

New Directions in Classics, Gaming, and Extended Reality

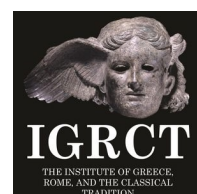
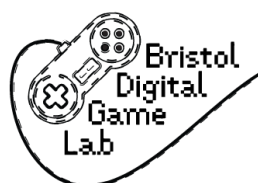
A hybrid, international conference hosted by the [Bristol Digital Game Lab](#) and sponsored by the [Institute of Greece, Rome, and the Classical Tradition](#), the [University of Bristol Faculty of Arts](#) and [Centre for Creative Technologies](#)

3-4 June 2024

Humanities Research Space (1.H020), 7 Woodland Road,
University of Bristol



University of
BRISTOL



Monday 3 June 2024

08:15-08:45 Registration

08:45-09:00 Welcome

09:00-10:00 Session 1 - Classics and XR: Industry Insights (Chair: Richard Cole)

- Jack Norris (Zubr): **Acropolis AR App** (in person)
- Peter Mansfield (The Newt in Somerset): **Roman Villa Experience** (in person)

10:00-11:00 Break / demos

11:00-12:00 Session 2 - Classics in Non-Classical Games (1) (Chair: Alex Vandewalle)

- Kevin Wong (Harvard University): **Esports and the Gladiatorial Fantasy: Technomasculine Imaginaries of the Colosseum in Competitive Play** (in person)
- Yifan Wang (Hong Kong Metropolitan University): **Digital Theogony in a Post-Apocalyptic Urban RPG: The Neo-Olympian Throne Claiming with Zeus, Nezha and Amunet in *Dislyte*** (in person)

12:00-13:30 Lunch (provided) / demos

13:30-15:00 Session 3 - Games and XR as Methods for Studying Classics (Chair: Lily Bickers)

- Orla Polten (Independent): **Posthuman Sappho: Artificial Intelligence In Twentieth- And Twenty first-Century Verse** (in person)
- Del A. Maticic (Vassar College): **Chess in the Classical Tradition: Some Main Lines** (in person)
- Yanxiao He (Tsinghua University, Beijing): **Gaming Cupid and Psyche: A Critical Analysis of NewJeans' "Cool with You" (2023) in Light of K-pop Cover Dance** (online)

15:00-15:45 Break / demos

15:45-16:45 Session 4 - Classics in Non-Classical Games (2) (Chair: Frances Pickworth)

- Alex MacFarlane (University of Birmingham): ***Bloodborne* (2015), the Gothic, and the Legacy of Classics in Videogames** (in person)
- Alexandra S. Henning (University of California, Los Angeles): **Echoes of Antiquity After the Apocalypse: *The Last of Us Part II* as Classical Reception of the Iliad & Oresteia** (online)

16:45-17:00 Break

17:00-18:30 Session 5 - Taking Stock (Chair: Dunstan Lowe)

- Richard Cole (University of Bristol): **The State of Play, Or What Happens When the Ancient World is Twinned with the Digital?** (in person)
- Aisha (University of North Carolina at Greensboro): **Single-player, Multi-player: Shaping Inclusive Collaboration** (online)
- Richard Blows (Time Machine Designs / Boomsatsuma): **Hadrian's Wall for Microsoft Flight Simulator** (in person)

19:00-21:00 Antiquity Games Night (AGN): *Age of Mythology* and pizza (provided)

Tuesday 4 June 2024

08:30-09:00 Tea / coffee

09:00-10:30 Session 1 - Classics, Games and XR: Applications and Potentials (Chair: Yifan Liu)

- Gillian Marbury (Ohio State University): **Fast-Traveling to Antiquity: Virtual Reality, the “Tetris Effect”, and Classics** (in person)
- Victoria Rooney (Independent): **Extending Experiences via VR: Immersive New Realities in Tragedy and the Dionysia** (in person)
- Alexander Vandewalle (University of Antwerp / Ghent): **A Sense of the Past: Game Feel and Sensory Rhetoric as Medium in Historical and Mythological Games** (in person)

10:30-11:00 Break / demos

11:00-12:00 Session 2 - Methods for Studying Classics in Games (Chair: Julia Higgins)

- Rita Tegon (University of Salamanca): **Navigating the Intersection of Classics and Video Games: Methodological Insights** (in person)
- Brent Van Mol (University of Antwerp): **Player Choice in the Underworld: An Investigation of Narrative Player Agency, Death and Failure in *Hades* and *The Forgotten City*** (in person)

12:00-13:30 Lunch (provided) / demos

13:30-15:00 Session 3 - Games, XR and Education (1) (Chair: Michael Samuel)

- Matthew Leeper (Education Evolved), Sumeet Gurung (Education Evolved), Rachel Porteous (University of Glasgow), Stephen Preston (St. Giles Cathedral): **Constructing a Cathedral: Co-Creation through Industry, Third Sector, and Higher Education collaboration** (hybrid)
- Preloaded / Rob Sherman (University of Exeter): **Wonders: Pyramids of Giza** (hybrid)
- Christine Steer (Virginia Tech): **Teaching Mythology, Philosophy, and Video Games** (in person)

