute within the game's system. In addition, they are provided with an ability that allows them to have increased stamina, allowing them to run and fight for longer. The MyCareer mode in *NBA2K17* presents a story with a Black code character, where the only meaningful interaction that exists for the player is through the simulation of a game of basketball.

The occurrence of the hegemonic teleological expectation is expressed through how CJ's violence, aggression, accumulation of a vast arsenal of weapons, and expansion of his criminal proclivities lead to him overcoming his obstacles, gaining power and returning his perceived idea of order to his community. The lore of the Redguard is structured as colonialists into the continent of Tamriel inspired by the myths of European greatness and imposing the West's ideals onto the Black representation. Within *NBA2K17*, it is clear that only the application of the hyper-athletic Black body can be used to achieve success.

It is clear that the lens of interrogating the union of systemic racism and technology through the lens of video games produces reveals interesting consequences but also similarly provides a narrow slice within the greater discourse. The process is cyclical, however. The nuanced and narrow ways in which these two thoroughly related ideas exist within video games also divulge the ways adaptive and mutated ways in which Empire controls its denizens and expands its ideas.

Works Cited

1. 2k Games. *NBA2K17*. 2016.
2. Akenine, Möller, et al. *Real-Time Rendering*. 3rd ed., CRC Press, 2008.
3. Alcorn, Allan. *Pong*. 1972.
4. Balandier, Georges. "Settler Colonialism." *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologi*.
5. Bethesda Entertainment. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. 2011.
6. Biko, Steve. *BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE QUEST FOR TRUE HUMANITY*. 1977.
7. Brown, Gregory, et al. *The Ghettoization of Blacks in Los Angeles: The Emergence of Street Gangs*.
8. Cole, Yussef, and Tanya DePass. "Black Skin Is Still A Radical Concept in Video Games." *Vice Games*, 2017, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/78qpxd/black-skin-is-still-a-radical-concept-in-video-games.
9. Daniels, Jessie. *Race and Racism in Internet Studies: A Review and Critique*. 2012.
10. ---. "Race, Civil Rights, and Hate Speech in the Digital Era." *Learning Race and Ethnicity*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008.
11. Dyer-Witherford, Nick, and Greig de Peuter. *Games of Empire*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
12. Entertainment Software Association. *Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry 2022*. Accessed 1 Feb. 2023.
13. Everett, Anna, and S. Craig Watkins. "The Power of Play: The Portrayal and Performance of Race in Video Games." *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth,*

Games, and Learning, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 141–66.

14. Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952.
15. *Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Marx: On Ideology." Introductory Guide to Critical Theory. Date of Last Update, Which You Can Find on the Home Page. Purdue U. Date You Accessed the Site. <http://Www.Purdue.Edu/Guidetotheory/Marxism/Modules/Marxideology.Html>*.
16. Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. 1966.
17. Garcia, Jorge Jimenez. *Practical Real-Time Strategies for Photorealistic Skin Rendering and Antialiasing*. 2012. Unversidad de Zaragoza.
18. Goguen, Joseph. *An Introduction to Algebraic Semiotics, with Application to User Interface Design*. Dept of Computer Science and Engineering, Univ of California, San Diego, 2005.
19. Gough, Christina. *Share of African Americans in pro Sports in North America in 2022*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1168461/african-american-sport-leagues/. Accessed 8 Jan. 2023.
20. Green, Joshua Lumpkin. *Digital Blackface: The Repackaging of the Black Masculine Image*. 2006. Miami University, http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=miami1154371043.
21. Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage, 1997.
22. Harari, Yuval. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankid*. 2014.
23. Harrel, D. Fox. "Phantasmal Media." *The MIT Press*, 2013, https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/phantasmal-media.
24. Harrel, Douglas. *Phantasmal Media: An Approach to Imagination, Computation and Expression*. The MIT Press, 2013.

25. Herzig, Rebecca. “The Matters of Race in Histories of American Technology.” *Technology and the African-American Experience: Needs and Opportunities for Study*, MIT Press, 2004, pp. 155–69.
26. Higinbotham, William, and Robert Dvorak. *Tennis for Two*. 1958.
27. hooks, bell. “Artistic Integrity: Race and Accountability.” *Reel to Real*, Routledge, 1996.
28. ---. “Neo-Colonial Fantasies of Conquest: Hoop Dreams.” *Reel to Real*, Routledge, 1996.
29. Ivory, James D. “A Brief History of Video Games.” *The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Digital Games*, 2015, pp. 1–21.
30. Kirkbride, Michael. https://www.imperial-library.info/content/posts-kirkbride-undated. Accessed 16 Nov. 2022.
31. Lange, Katie. “How & Why the DOD Works With Hollywood.” *Inside DoD*, 2018, https://www.defense.gov/News/Inside-DOD/blog/article/2062735/how-why-the-dod-works-with-hollywood/.
32. Leonard, DJ. “High Tech Blackface -- Race, Sports Video Games and Becoming the Other.” *Simile: Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education*, 2003.
33. Marschall, Sabine. “The Heritage of Post-Colonial Societies.” *The Routledge Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, 2016.
34. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. Prometheus Books, 1998.
35. Miller, Kiri. “The Accidental Carjack: Ethnography, Gameworld Tourism, and Grand Theft Auto.” *Game Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, Sept. 2008.
36. Murray, Janey. “Agency.” *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, The Free Press, 1997.

37. Nakamura, Lisa. *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. Routledge, 2002.

38. Parsons, Talcott. *The Social System*. 1951.

39. Rockstar Games. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. Playstation 2, Rockstar Games, 2004.

40. Roth, Lorna. "Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2009.

41. Rousseau, Jean-Jacque. *Du Contrat Social; Ou, Principes Du Droit Politique*. 1792.

42. Sinclair, Bruce. "Integrating the Histories of Race and Technology." *Technology and the African-American Experience*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004.

43. Stam, Robert, and Louise Spence. "Colonialism, Race and Representation." *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1983, pp. 2–20.

44. Strausbaugh, John. *Black like You : Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture*. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006.

45. *Super Mario*. Nintendo, 1985.

46. Taborn, Tyron. "Separating Race from Technology: Finding Tomorrow's IT Progress in the Past." *Learning Race and Ethnicity*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008.

47. Tanenbaum, Karen, and Theresa J. Tanenbaum. "Commitment to Meaning: A Reframing of Agency in Games." *UC Irvine: Digital Arts and Culture*, 2009.

48. Thomas, Douglas. "KPK, Inc.: Race, Nation, and Emergent Culture in Online Games." *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digitial Media*, MIT Press, 2008.

49. Veracini, Lorenzo. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

50. Wolfe, Patrick. *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. Cassell, 1998.

51. *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*. 2020.

52. Wozniak, Steve. *Breakout*. Atari, 1976.