Unorthodox Professors: World War One in Videogames and on YouTube

For

HSTR 499

Dr. Peter Cook (Supervisor)

Dr. Kristin Semmens (Second Reader)

and Dr. Jill Walshaw (Chair)

In order to fulfill the requirements of a History (Honours) Bachelor of Arts at the University of Victoria for:

Jordan Dean Crocker

V00800359

April 4, 2017

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction	1
Chapter II: Literature Review	8
Chapter III: Videogames	14
Chapter IV: YouTube	23
Chapter V: A Note on Education	35
Chapter VI: Conclusion	37
Bibliography	39

Chapter I: Introduction

In his seminal work on film and history, Robert Rosenstone struggled with the question of the representation of history in feature films. Famously, he concluded:

> To accept film-makers as historians… is to accept a new sort of history. The medium and its practices for constructing the past [A1]– all ensure that the historical world on film will be different from that on the page. In terms of informational content, intellectual density, or theoretical insight, film will always be less complex than written history. Yet its moving images and sound scapes [A2][A3]will create experiential and emotional complexities of a sort unknown upon the printed page… the historical film can convey much about the past to us and thereby provide some sort of knowledge and understanding – even if we cannot specify exactly what the contours of such understanding are.[1][A4][A5]

Here, Rosenstone argues that the medium of film, which at the time had been an often-overlooked way of representing the past, should be understood as a legitimate form of history and that our criteria for analysing film need to change.[2] Today, due to academics such as Rosenstone and Natalie Zemon-Davis, analysing films is becoming more widely accepted and written about by academics.[3]

However, as our modern world changes, so too does the technology that the public has at its disposal. Film may have recently become more commonly discussed in academic circles, but there are other forms of media [A6]which are primarily based on moving images and grip us the same way as film, such as videogames and YouTube. They create experiences that cannot be had in a static text because they introduce sound and images in order to engage and entertain. These media are also becoming increasingly popular, especially with younger demographics.

---

[1] Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2012), 181.
[2] Ibid., 177, 185.
[3] Robert A. Rosenstone, "A historian in spite of myself," *Rethinking History* 11, no.4 (December 2007): 589, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642520701652145.

Beginning from humble origins, videogames have become an increasingly influential force in the entertainment industry. According to the Pew Research Centre, seventy-seven per cent of men and fifty-seven per cent of women between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine have had some experience in playing videogames.[4] Of course, this statistic considers all videogames and genres, but the popularity of the historical videogame should not be overlooked. For example, the popular videogame series *Call of Duty* [A7][A8]had its beginnings with a game about World War Two (WWII) in 2003. So far, the series has thirteen titles to its name and has been produced since the mid-2000s. More recently, *Battlefield 1* is an example of a historical videogame which has seen commercial success. In fact, *Battlefield 1* contributed heavily to the success of Electronic Arts (EA), the publisher of the game. During the third quarter of 2016, EA reported a seven per cent increase in revenues to just over two billion dollars on an adjusted basis, largely due to the success of *Battlefield 1*.[5] Due to such success, it becomes necessary to analyse the impact of historical videogames on historical analysis[A9]. After all, if moving images can teach about the past in distinct ways (as Rosenstone concedes), one must ask whether videogames can reasonably contribute to a discussion of historical events. While there are many games which can be analysed, this paper focuses [A10][A11]on two recent games that depict the era [A12]of World War One (WWI): *Battlefield 1* and *Victoria II*.

---

[4] Maeve Duggan, "1. Who plays video games and identifies as a 'gamer,'" *Pew Research Centre*, December 15, 2015, http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/12/15/gaming-and-gamers/.
[5] Anya George Tharakan, "EA profit, revenue top estimates on strong 'Battlefield 1' sales," *Reuters*, January 31, 2017, Technology News, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-electronic-arts-results-idUSKBN15F2LQ.