15:00-16:00 Break / demos

16:00-18:00 Session 4 - Games, XR and Education (2) (Chair: Nanci Santos)

- Irene Di Gioia (University of Göttingen): **Learning the Ancient Greek Language via Video Games** (online)
- Lissa Crofton-Sleigh (Santa Clara University): **Lingua Vitae: Teaching Latin in Virtual Reality** (online)
- James H. Brusuelas (University of Kentucky): **Ancient Manuscripts, Ancient Languages, and a Post-Keyboard World: Research and Teaching in Mixed Reality** (online)
- Claudia Moser and Christian Thomas (University of California, Santa Barbara): **Rome: The Game. Creating an Online Course as an Interactive Adventure Game** (online)

18:00-19:00 Drinks and networking

19:00 Mezze dinner (provided)

Abstracts and biographies

Esports and the Gladiatorial Fantasy: Technomasculine Imaginaries of the Colosseum in Competitive Play

This paper examines how the Colosseum and Roman gladiatorial bloodsport have been adopted as part of a spatial, performative, and aesthetic programme for both the in-game worlds of many online competitive videogames and their live esports events. Placing gladiatorial history and classical reception in conversation with scholarship on esports, this paper argues that a technologically-inflected classicism pervades contemporary esports practices—offering explanatory potential for the particular forms of competition, spectatorship, professionalization, sociality, embodiment, community formation, and gender production that have emerged.

While this historical imaginary may have operated quietly as an imagined framework for physical sporting events and live spectacle long before esports, the combat-oriented gameplay and fantasy elements that characterize competitive online videogames have conjured new degrees of similitude, revivifying its aesthetic potential. Since the early 2010s, when esports was being rapidly scaled-up from more localized grassroots events into the commercialized global media spectacles they are today (i.e. Dota 2's The International or League of Legends' World Championship), there has been a sustained cultural and commercial strategy of leaning into this imaginary of the Colosseum.

Relying on visual instantiations from *League of Legends* (2009), *Dota 2* (2013), and *Apex Legends* (2019), this paper aims to demonstrate how a popular transmedia imaginary of the Colosseum spills out from within in-game worlds and gameplay mechanics over into the physical, commercial, and sociotechnical infrastructure surrounding esports—often to points of excess where we find colosseums embedded within colosseums. Such moments offer vivid displays of how this historical imaginary spans across the overlapping layers of spectatorship and sensory perception (staged live events, livestreams, AR overlays, to their cinematic and musical paratext).

This gladiatorial turn in esports represents a rather transparent attempt at borrowing not just the iconicity, but the masculinity associated with this historical setting for the legitimization of a burgeoning esports industry. It does so by leveraging, in part, on the synchronous resurgence of gladiatorial, sword-and-sandal themed cinema and television that lasted from 2000 to the mid-2010s. Given the patriarchal (and often misogynistic) tenor of this transmedia gladiatorial imaginary, its co-optation for esports and competitive gaming implicates organizers, players, and fans within the overlapping discourses on gender, masculinity, and exclusion within both antiquity and gaming culture. Just as the historical Colosseum was predominantly a site for male violence and spectatorship, classicism reprises its role within the apparatus of gender production that perpetuates the unfortunate reality of a male-dominated esports demographic.

Kevin Wong is a graduate student at Harvard University working towards a PhD in Classical Philology with a secondary field in Science, Technology, and Society. He studies the afterlife of ancient Greece and Rome in videogames, entertainment technology, and media culture—above all, the entrenchment of 'epic' as a framing ideology for gaming entertainment. His research analyses in-game systems and narrative worldbuilding co-extensively with the entire gamut of sociotechnical phenomena that has emerged around gaming culture—esports, streaming, content creation, fan conventions, emergent gameplay, online fora, marketing formulae, game engines, developer interviews, and the design of physical gaming spaces.

Digital Theogony in a Post-Apocalyptic Urban RPG: The Neo-Olympian Throne Claiming with Zeus, Nezha and Amunet in *Dislyte*

Classical past is conceived beyond the “physical” representation of histories and heritages in games. Specially when Greek mythology and cosmological order become the cornerstone of a gaming world. The recent popular mobile game *Dislyte* (2023) has a typical sci-fi setting as the main storyline is initiated by the invasion of “alien” powers. The arrival of an Obelisk symbolising Divine Powers painted the post-apocalyptic world with ancient mysteries. Chic figures of Athena, Artemis, Dionysus, Hermes, and many other deities are adapted into the urban world, amazingly unfamiliarised from those on vase paintings and renaissance art works. Underneath the striking visual reception of Pantheon deities, the worldbuilding is more interesting. *Dislyte* reuses Greek divine order and implicitly encodes it into the cosmological structure of a post-apocalyptic setting. In the game, a bench of neo-Olympian gods aims to unravel the Divine intervention and restore the worldly order. Though disguised in pop culture and streetwear, new gods under the control of players in front of screens are fighting for human cities and humanity against mythical monsters. Hesiod told us how Zeus became Zeus, while the gaming story illustrates us how mortal human could become “Zeus”. When at the catastrophic moment, facing the existential crisis, man can awake the deity power and fight for a new order like Zeus. The next generation of heavenly gods to welcome the new world is post-human, as receiving the divinity yet balancing to keep the humanity. A new Theogony is thus recorded, and involving diverse deities from Chinese, Egyptian, and Norse mythologies. But why do human or post-human still need ancient mythologies and classical cosmology in the post-modern world? Is it an universal unconscious archetype that with bestowed divinity human establish new cosmos? Or a mythical return of a post-apocalyptic world is towards classical traditions?

