PLAY/PAUSE Symposium - Proposal

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Non-Human Gaming

In this talk, I will critically analyse the rise of video games that require limited human intervention to be played. Idle games such as *Cookie Clicker* and *Adventure Capitalist*, games made by algorithms such as *No Man's Sky*, the programming of AI to play games such as *Screeps*, *Drivatars* and ghost cars in racing games, all suggest that human beings are becoming peripheral in the act of playing and in the definition of video games. Drawing on Sonia Fizek's analysis of Slavoj Zizek and Robert Pfaller's concept of interpassivity, and on studies on gamification and self-tracking, I will argue that Non-Human Gaming is not necessarily an exception to oppose to 'standard' video games, or a temporary trend. I will argue that the non-human has always been haunting the medium, and that studies on interactivity, agency, and player's competences have been providing, so far, a comforting perspective that places the human at the centre. In fact, Non-Human Gaming is an adequate response to the disappearance of life from Earth – as it has been imagined, feared, and prophesised by scientists in the last few decades. Alexander Galloway's concept of video games as allegories of life will be deployed to argue that digital games are transforming into *living things*, which could entirely replace human players and play by themselves. From this perspective, video games might be seen in relation to the rise of self-driving cars, algorithmic trade exchange, and remote warfare, which could be functioning by themselves after human extinction. Roger Caillois, in his early work on mimicry and mythology, was already prefiguring a similar hypothesis: living beings develop forms of dispersal and waste of energy (of which games are an example) that cannot

be explained through a rationalistic view on evolution and species preservation, but are nonetheless defining characteristics of life.

Essential bibliography

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Bio

Paolo Ruffino is Lecturer in Media Studies at University of Lincoln. He has been researching and publishing in video game culture, media arts and media studies. His interests include independent forms of video game development, archaeologies of games, hacking, modding, practices of modification of video game software, gamification and the Quantified Self. Ruffino is the author of *Future Gaming: Creative Interventions in Video Game Culture* (Goldsmiths Press, 2018), co-editor of the volume *Rethinking Gamification* (Meson Press, 2013), editor of an issue of GAME journal on video game subcultures and of a special issue of *Games and Culture* (SAGE) on the early work of Roger Caillois. He is board member of British DiGRA and Chair of DiGRA Italia. He has been working at University of York (Associate Lecturer in Digital Culture), London South Bank University (Lecturer in Game Culture), Goldsmiths, University of London (Associate Lecturer in Media and Communications). He has been involved as Research Associate from 2012 until 2015 at the Gamification Lab, Centre for Digital Cultures, Leuphana University. Paolo Ruffino is also one of the four founding members of the art collective IOCOSE (http://iocose.org). The group has been exhibiting at the Venice Biennale, Tate Modern, FACT in Liverpool, Science Gallery in Dublin, Taj and SKE gallery in Bangalore, MACRO in Rome, Transmediale in Berlin and Jeu de Paume in Paris. Their work featured in publications such as Wired magazine, The Creators Project, Flash Art, Liberation, Der Spiegel, El Pais, Adbusters, Neural and Vanity Fair, and on TV channels such as the BBC, RAI, and France4.