Battlefield 1 is a first-person shooter (FPS) videogame which immerses players in the combat of WWI. As pointed out above, it was also one of the most commercially successful games for EA in 2016. *Battlefield 1* follows the model as set out in typical FPS games: fast-paced action, unlimited respawns and a point-of-view representing a single protagonist. What makes *Battlefield 1* somewhat unique in the genre of first-person shooters is that the game has a campaign which is told through six distinct war stories[A13] in which the player assumes various roles as soldiers on the side of the Allies.[6] This [A14]includes helping Arab nationalists in the Ottoman Empire, aiding the Italians in their assaults on Austria-Hungary, or assisting British pilots over the skies of France.[7] While all these stories are varied and make for interesting gameplay, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the game is the prologue mission named "Storm of Steel." During the mission, users are able to play as African-American soldiers [A15]undertaking a mission to hold positions in the trenches and then counterattacking the German lines.[8] In a jarring departure from the conventions of the FPS genre, the death of the player's character is final with no opportunities to respawn, with the game even displaying their year of death.[9] This happens multiple times during the mission as, when one soldier falls, the player takes the role of another one.[10] This gives a sense of emotional complexity that simply cannot be recreated in a written historical text. There is almost a sense of

---

[6] Electronic Arts, *Battlefield 1*, directed by Jörgen Carlström, Stefan Strandberg and Lars Gustavsson (Stockholm, Sweden: EA DICE, 2016).
[7] Ibid.
[8] Electronic Arts, "Storm of Steel," *Battlefield 1*, directed by Jörgen Carlström, Stefan Strandberg and Lars Gustavsson (Stockholm, Sweden: EA DICE, 2016).
[9] Ibid.; I am including the word 'their' instead of 'his' or 'her' to include gender neutral-language, as one can play as both male and female characters in the campaign. Both genders can die over the course of the game.
[10] Ibid.

permanent loss. This brings gravity to the game world that does not usually appear in other genres and formats. In a way, it personalises the war and puts faces to the events.

Whereas *Battlefield 1*[A16] places the player in the midst of combat on the ground, much like a thematic sequence similar to the opening scenes of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, *Victoria II* is more akin to the experience of playing the board game *Risk*. The game takes place between 1836 and 1936.[11] The player directs one of the countries which existed in 1836 and makes diplomatic, economic, and military decisions in response to circumstances generated by the program's algorithms.[12] The game reproduces the basic technological and geopolitical realities of the Victorian and WWI eras, but between the decision-making of players and the computer-generated events, events may unfold in ways that depart radically from actual history.[13] For example, neither the alliance system nor the battles of WWI are inevitable. In other words, the game is likely to produce a counterfactual history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This leads to an intriguing aspect of the game: that WWI, while a plausible occurrence, is not an inevitable event. This view is embraced by professional historians who emphasize the contingency and interplay of multiple causes. One the most important aspects of the game is the international crisis mechanic, which determines whether or not a war will occur.[14] As well, *Victoria II* has a technology system that requires research to be conducted in military, social, and economic ideas, which gives players a greater sense of the scientific

[11] Paradox Entertainment, *Victoria II*, directed by Thomas Johnansson (Stockholm, Sweden: Paradox Development Studio, 2010).
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

and social advancements occurring in the 19th and early 20th centuries.[15] These features are discussed at length later in the paper.

YouTube is another visual platform [A17]and form of new media which has emerged in recent years. Similar to videogames, it also informs a younger audience. According to YouTube's most recent statistics, the site boasts over a billion users and reaches more eighteen to thirty-four and eighteen to forty-nine year olds than any cable network in the United States.[16] This means YouTube is becoming increasingly popular and is looked to more often for entertainment, which occasionally includes history.[17] For the purposes of this paper, the primary sources analysed are the YouTube channels *Crash Course World History*, *The Great War*, and *History Respawned*.

Crash Course World History is a video series created by the Green Brothers, Hank and John.[18] It is essentially a survey course for those who are curious about the past. WWI makes an appearance in four episodes: "How World War I Started: Crash Course World History 209," "Who Started World War I: Crash Course World History 210," "Archdukes, Cynicism, and World War I: Crash Course World History #36," and "American in World War I: Crash Course US History #30." In this series, John Green explains complex historical problems as well as the general accepted history of the war. The series is actually written by John Green's high school teacher, Raoul Meyer, while

---

[15] Paradox, *Victoria II*.
[16] YouTube, "Statistics," https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html (accessed 15 February 2017).
[17] It should be noted for the purposes of this paper that YouTube is a platform, which means that YouTube itself does not create content, it provides it. Creators upload videos to the platform, which are then viewed by anyone. As such, there is a wide array of sources that YouTube can provide.
[18] *Crash Course*, "Crash Course is creating Smarter People," Patreon, https://www.patreon.com/crashcourse (accessed 20 January 2017).