Yifan WANG, Research Assistant of Research Institute for Digital Culture and Humanities (RIDCH), Hong Kong Metropolitan University; BA (Classics) in Durham, MSc (Art History) in Glasgow; research interests include Platonic Cosmology and Artistic Creation, Art Law, Art Crime, and Art Curation.

Posthuman Sappho: Artificial Intelligence in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Verse

The fusion of classical literature and digital technology has led to innovative explorations of ancient themes in virtual spaces. However, the influence of classical poetry on contemporary verse remains a fertile ground for investigation, particularly within the framework of posthumanism and contemporary debates surrounding artificial intelligence. This paper proposes to examine the persistence of Sapphic rhythms and metres in the poetry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, shedding light on the transformative potential of verse-technology in shaping our understanding of poetic expression.

Drawing inspiration from Rosi Braidotti's concept of 'the posthuman condition', the paper investigates the persistence of Sapphic rhythms and metres in English poetry after modernism as a form of artificial intelligence. Specifically, it examines the works of Ezra Pound, H.D., J.H. Prynne, Anne Carson, and Kay Gabriel, analysing how their verse engages with Sapphic temporalities and the extended realities offered by the persistence of Sapphic versification.

By employing the concept of 'verse-technology,' previously developed in my forthcoming monograph *Pagan Poetry: English Verse in Classical Measures, 1860-1930* (OUP, 2024), this paper delves into the ontological status of 'Sappho' as a measure of poetic expression, exploring its implications in the context of artificial intelligence, extended reality, and posthuman thought. Through a multidisciplinary approach blending literary analysis, classical reception, and queer poetics, this paper aims to contribute to ongoing discussions in the fields of digital classics and extended reality, offering new insights into the dynamic relationship between ancient traditions and contemporary literary practices.

Orla Polten is a postdoctoral researcher specialising in classical reception studies and digital humanities. She holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Cambridge, with a focus on the anglophone receptions of Ancient Greek and Latin poetry, and has previously published on the intersection of classical poetry and contemporary verse. Her current research focuses on the influence of Homeric and Sapphic rhythms in twentieth and twenty-first-century poetry in the context of contemporary debates surrounding artificial intelligence and the posthuman condition.

Chess in the Classical Tradition: Some Main Lines

Despite not being introduced into Europe until the 12th century CE, the game of chess becomes a key piece of the self-conscious reception of Greek and Latin literature that we call the “classical tradition.” Medieval poets imagine allegorical chess games between Olympians. Early modern historians of the game trace the invention of the game back to Ulysses, who it is said invented the game in the Greek camps around Troy as a productive pastime. Called by the legendary player Paul Morphy “the most ancient and most universal game known among men,” the study and practice of text was likened to the comparative study of ancient societies. In the 20th-century, literary works like Eliot’s “The Wasteland” and Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* express the modern condition of isolation and disenchantment through the blended media of chess notation and forms of literary critical knowledge like the fragment and the commentary. And in the last 50 years, the game of chess and the work of classical philology have had similar histories as prestigious international ventures that have been rapidly transformed by the systematizing potentials of computing and artificial intelligence.

The proposed 30-minute paper would lay the groundwork for a history of chess in the classical tradition. In order to lay the groundwork for a book project on the topic, I will collect a dossier of texts in a variety of European languages, which I will make available to the conference and from which I will produce a survey of trends like the ones sketched above. My overarching argument is that the chess board and the classical world emerge as two powerful and compatible microcosms for thinking about geopolitics, gender, technology, and aesthetics.

Del A. Maticic is the Blegen Research Fellow in Greek and Roman Studies at Vassar College, whose research explores how Latin literature responds to and constructs worlds. His current book project, *The Invention of Metal in Latin Literature*, explores Roman attitudes towards the environment through a study of mineral extraction in late Republican and early imperial texts. He is the co-editor of a forthcoming edited volume entitled *Working Lives in Ancient Rome*, on the relationship between labor and subjectivity in the Roman world. He is also a chess enthusiast and is in the early stages of planning a second book project on the history of the relationship between chess and the classical tradition.

Gaming Cupid and Psyche: A Critical Analysis of NewJeans' "Cool with You" (2023) in Light of K-pop Cover Dance

K-pop, a trans-media phenomenon, extends beyond being merely synonymous with Korean popular music. It is better understood as “a postmodern product of pastiche and parody” produced in Korea (Fuhr (2014): 10), spawning its own unique gaming culture: K-pop cover dance. While K-pop choreography spreads across social media, some fans go beyond passively watching these dances, aspiring instead to replicate them in real life. This ambition gives rise to phenomena such as K-pop random dance play, K-pop cover dance competitions, and the reshooting of K-pop music videos by closely mirroring the originals (Oh (2022)). From the viewpoint of critical game studies, K-pop cover dance emerges as a gaming culture where the lines between reality and media blur in the age of gamification (Jagoda (2020); Cho (2023): 231-248).

