THE CORRUPTION OF PLAY

MAPPING THE IDEOLOGICAL PLAY-SPACE OF AAA VIDEOGAMES

CHRISTOPHER MCMAHON

The Corruption of Play

This page intentionally left blank

The Corruption of Play: Mapping the Ideological Play-Space of AAA Videogames

BY

CHRISTOPHER MCMAHON University of Liverpool, UK



United Kingdom - North America - Japan - India - Malaysia - China

Emerald Publishing Limited Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Copyright © 2022 Christopher McMahon. Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80117-737-5 (Print) ISBN: 978-1-80117-736-8 (Online) ISBN: 978-1-80117-738-2 (Epub)



ISOQAR certified Management System, awarded to Emerald for adherence to Environmental standard ISO 14001:2004.

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Certificate Number 1985 ISO 14001

Contents

About the Author	ix
Introduction	1
The State of Play	6
The Argument	12
Overview of Chapters	16
Chapter 1 Play	19
It's in the Game	19
Play for the Sake of it	32
Chapter 2 Neoliberalism	43
Understanding Neoliberalism	46
The Cult of Work and the Entrepreneurial Self	52
The Neoliberalisation of Play	57
Why Oppose Neoliberalism	61
Chapter 3 Cognitive Mapping	65
Developing a Critical Approach	68
Cognitive Mapping	69
The Entrepreneurial Player and the Cult of Gaming	75
Chapter 4 Identity	79
Maps and Menus: What Can I Do? And How Can I Do It?	85
Space is Waste	90
When I'm Dead, Just Throw Me in the Trash!	95
Chapter 5 Agency	101
Non-playable Characters and Level Progression:	10 -
What Am I Doing This? And What Do I Get Out Of It?	105
Another Settlement Needs Your Help	110
Glitches Get Stitches	113

vi	Contents
	contentio

Chapter 6 Consumption Downloadable Content and Microtransactions:	117
How Can I Play More? And How Can I Play Better?	121
Credits <i>Will</i> Do Fine I'm Trying to Teach the Baby to Gamble	
All That Is Solid Melts into VR	139
Ludography	143
Ludography	145
Bibliography	145
Index	161

For Colette and Charlotte

This page intentionally left blank

About the Author

Christopher McMahon completed his Doctoral thesis at the University of Liverpool in 2020. His research covers neoliberalism, ideological components of the videogame medium, and the mediation of football. He is currently a Lecturer in Digital Media and Culture at the University of Liverpool.