Stan Muller and Tim Barrett serve as editors. According to the creators, the purpose of *Crash Course* is to "create free, high-quality educational videos used by teachers and learners of all kinds."[19] The series is thus explicitly pedagogical in intent and represents a Rankean view of history: to tell what actually happened. In[A18] regards to WWI, they certainly discuss the big issues with the war.

Another video series on YouTube with content on WWI is *The Great War*. This series follows WWI week-by-week in order to mark the centennial of the conflict.[20] The channel even includes some special episodes about certain countries, people and groups.[21] It is a very in-depth narrative account of the war. The team behind *The Great War* describe themselves as a "dedicated group of around five Berlin-based people most of whom work full time for this project as employees of *Mediakraft Networks*, a German multi channel network."[22] Their work to make WWI relevant again often involves using the publicly accepted history of the war and does not necessarily challenge historical thought. The channel does not go into a vast amount of detail about the war, but does discuss the significant points, much like a typical classroom lecture might do.

The third YouTube source that this paper will be analysing is *History Respawned*, defined by its creator, Robert Whitaker, as "a show where historians consider historical video games."[23] Whitaker is an Assistant Professor with the Waggonner Center at

---

[19] *Crash Course*, "Smarter People."
[20] *THE GREAT WAR*, "Indy Neidell is creating THE GREAT WAR DOCUMENTARY SERIES," Patreon, https://www.patreon.com/thegreatwar (accessed 20 January 2017).
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] *History Respawned*, "About," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyx1mPZXobOxCyzO2CwmDZA/about (accessed 20 January 2017).

Louisiana Tech University.[24] This series bridges [A19]the videogame genre and the YouTube platform, in that Whitaker is analysing games such as *Battlefield 1* in order to examine "the controversy over the game's depiction of the war… and the general embellishments and inaccuracies."[25] By doing so, Whitaker discusses the issues facing the entertainment industry and its depictions of war in general. What is interesting is that Whitaker and his guest for the WWI episode, Chris Kempshall, argue that the inaccuracies in games is "on us" (that is, on academic historians) who must become more involved in game development.[26]

Overall, videogames and YouTube are becoming increasingly popular in modern society and as a result are teaching younger audiences about history. While some channels on YouTube do try and take a documentary-style approach to history,[27] videogames should be evaluated on how well they convey historical information, instead of their accuracy, given their 'what could have been' counterfactual histories. By analysing the previously mentioned primary works and secondary sources, I argue that, for the time being, the work being done in videogames and YouTube is sufficient to convey historical information about WWI in terms of trench warfare, the reasons for the war, and the political alliance system, but historians need to begin to challenge the narratives being developed by videogame developers and YouTube creators.

[A20]

---

[24] "History Respawned: Battlefield 1," YouTube video, "Description," posted by *History Respawned*, November 17, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHXzMhY9-VU&t=1161s.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 32:53 – 33:17.
[27] For example, they attempt to re-create the past as "what really happened."

Chapter II: Literature Review

Given the topic of videogames and YouTube, secondary sources were particularly difficult to locate given the lack of academics writing on these topics. For videogames, the secondary sources obtained to understand representations of the past included those which are focused on studying the use of videogames and sources regarding the historical plausibility of videogames. In this way, videogames are similar to feature films and fictional works because videogames are designed to allow players to create their own fictions within certain parameters of historical plausibility, or rather, 'what might happen.' One of the sources on videogames, *Consuming History*, by Jerome de Groot, [A21] discusses this topic. The argument is part of a larger project about how history is "consumed" in a wide range of popular activities and entertainments, such as videogames, but also through documentaries, historical re-enactments and other activities. Regarding videogames, De Groot's main point is that it is difficult to see multiple perspectives in videogames, especially in FPS games, but historical awareness is increased and videogames encourage a very individual experience of history.[28] As De Groot writes:

> …the player is at once a powerful figure but at the same time an avatar that can easily be destroyed; at once a small cog in the military machine and at the same time crucially important to the war. The experience of history is at once othered and simultaneously enfranchising – the war takes place around and above the player, but their experience of history is fragmented, ontological and particularised.[29] [A22]

[28] Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 134 – 137.
[29] Ibid., 136.