Furthermore, the K-pop industry reflects meta-medially on K-pop cover dance by incorporating classical motifs. This paper critically explores how the story of Cupid and Psyche is leveraged to comment on the gaming culture of K-pop cover dance in the girl group NewJeans' 2023 song “Cool with You” and its accompanying mini-film. Specifically, it depicts an Asian female and a Black male falling in love after observing the 19th-century French neo-classical painting *L'Amour et Psyché* by François Édouard-Picot. As NewJeans dance in front of the painting, it transforms into a social media screen, alluding to contemporary K-pop consumers mediated by such platforms. Further analysis of “Cool with You” leads to another song from the same album, “Super Shy,” which portrays a group of Western individuals dancing to NewJeans' 2022 debut song “Attention” in a public plaza. As I show, exploring how “Super Shy” represents K-pop cover dance as a gaming culture in a Western city, the juxtaposition between interracial dating in a Western city and NewJeans' modern choreography in front of a French classical painting in “Cool with You” is meta-K-pop illustrating K-pop cover dance as a gaming culture through resource to Greco-Roman antiquity.

Work Cited

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Jagoda, P. (2020): *Experimental Games: Critique, Play, and Design in the Age of Gamification* (Chicago).

Oh, C.Y. (2022): *K-pop Dance: Fandoming Yourself on Social Media* (London).

***Bloodborne*(2015),the Gothic,andthe Legacy ofClassicsinVideogames**

The legacy of classical myth extends its tendrils in every direction. Yet whilst the realms of literature and theatre enjoy plentiful attention, videogames are often dismissed as a niche research interest. I appeal for a future in which analysis of videogames for classical themes is treated academically on par with other mediums. Here, I examine the legacy of various classical themes through the thread of literature into the videogame world, focusing on seeing the classics in game *Bloodborne* – a videogame not typically considered classics-themed. *Bloodborne* owes many Greek mythical references to the Gothic tradition. For example, I consider the *Iliad* as a precursor to the Gothic, and *Bloodborne* as an inheritor. The study of classical mythologies can tell us much about the use of narrative and storytelling in the new(er) (and ever-evolving) medium of videogames. Considering the *Bloodborne* developer *FromSoftware* has previously dabbled in using VR – and consulted with renowned author GRR Martin for one of their most recent releases – one can see how they embrace both extant literary traditions and advances in technology. I demonstrate that both this game and classical texts share motifs confronting the human experience of mortality and fate, engaging at length with issues of monstrosity, curses, and circular narrative. Embracing intertextual relationships in videogames allows us to look forward to the future of the industry and appreciate the ancient legacies it carries with it.

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Alex MacFarlane is currently nearing completion of his PhD at the University of Birmingham. His thesis focuses on gendered behaviour in Ancient Greek literature, examining mythical women and their corruptions of expected norms. His research interests also include reception studies, translation, and literature. To this end, he has participated in conferences internationally. He has previously taught on undergraduate modules introducing students to exploring and analysing Greek mythology.

Echoes of Antiquity After the Apocalypse: The Last of Us Part II as Classical Reception of the Iliad & Oresteia

This paper explores *The Last of Us Part II* (Naughty Dog, 2020) as a nuanced manifestation of indirect classical reception. This analysis examines nostalgia's role in storytelling, implicit connections between the game's mechanics and environment with an archaeological mindset, and thematic parallels to the storytelling traditions of Homer's *Iliad* and Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. By fostering a sense of familiarity, connection, and nostalgia with ancient narratives, the game achieves a unique intersection between classical storytelling and contemporary gaming. In unraveling these connections, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary storytelling media draw inspiration from and echo the timeless narratives of classical antiquity.

Alexandra S. Henning is the Programs & Administration Coordinator for UCLA's Pourdavoud Institute for the Study of the Iranian World. She holds a BA in Classics from the University of Missouri and an MSc in Southeast European Studies: Politics, History, Economics from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. In 2020, she co-founded The Ozymandias Project, a humanities focused non-profit aimed at making access to the ancient world more accessible to the general public. Her work in public humanities led her to create and host *Ancient Office Hours* podcast (2020) and co-host *The Reading Party Podcast* (2022). As of 2023, she also hosts and produces the *Legacies of Ancient Persia* podcast for the Pourdavoud Institute.

The State of Play, Or What Happens When the Ancient World is Twinned with the Digital?

This paper will outline current research and practice in Classics, Gaming, and Extended Reality, and explore the application of Digital Twin theory to the study of the digitized past.

Richard Cole is Lecturer in Digital Classics at the University of Bristol, UK, and co-director of the Bristol Digital Game Lab. His research focuses on how the history and culture of antiquity intersects with new media, in particular video games, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence. From 2020-2023, he worked on the multidisciplinary Virtual Reality Oracle project, which created a ground-breaking VR experience of ancient divination that is improving educational outcomes in schools. He has published leading research on Classics in video games, while his forthcoming work looks at how questions around the authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* can help us better understand AI generated texts today.

