Postanthropocenic, posthumanist, postapocalyptic play

Justification for the workshop informed by current trends and research

Off the back of an upcoming Special Issue ('Playing the posts: post-Anthropocene, posthuman, postapocalypse', *Journal of Games Criticism*, autumn/winter 2024) which received 60 responses to its CFP, this workshop seeks to harness the evident interest in games and postanthropocenic, posthumanist, postapocalyptic play. We want to take the opportunity to hear other voices and map potential areas of interest, to explore opportunities for both publication and networking.

Today, we create and play videogames in the ruins of our own planet, as our contemporary era comes to be defined by inexorable ecological crises and collapse. The post-Anthropocene asks us to transcend the human-centric paradigms that have led to our environmental crises and instead envision new, often bold, futures concerning ecosystems, cultures, and societies (which may be framed in hopeful, pessimistic, idealised, or simply pragmatic terms). Embracing post-Anthropocentric thought is also evident in the recognition that nonhuman entities are deeply embedded within human systems, and permeate biology, sociality, and meaning. The exploration of the entanglement and interdependency of human and nonhuman entities in shaping the world draws us to posthumanist theory, and the challenges this concept makes to the traditional boundaries and exceptionalism of human identity. Another 'post' is also evoked by the post-Anthropocene: the post-apocalypse. Post-apocalyptic depictions of worlds or societies in the aftermath of catastrophic events substantiate the notional consequences of environmental, technological, or societal collapses. Often, these imaginings reinforce post-anthropocentric ideologies, demonstrating the limits of human "power" and "control", whilst also demonstrating the posthumanist challenges to the sanctity of selfhood and individuality. These accounts often provide imaginative, affectively rich spaces for exploring the consequences and potential futures (whether marked by renewal or grinding terror) resulting from environmental crises. As such, we suggest that games offer powerful opportunities for experimentation that critique and think beyond our contemporary conditions.

In the field of game studies, there has already been growing interest in understanding how videogames and their players engage with, and respond to, our era's urgent ecological and ethical concerns. Game studies scholarship addressing these confluent concepts includes

- critical posthumanist accounts (e.g. Boulter, 2015; Fizek, 2018; Wilde, 2023)
- interrogation of Anthropocentric conditions of play (e.g. Abraham, 2022; Abraham & Jayemanne, 2017; Nicoll, 2023)
- post-apocalyptic, monstrous, and inhuman imaginaries (e.g. May, 2021; Ruffino, 2020; Švelch, 2023)
- games and their relationships to futures (e.g. Atkins, 2006; Fordyce, 2021; op de Beke, 2021)
- games and their relationships to, and representations of, ecologies (e.g. Abraham, 2018; Bianchi, 2014; Chang, 2019)
- identity play beyond the human (e.g. Bianchi, 2017; Ruberg, 2022; Seller 2022)

This workshop invites scholars to explore the complexities and implications of the post-Anthropocene in order to expand our understanding of how digital games can engage with, and respond to, the challenges of the present moment, and the anxieties and opportunities presented by our uncertain futures. Crucially, we ask: how does thinking about the confluence of these 'posts' in games influence critical thinking and theory?

Major objectives

The proposed workshop would be a three hour long session and the aims of the workshop are twofold:

1. short presentations that share current work for feedback and discussion, with a view to publication in a forthcoming edited collection
2. a roundtable to ascertain key/shared/competing issues (and opportunities) in the field

Format and activities, and expected outcomes

The first part of the workshop will include the presentation of 6-8 accepted short presentations, of around ten minutes in length. These papers should be work-in-progress that is not currently under review for publication. They will therefore form the basis for exploring future publication in a proposed edited collection (Bloomsbury/DeGruyter) addressing the expanding work within these fields.

A roundtable discussion in the second half of the workshop will then allow collaborative opportunities to discuss specific issues, theories, and agendas that are shaping participants' work in the area of the named posts in relation to gaming. This, less formal, section will allow both presenting and non-presenting workshop attendees to contribute in terms of networking and thinking about how best to collaborate and connect.

Expressions of interest

Participants for the workshop will be invited through two forms of expressions of interest:

- Anyone wishing to present work-in-progress will be asked to submit a 250 word abstract.
- Non-presenting collaborators (i.e. those who may not feel confident in presenting a formal paper) will be requested to send a 250 word expression of interest outlining their relevant research interests or motivations.

Abstracts and EoIs will then be reviewed by the three workshop organisers for selection for the final 6-8 presentations and for invited non-presenting contributors. We anticipate 12-15 participants in this workshop, but aim to be inclusive of as many interested people as possible. The invitation for non-presenting collaborators, and the roundtable discussion, will ensure that all who are invited to the workshop will have a rich opportunity to contribute.

The organisers' backgrounds

The workshop will be offered in a hybrid format, facilitated by Dr Lawrence May (University of Auckland, NZ) online and Dr Poppy Wilde and Dr Will McKeown (Birmingham City University, UK) in person in Mexico.

Dr Lawrence May is author of *Digital Zombies, Undead Stories: Narrative Emergence and Videogames* (Bloomsbury, 2021). His recent work explores ideas around the anthropocene, ecosystems, and ecologies.

Dr Poppy Wilde is author of *Posthuman Gaming: Avatars, Gamers, and Entangled Subjectivities* (Routledge, 2023). Her recent work explores the avatar-gamer relationship as posthuman subjectivity, zombies as/and posthumanism, and the tensions of humanist morals in post-apocalyptic play.

(May and Wilde are currently co-editing the forthcoming Special Issue of the *Journal of Games Criticism*, 'Playing the posts: post-Anthropocene, posthuman, postapocalypse', due for publication in October 2024.)

Dr Will McKeown's research focuses on representations of self-sacrifice in film, TV, and videogames. His current work explores Deleuzian and Guattarian concepts in relation to rhizomatic play as ecocritical co-creation, and the affordances of space and monsters in postapocalyptic (videogame) worlds.

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