The second survey of history in videogames that I will be using is *The First World War in Computer Games* by Chris Kempshall. In this book, Kempshall argues that interest in WWI is increasing,[A23] but that there remains "a lack of real understanding [of the war] in its nature."[30] As historians, he argues, we can no longer ignore what has happened in gaming; he states, "The First World War 'lives' in games, it is only the beginning."[31] Kempshall also discusses other videogames other than the ones analysed here,[A24] so it will be his general conclusions which are used to evaluate WWI in videogames. Kempshall examines the games *Verdun*, *The Great War Mod*, and *Valiant Hearts*.

The sentiment that videogames are becoming more popular and warrant developing a "cohesive and comprehensive approach to historical videogames" is expressed in the next secondary source, "Privileging Form Over Content: Analysing Historical Videogames," by Adam Chapman. Chapman essentially analyses historical videogames and concludes that historians need to develop a cohesive and comprehensive methodology [A25]in order to assess how videogames privilege form over content.[32] The other secondary sources for videogames remain as studies. One is *Learning by Doing* by Clark Aldrich. In its [A26]beginning chapter, Aldrich interviews prominent individuals in videogames and asks how videogame developers should consider history in games. Jane Boston, of Lucas

---

[30] Chris Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 103, https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/book/10.1057/9781137491763.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Adam Chapman, "Privileging Form Over Content: Analysing Historical Videogames," *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no.2 (Spring 2012): n.p, http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-2/privileging-form-over-content-by-adam-chapman/.

Learning Limited, states that people need to be increasingly challenged.[33] There are four things videogame simulations can teach: understanding big ideas and concepts, dealing with time and scale, making rational decisions and transporting the audience to a different time[A27].[34] Aldrich then asks Will Wright, the creator of videogames such as *The Sims* and *SimCity*, how accurate videogames should be in order to be a valid teaching tool.[35] Wright answers that: "While… simulation[s] would fail at being predictive, it would teach both the range of possibilities… [and] it teaches that you can't rely on predicting the exact outcome and how to deal with randomness."[36] Essentially, videogames are good for understanding how situations might have occurred, but to treat them as non-fiction would be problematic; therefore, one must be careful of the conclusions possibly drawn from videogames[A28].

Another source that involves study is *Playing Games in School: Video Games and Simulations for Primary and Secondary Education* by Atsusi Hirumi. Using the study of students in a high school environment, Hirumi is able to demonstrate that games were a positive influence for students learning about the Second World War.[37] Students would often be more engaged with material and so would better understand more complex

---

[33] Chris Aldrich, *Learning by Doing: A Comprehensive Guide to Simulations, Computer Games, and Pedagogy in e-Learning and Other Educational Experiences* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2005), xxix.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., xxxi.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Atsusi Hirumi, *Playing Games in School: Video Games and Simulations for Primary and Secondary Education* (Washington, D.C: International Society for Technology in Education, 2010), 189.

matters.[38] For example, students directing Germany's war effort via a videogame were better able to appreciate the necessity of acquiring strategic resources[A29].[39]

Another study focused secondary source is Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen's article, "Third Generation Educational Use of Computer Games."[A30] In the article, Nielsen references his own studies in using strategy games and history and comes away from his 2005 study which found that "students initially learn the same in history when using videogames *but have better retention* [emphasis added]."[40] His ultimate conclusion is that videogames should be tailored to content in class and educational videogames should become more viable by being more than about spelling and math (as most educational videogames are).[41]

Given the way videogames often treat history as "what might have happened," videogames are connected with film and fictional works; or rather, due to videogames emphasizing a cinematic fiction of history, such as that the player can ultimately choose the destiny of the war in *Battlefield 1*, videogames become ways of interpreting the past that involve more than a simple accurate and inaccurate dichotomy. The secondary resources of Robert Rosenstone's *History on Film / Film on History* and Natalie Zemon Davis' article "Movie or Monograph? A Historian/Filmmaker's Perspective" emphasize the need for new criteria to analyse historical films and how historians should become

---

[38] Hirumi, *Playing Games*, 189.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Simon Egenfeldt-Nelson, "Third Generation Use of Computer Games," *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia* 16, no.3 (2007): 270, http://egenfeldt.eu/papers/third_generation_JEM_egenfeldt-nielsen.pdf.
[41] Ibid., 277.

more involved in the process of making the historical entertainment in conjunction with producers and directors.[42]