Single-player, Multi-player: Shaping Inclusive Collaboration

Classics continues to carry the burden of being a historically insular field and meeting it at the intersection of gaming, where isolation and hostility can run as deep as collaboration and innovation, poses a unique challenge of inclusivity. It is both a theoretical challenge in the highly variegated nature of research on Classics and Gaming, but also a practical one because, for many of us, inclusivity begins in the classroom. The Classics Gaming Collaborative draws together expertise to build and elaborate on a synergy between research and pedagogy with on-going dialogue and projects such as the Apollodorus Project. In a post Gamergate world, we must continue to question how we engage Classics and game culture to give voice to marginalized topics and communities and to scaffold our work against dehumanization.

Aisha Dad is a Lecturer in the Department of Classical Studies at UNC Greensboro where she also serves as the Director of the Classics Gaming Collaborative. She received her PhD in Comparative Literature from Harvard University. A scholar of Classical Antiquity and South Asia, her research encompasses myth, performance, and narratology as well as Classical Reception in children's literature, animation, and gaming.

Fast-Traveling to Antiquity: Virtual Reality, the “Tetris Effect”, and Classics

Virtual reality (VR) has recently been used to investigate ancient religious experiences through the Virtual Reality Oracle (VRO), a short, immersive experience where the player consults the oracle at Dodona. While the VRO has done groundbreaking work examining the use of VR in classics through the lens of pedagogy and the neurology of divination, I seek to expand this research by investigating the effects of long-term gameplay and how this might inform our knowledge of the mentalities of ancient people. Specifically, this paper incorporates psychological research about the so-called “Tetris Effect” or game transfer phenomena, wherein long-term play has substantial effects on a player’s real-world cognition and perception (Ortiz De Gortari 2019). I use this research alongside VR’s heightened effect on mentality (Vatsel et al. 2023) and the game logic formed by players (van Benthem 2014) to explore how game transfer phenomena can illuminate the mentality of an ancient person. For example, how does our understanding of a religious festival change when contextualized by a more comprehensive simulated experience of ancient life? What might it have been like to see a tragedy at the Theater of Dionysus seated in the shadow of the Acropolis, where an ancient person might have made a sacrifice that same day?

Gillian Marbury is a PhD student in the Department of Classics at The Ohio State University. She is interested in the religions of the ancient Mediterranean as well as the use of video games in reception, pedagogy, and the investigation of antiquity.

Extending Experiences Via VR: Immersive New Realities in Tragedy and the Dionysia

Virtual Reality has been effectively applied in the study of antiquity and the dissemination of its findings, most notably in the Virtual Reality Oracle project by Bristol University. With VR's focus on visuality, first person experience and the recreation of entities and events often impossible to individuals in real life, a question emerges on what other aspects of ancient life are suitable for similar exploration. Athenian tragedy's original performance was a unique sensory experience now largely inaccessible to modern audiences. Nevertheless, investigations into various features of the performance, such as masks (Thurmiger 2016), costume (Wiles 2011), the actors' movements (Capponi 2020), the Chorus' presence (Foley 2003) and the use of music and song (D'angour 2018), indicate the genre's impact as a singular visual and aural experience (Haselwerdt 2019). Part of a wider city festival, in which the citizen body presented and articulated itself through religious worship (Souvinou-Inwood 2000), the audiences' shared immersion in the world of the stage enabled a temporary, but powerful, experience of living myth. This paper details how the Dionysia Festival, and the performance of tragedy within it, is especially well-suited for further study using VR technology, and proposes how the ancient event will be elicited through the digital medium. With the overlapping significance of imaginative suggestibility of tragedy and with VR (Jicol, Crescent; Clarke, Christopher; Tor, Emilia et al 2023), the psychological impact of the user in the VR will be compared to that of the audience member receiving the new reality of the play. Furthermore, the event's social experience, shall be speculated upon in relation to a shared VR event (Sarasso, P., Ronga, I., Piovesan, F. et al. 2024). Ultimately, this paper provides suggestions on the practical applications of the project.

Author Bio: Victoria Rooney is a researcher in Classics with a background in education and heritage. She achieved her doctorate in Classics in 2022, before taking a career break for family duties. Her doctoral dissertation was on negative emotions against the gods in Athenian tragedy, and its religious and theatrical significance, and is currently under review by Bloomsbury to be published. She is a Latin teacher at Maricourt Catholic High School in Liverpool, and has previously been Assistant Curator of Archaeology for Museum of Liverpool. She is also an amateur coder, having completed a coding bootcamp in 2023.