There were many challenges to finding secondary sources for YouTube, given the lack of academic works addressing this relatively recent phenomenon. Robert Whitaker will be helpful here because of his academic article on "Privileging Form Over Content" and Jerome De Groot will also prove insightful due to his discussion of historical documentaries.[43] This is needed because YouTube creators often emphasize narrating history and conveying history "as it really was" through ostensibly evidence-based research. In his work, De Groot argues the historical documentary is a fragmentation of the historical image and leads to a "certain absence and an unconscious but active appreciation as a viewer of the paradox of watching the past."[44] In essence, the viewer is placed in a paradox with historical documentaries. They are enabled to gain a more complex engagement with the past, but are also distanced from it.[45]

In speaking of the past, it is crucial that there be included some sources on WWI. For this paper, I relied on three main sources on WWI. They are: *The Sleepwalkers* by Christopher Clark, *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World* by Jeremy Black and *A History of the Great War* by Erin Brose. Essentially, these three works are to serve

---

[42] Rosenstone, *History on Film*, 181; Natalie Zemon Davis, "Movie or Monograph? A Historian/Filmmaker's Perspective," *The Public Historian* 25, no.3 (Summer 2003): 47, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2003.25.3.45.
[43] Robert Whitaker, "Backward Compatible: Gamers as a Public History Audience." *Perspectives on History* (January 2016): n.p., https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2016/backward-compatible-gamers-as-a-public-history-audience; De Groot, *Consuming History*, 150.
[44] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 150.
[45] Ibid.

as background to WWI and how today's historians explain and interpret crucial features of the war.[A31][46]

Overall, finding these sources proved to a difficult task, given how recent videogames and YouTube are as vehicles for discussing history, but by understanding the literature, there comes an intriguing dichotomy which exists between the fiction and the non-fiction and the 'what could have been' versus the 'what actually happened.' In the end, these are both valuable forms of historical interpretations and should be evaluated as separate genres of historical representation.

[46] Jeremy Black, *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 1 – 3; Erin Dorn Brose, *A History of the Great War: World War One and the International Crisis of the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), ix – xiii; Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), xxi – xxix.

Chapter III: Videogames

Videogames are the first form of historical representation to be analysed in this paper. The two games being examined are *Battlefield 1* and *Victoria II*. These games will be analysed with regard to their depiction of trench warfare, their explanations of the war's causes, and the dynamics of the WWI alliance system[A32]. It will be argued that while these games are not perfect representations of WWI, they bring the audience closer to the realities of the war. As with Rosenstone's conclusion about the experiential and emotional complexities of film, videogames allow for an awareness of the war that is simply not achieved in other media.

Trench warfare was a main aspect of WWI. As Jeremy Black points out: "…stalemate and trench warfare reflected the nature of modern industrial warfare once both sides had committed large numbers of troops and lacked the ability to accomplish a breakthrough."[47] Black continues by putting the blame for the stalemates upon the "organizational, operational and tactical dimensions" of the war and explains that a lack of resources, poor generalship, and outdated tactics all contributed to a war which hardly

[47] Black, *Making of the Modern World*, 57 – 58.

shifted battle lines.[48] Surprisingly, this reality of war does not appear in either *Battlefield 1* or *Victoria II*. It appears that both games largely ignore the concept of trench warfare in favour of decisive battles.

The first game, *Battlefield 1*, is a first-person shooter, or FPS, videogame which simulates for its players [A33]a Europe decimated by war. In fact, one aspect which makes *Battlefield 1* unique is its landscape destruction simulator. As gamers play throughout a multiplayer match, the earth is scorched and mortars leave deep craters in the ground.[49] While there are destructive environments, strangely absent from these war-torn areas are the trenches. They make a brief appearance in the prologue mission of the game, "Storm of Steel," but most of the game is played through ruined cities or relatively open landscapes scattered with occasional buildings.[50] If played in multiplayer mode, the game is even more fast-paced and chaotic. In this way, the player is spared the tedium of successive days of inaction in the trenches.[51] Blimps and armoured trains participate, and planes soar in the air, but artillery is almost absent and cover can be found anywhere; no-man's-land does not exist.[52] In this way, *Battlefield 1* appears to fail the audience in its representations of the past. Of course, the game needed to earn money, so the combat was sped up. This is a problem with historical representation. Rosenstone would probably