A Sense of the Past: Game Feel and Sensory Rhetoric as Medium in Historical and Mythological Games

In 2018, IGN unintentionally created a meme when their review of *Spider-Man* (2018) claimed the game made them “*feel* like Spider-Man” (IGN, 2018). A year later, *Death Stranding*’s (2019) unique movement mechanics had players rethink how to balance and traverse through game spaces. Both examples play with what Steve Swink (2009) called “game feel”, or the “real-time control of virtual objects in a simulated space, with interactions emphasized by polish” (p. 6). Brendan Keogh (2018) likewise examined how players’ “lived bodily experience” is “augmented by and part of videogame play” (p. 6). Such analyses on what it means to ‘feel’ a game – a sensation structured by games’ audiovisual, verbal, haptic, and ergodic qualities, among others – have, however, not extensively made their way into the study of antiquity and games. This presentation explores the current state and limits of game feel as a potentially expressive medium in historical or mythological games, and as a venue for classical/historical reception. Can contemporary technologies convey historical agents’ bodily experiences? How do games make us ‘feel’ like gods? How can game feel function as classical reception, or relate to notions of authenticity? Building on previous work (Vandewalle, 2023) and inspired by developments from classical reception studies (e.g., Grand-Clément & Ribeyrol, 2022; Purves, 2018) and haptic media studies (Parisi et al., 2017), this presentation will discuss various historical and mythological games – focused generally, but not exclusively, on Greece and Rome – through game feel, including analyses of kinaesthetic characterization in games and examples of classical/historical reception through game feel. Case studies will investigate various contemporary technologies (e.g., PlayStation 5, Meta Quest 2/3, OWO Haptic Gaming System, GameScent). Similar to Bogost’s (2007) procedural rhetoric, this paper shows how video games (can) communicate via a sensory rhetoric, which in turn can inform artists’ engagement with the ancient world today.

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Alexander Vandewalle is a Joint PhD Researcher at the University of Antwerp and Ghent University in Belgium. He recently finished and submitted his PhD thesis on the characterization of mythological characters in video games. Previously, he has published and presented on various topics related to history, mythology and games (e.g., aesthetics, narrative, player experiences, intertextuality, epigraphy, haptic feedback, and more), as well as characterization in games more broadly, archaeogaming, game analysis methodology, and broader popular culture franchises (Marvel Cinematic Universe, Star Wars). He is the founder of Paizomen (a work-in-progress database of games set in ancient Greece, Rome, or Greco-Roman mythology) and co-hosts regular livestreams with the Save Ancient Studies Alliance (SASA). He is also the co-editor of the forthcoming volume *Psychgeist of Popular Culture: Marvel Cinematic Universe*

Navigating the Intersection of Classics and Video Games: Methodological Insights

Video games have evolved into a significant cultural and technological phenomenon, whose undeniable richness, both from a technical and cultural perspective, gives rise to a multifaceted complexity in their analysis. In the realm of game development and player engagement, various frameworks, tools, techniques, and metrics have been devised to facilitate comprehensive examination. However, when it comes to investigating video games as an intricate multimodal cultural product, incorporating elements such as text, images, audio, and video, the existing research appears to have fallen short in providing comprehensive models that can satisfactorily address a multitude of research questions.

This communication, which is part of a doctoral research endeavor, aims to describe how it is trying to overcome this gap by presenting the methodology implemented to explore and understand the persisting presence of the Homeric Hercules archetype within videogames. By focusing on games wherein the iconic hero takes center stage, the analysis spans an extensive time frame, encompassing the years 1983 to 2015. Through this methodical investigation, a deeper comprehension of the enduring influence of the Homeric hero on video game narratives and characters is sought, enriching the understanding of how ancient mythological elements continue to shape contemporary interactive storytelling. To achieve this, criteria defining the hero, derived from close and distant readings of Homeric texts, are sought within video games. Iconographic content analysis is automated using video and image labelling techniques, complemented by an AI data engine for computer vision and generative AI. This combination allows for the customization of data pipelines to address various computer vision tasks. The integration of these techniques enables the collection and analysis of quantitative evidence alongside qualitative data, mitigating potential biases. A key strength lies in the methodology's replicability, ensuring the robustness and validity of the proposed approach.

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Player Choice in the Underworld: An Investigation of Narrative Player Agency, Death and Failure in *Hades* and *The Forgotten City*

The antiquity games *Hades* (2020) and *The Forgotten City* (2021) are both set in the Underworld. While *Hades* is a roguelike and *The Forgotten City* a time loop adventure, both games feature a similar loop-based structure (see Anyó 2015). The term “loop-based games” refers to games deliberately designed for repeated play, enabling players to gradually discover the story. Both *Hades* and *The Forgotten City* use failure and player death as narrative elements, shaping story progression and player agency within the Underworld setting of both games. Caracciolo (2023) explains how dying shapes narrative development in *Hades* through looped structures (676). Dying becomes integral to the game, impacting story development. While failure and death are essential to video games, these concepts are not often used to investigate video game narratives or player agency (Juul 2013; Wenz 2014). The booming genre of the loop-based game also has the potential to offer a sustainable alternative to traditional branching narratives.

This paper investigates the interplay of narrative player agency, failure, and death in both *Hades* and *The Forgotten City*. How does failure alter the story? How does player death contribute to story developments? Is there a benefit to purposefully dying or failing in either game? These questions are addressed by merging findings from my previous qualitative audience study on *Hades* with game text analysis. I argue that examining *Hades* and *The Forgotten City* as loop-based games provides insights into how this genre utilises the loop as both the central mechanic and a crucial aspect for addressing myths of the Underworld, particularly through exploring failure and death as core themes. Additionally, it examines how the recent industry trend of narrative-focused, loop-based games is reflected in antiquity games and how this mode of storytelling is used to tell stories set in or based upon themes of antiquity.

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Brent Van Mol recently graduated from the University of Antwerp with a Master of Arts and has applied for a PhD scholarship. He focuses on narratology, game studies and empirical video game research.

Teaching Mythology, Philosophy, and Video Games

In the Classical Studies department at Virginia Tech, I teach CLA 2464: Mythology, Philosophy and Video Games. The focus of this class is on the function of games in modern times and the function of myth in ancient times. As ancient peoples developed stories and ritual through mythic belief, so we develop stories and ritual through gameplay. We explore the extent to which the role and identity of the hero changed through time, and whether the archetypes pertinent to myth are the same as archetypes pertinent to games. We explore gender roles and societal norms, and eventually tackle the big question: How do myths and games help humans to face the real world around them?

Students are often inclined to view the humanities as something removed from their lived experience. Using games as the medium of exploring themes of the humanities, my class encourages students to see the universality of the human experience while not quashing the identity of the individual.

My 30-minute paper explains how I conduct this class. After describing the syllabus and activities, I will speak about potential student learning outcomes and the transferable skills acquired in this class.

Christine Steer is an instructor of Latin and Classical Studies in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures at Virginia Tech, USA. She holds a BA from Virginia Tech; a second BA from Cambridge University in music history; an M.Phil. from Cambridge University in Archaeology and Anthropology. She is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Classics at the University of Florida. She is an instructor, costumer, historical reenactor, historical gardener, and life-long player of games.

Learning the Ancient Greek Language via Video Games

Is it possible to learn the ancient Greek language via video game? And is it possible even for students with Special Learning Disorders? Many are the studies that focus on the intersection between video games and classical studies, however, the majority reflects on the reception of the classical world within the video game itself rather than on the possible learning benefits of using video games to teach the language. Thus, it still seems to be lacking research on the use of video games to learn the ancient Greek language, culture and literature. In the light of these motives, within the development of her PhD's research, the researcher is developing a story-based video game to teach the ancient Greek language to 13-14 years old English speaker students. The story is written in ancient Greek and consists in an ancient Greece-themed mystery that the students should solve while learning and using ancient Greek. The researcher aims to find out if a video game build on the pedagogical approaches of Digital Game-Based Learning and Universal Design of Learning could better motivate students, increase their intercultural competence and vocabulary retention, as well as allow students with Specific Learning Disorders to approach ancient Greek and enjoy it.

Irene Di Gioia concluded her bachelor's degree in Classical Studies at the University of Bologna in March 2020 with an Erasmus period of 6 months at the University of Leipzig in Germany where she has been language tutor for the Italian language. In October 2022 she obtained her master's degree at the Università per Stranieri di Siena in Didactics of Italian as a foreign language with a thesis on the use of digital resources to teach ancient Greek online.

Since November 2022 she has been doing her PhD in Didactics of Classical Languages (with focus on ancient Greek) at the University of Göttingen in Germany in cotutelle with Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna in Italy and she has been working for the Italian company Sirius Game as Head of Didactics, Research and Development. With this company, she has developed in Italian two learning video games to learn ancient Greek. Since October 2023 she has been teaching Italian at the University Language Center of University of Göttingen and she is subject expert in ancient Greek language and culture at the University of Bologna.

Lingua Vitae: Teaching Latin in Virtual Reality

Greek and Latin have long suffered from being deemed “dead languages”. Enrollments have declined at many universities, and the traditional methods of learning these languages often offer limited opportunities for student engagement, emphasizing the memorization of vocabulary and grammar. While beneficial to students’ improvement of English vocabulary and writing skills, textbooks often frustrate students due to little or no emphasis on speaking and creative/narrative writing skills, tools highly emphasized in modern languages. However, shifts in modern language acquisition, both in classroom settings and in the invention of apps such as Duolingo and Babbel, have led to new approaches in the teaching of ancient Greek and Latin at the secondary and post-secondary levels. These approaches include more oral communicative and cultural components and thinking along the lines of narrative and task-based learning.

Our approach is to take the concept of language immersion and apply it to a virtual immersive space, recreating the Roman Forum in 3D in 46 BCE. The *Lingua Vitae* project seeks not to replace traditional textbooks, but to enhance their teachings using more modern and innovative learning strategies and tools. Through the creation of an interactive, virtual ancient environment we aim to eliminate the distance students often feel when studying cultures which thrived millennia ago. We have crafted a narrative where the player takes on the role of a young poet, named Titus, documenting a military triumph in the late Republic. “Titus” holds small conversations with a variety of characters in Latin as the narrative of the story unfolds.

In this paper, we will discuss the development of the project; research completed on VR, education, and language acquisition; challenges we have faced along the way; the (promising) results of our preliminary user studies; and future steps. Through this project we hope to demonstrate that Latin is more appropriately a “language of life” (*lingua vitae*).