[48] Ibid., 58.
[49] Electronic Arts, *Battlefield 1*.
[50] Ibid.; Electronic Arts, "Storm of Steel," *Battlefield 1*.
[51] Electronic Arts, *Battlefield 1*.
[52] Ibid.

point out that while *Battlefield 1* certainly has dramatic appeal, it lacks the true authenticity, or 'look,' of the period.[53]

Victoria II is also not particularly a good representation of trench warfare, as battles are conducted as if the player was the leader of a nation. This means that battles are fought using dice rolls, leadership ability, technology advantages and the number of men involved in combat.[54] While these are certainly important aspects to any battle (dice rolls could be seen as the 'random chance' factor that is outside of the player's control), there is still much to be desired about the combat system in *Victoria II*. Soldiers and battles turn into nothing but flashing red numbers (which let you know how many men are lost per turn) with a single, impersonal, three-dimensional figure representing the entire army.[55] Yet, *Victoria II*, while clearly not [A34]providing an experience which demonstrates the reality of trench warfare, comes closer to the experience of decision makers and generals behind the lines, for whom the war unfolded on maps and in memoranda.

If trench warfare does not exist or is rarely depicted [A35]in *Battlefield 1* and *Victoria II*, the reasons for the beginning of WWI are also not clearly represented. While it is difficult to determine how WWI began, it is clear the assassination of the Archduke of Austria, Franz Ferdinand, on 28 June 1914, ignited the tensions that had existed in Europe.[56] These tensions existed due to a militant Germany, a humiliated France, an

[53] Rosenstone, *History on Film*, 169.
[54] Paradox, *Victoria II*.
[55] Paradox, *Victoria II*.
[56] Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 367.

ambivalent United Kingdom and the competing Eastern powers Austria-Hungary and Russia.[57] *Battlefield 1* hardly examines these factors. The closest the game gets to discussing the reasons for the war comes during the prologue mission which is designed in order for the player to understand how needless and violent WWI turned out to be.[58] In this way, *Battlefield 1* clearly showcases the general belief of soldiers and the general public in 1917 - 1918, in that the war is seen as unnecessary and draining Europe of its sons.[59] It is understandable this was a strong belief in the European population, as thirty-one per cent of European men who joined the army received wounds, which equated to approximately twenty-one million men. This does not include the figures for the dead.[60] Portraying the idea that the war was a waste of lives is an admirable [A36]pursuit for a videogame and a valid historical representation of the past, in consulting with Rosenstone's criteria, as the game clearly emphasizes the horrors of war. However, the reason for the war is not explicitly discussed in the game.

Victoria II better explains the reasons countries went to war. It is important to note though, that WWI is not actually an inevitable event in all playthroughs of the game. Instead, *Victoria II* forces the player to make alliances, manage a national economy, monitor class relations domestically and keep their country ahead in technology.[61] These systems are complex and the game can be difficult to master [A37]as a result, but this is also *Victoria II*'s strength. By showing how complex managing a country can be and by

[57] Ibid., 123.
[58] Electronic Arts, "Storm of Steel," *Battlefield 1*.
[59] Brose, *History of the Great War*, 150.
[60] Brose, *History of the Great War*, 151.
[61] Paradox, *Victoria II*.

identifying all of the factors which contribute to an industrialised war machine, the game gives players a detailed grasp on the situations which existed in the decades leading up to WWI. While it does not explain the beginnings of the historical WWI, *Victoria II* certainly allows for the player to understand some of the calculations of the Great Powers and the forces that acted upon the leaders of those nations in deciding to go to war, as the player must analyse how warfare will be harmful or beneficial to their nation.

On the topic of spheres of influence, both games have different ideas on how to approach the systems of alliances which existed in Europe in 1914. The alliance systems which existed during this period were the Triple Alliance between Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary and, opposing the Triple Alliance, the Triple Entente.[62] The Entente was a grouping of Russia, the United Kingdom (UK) and France, who were bound together through mutual treaties of defence, such as the Anglo-Russian Convention (an agreement between the UK and Russia), the Franco-Russian Alliance (between France and Russia) and the Entente Cordial (between the UK and France).[63]

Battlefield 1 does not mention these alliance systems. In the game, the player is only given the goal of eliminating their enemies.[64] The enemy happens to be whatever is attempting to kill [A38]the player during the game, whether the enemy is German or American. The game basically decides for the player who the enemies and allies are and, as player, the possibility of altering or influencing those alliances is effectively foreclosed. While this might be an accurate reflection of the experience of the average