Lissa Crofton-Sleigh is Lecturer in the Classics Department at Santa Clara University, where she also serves on the advisory council of the Digital Humanities Initiative. She earned a B.A. in Greek and Latin, with a minor in Music History, from UCLA, and her M.A. and Ph.D in Classics from the University of Washington, Seattle. Her research spans from Latin literature and ancient Roman culture, in particular the connections between poetry and built environments (which helped to spark her interest in the uses of XR in the humanities), to classical reception in music, especially opera and heavy metal.

Ancient Manuscripts, Ancient Languages, and a Post-Keyboard World: Research and Teaching in Mixed Reality

Mixed Reality, as an emerging technology, is still something that seems to belong to science fiction and Hollywood movies. Whether it is Tony Stark in *Avengers: Endgame* running simulations via holograms in his living room to unlock time travel, or K's relationship with his holographic partner Joi in *Blade Runner 2049*, the blending of the real world with holographic surrogates seems far off in the distance in the context of everyday life. However, Microsoft HoloLens2 and Apple Vision Pro headsets have already made the development of interactive holograms a reality. Spatial computing is advancing the concept of a post-keyboard world, i.e. the obsolescence of traditional desktop and laptop computers. For the Humanities, the initial question is simple. How can this new technology be incorporated into the workflows of researchers and instructors? After all, 3D modelling, which is the foundation for creating a hologram, is increasingly becoming common in the study of cultural heritage objects (CHOs). 3D models offer new ways to interact with and investigate CHOs. And those 3D models are, for the most part, ready to be implemented into a Mixed Reality environment. Nevertheless, there are a few more complex questions that arise. What are the challenges in creating Mixed Reality applications? What skillsets are required? Can a researcher in the Humanities perform this task on their own, or is a larger interdisciplinary team required? In researching and teaching, is there any great difference between interacting with a 3D model on a computer vs. a hologram projected by a headset?

The purpose of this paper is to address these issues by providing an initial report on the use of HoloLens2 in studying ancient manuscripts and in language learning. Using 3D models of papyri from Herculaneum and of Ancient Greek, I have developed prototype applications.

Dr. James H. Brusuelas is Associate Professor of Classics in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Kentucky, as well an affiliate of EduceLab. His research is broad and interdisciplinary. In Classics he has published books and articles on Greek papyrology (especially in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri Series), Greek and Latin scholia in papyri and mediaeval manuscripts, and Greek and Latin Literature in general. In Computer Science and Digital Humanities, his publications have focused on crowdsourcing, human-computer interaction, and artificial intelligence and ancient languages. While at the University of Oxford, U.K., from 2010 to 2018 Brusuelas wrote and oversaw multiple grant funded projects as project manager and Co-Investigator. Grant funding bodies included the NEH, NSF, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (U.K.). At the University of Kentucky, he is Co-Investigator on a Mellon funded project devoted to the virtual unrolling of Herculaneum papyri (ancient books) and the use of artificial intelligence to extract the carbon ink text trapped inside these damaged artefacts. He is also Co-Principal Investigator on a NEH funded project that is proposing new editorial conventions for ancient texts that have been edited using artificial intelligence and advanced imaging. In 2023 Dr Brusuelas received a UK copyright award for language learning software for Mixed Reality technology. As a Launch Blue UAccel graduate, his emerging startup, LangXR, is laying the foundation for new language learning environments in three dimensions that combine artificial intelligence and holograms. He received his PhD from the University of California Irvine in 2008.

Rome: The Game. Creating an Online Course as an Interactive Adventure Game

This presentation will discuss the design of the online, lower-division course *Rome: The Game*, cross-listed in the History of Art and Architecture Department and Writing Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In the course/game, which features a choose-your-own-adventure-style interactive narrative created using Twine and the Unity game engine, undergraduate students play the role of a graduate student who is sent to Rome by a Getty Museum curator in order to solve a mystery involving an ancient statue found in the museum's storeroom. Along the way, the student (or player) visits local museums and areas of cultural interest, gives tours of ancient Roman monuments and sites, becomes a trench supervisor on an archaeological excavation, and encounters the shadowy world of the tombaroli (tomb robbers) and the mafia-run black market for antiquities. This presentation will discuss aspects of pedagogical game design such as how the narrative is crafted to invite students to play inside an interactive, multimedia storyworld where they form meaningful relationships with characters, interact with course materials and assessments (all presented in-game), and work to solve a mystery about an ancient Roman statue. Grounded in relevant research from several fields—such as game studies, educational psychology, and communication studies—we will argue that creating an online Classical Archaeology course in the style of an interactive, narrative-driven digital game presents a model for engaging and effective online learning—one that goes beyond conventional virtual learning to offer an innovative, active, and deeply immersive model for online game-based pedagogy within Classics.

Co-Presenters:

Claudia Moser is Associate Professor in the History of Art & Architecture Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Trained as a Roman Archaeologist, her research and teaching focus on the material culture of Roman religion and the economics of religion.

Christian Thomas is Associate Director of the Center for Digital Games Research and Continuing Lecturer in the Writing Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His research and teaching engage with digital games for learning, multimedia storytelling, and game-based learning.