[62] Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 122.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Electronic Arts, *Battlefield 1*.

soldier, it does not engage critically with the idea of the alliance systems prior to the outbreak of war. In fact, in single-player[A39],[65] users are only able to play as a combatant representing a few of the warring powers: the UK, the United States of America, Italy[A40], Australia, and Arab nationalists.[66] Russia and France are to be added through downloadable content (DLC). It is the fact that the player [A41]is unable to take on the role of Germans or Austro-Hungarians that is the most egregious weakness [A42]of *Battlefield 1*. Not allowing players to experience the war through the eyes of a German or Austro-Hungarian soldier is problematic because it evokes a sense of British and American righteousness and paints the German-speaking powers, much like they were in WWII, as the undemocratic and militaristic enemies of the free English-speaking world. Yet, history proves this interpretation is incorrect. While Germany and Austria-Hungary deserve some blame for WWI, the Entente powers of France, Russia and the UK were also responsible for WWI.[67] As Christopher Clark points out, "without the two blocs, the war could not have broken out the way that it did. The bipolar system structured the environment in which the crucial decisions were made."[68] Here, Clark does not blame a particular nation for the war, but the bipolar alliance system. Therefore, it is not only German and Austro-Hungarian leaders who were responsible for the war, but the alliance system that had divided the continent into opposing blocks. Furthermore, this

---

[65] For those that may be unfamiliar with videogames, 'single-player' is a mode of play in which is played by only one person. Generally, these sections appear in videogames through a 'campaign mode.' Multiplayer is another mode in which multiple users play the game. This is done through different 'matches' with thousands of games occurring at the same time on servers.
[66] Electronic Arts, *Battlefield 1*; I mention Italy as an Entente power in this section because *Battlefield 1* takes place in 1918, when Italy had already defected from the Central Powers and instead joined the Entente.
[67] Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 123.
[68] Ibid.

interpretation also shows how there were no real 'bad' nations and 'good' nations. All nations were responsible.[69] Unfortunately, *Battlefield 1* does not delve into this nuance and instead leaves the player with the impression that the Germans are warmongering and militant.

Victoria II's interpretation of the systems of alliances is more nuanced than *Battlefield 1*. Playing as the leader of a great power in 1836, a gamer may decide to establish an alliance or rivalry with any country that existed in the world at that time.[70] This allows for a range of counterfactual events. However, it is still possible for something similar to WWI to occur. Indeed, the game's baseline starting point does place certain countries within predetermined spheres of influence and virtually guarantees that conflict will occur often over particular issues.[71] For example, the artificial intelligence (AI) [A43]of France in the game often attempts to incorporate Alsace-Lorraine into its sphere of influence, and as Prussia, Alsace-Lorraine is crucial in order to form Germany.[72] This sets up a conflict between France and Prussia and will lead to tensions between France and the newly created Germany, similar to what occurred in history.[73] Of course, *Victoria II* is a counterfactual game, and as a result, France may not necessarily attempt to incorporate Alsace-Lorraine in its sphere of influence. Instead, it could focus its attention somewhere geographically different, or it may even decide to have an

[69] Ibid.
[70] Paradox, *Victoria II*.
[71] Paradox, *Victoria II*.
[72] Ibid; To clarify, the AI in the context of videogames run a complex, but limited set of algorithms that mimic the actions of a human opponent. They are not equivalent to high-order cognition programs.
[73] Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 124.

alliance with Prussia.[74] The opportunity to literally make history is one of the strengths of *Victoria II*, as it implicitly argues for the notion that historical events are not inevitable but rather the result of extremely complicated factors. However, even with this implicit argument, *Victoria II* does set preferences for the AI and the personalities of certain nations create the likelihood of certain outcomes occurring, including a large conflict like WWI.[75] Moreover, given the counterfactual nature of the game, WWI may not necessarily break out over the area of Bosnia, but the probability of a global crisis occurring is still extremely high. This is due to the 'international crisis' system. Essentially, this system is a game mechanic which enables smaller, minor powers to appeal to the eight Great Powers of the world in order to solve a dispute.[76] For the smaller nation, a 'backer' is required in the form of one of the eight Great Powers.[77] After this occurs, an international crisis is triggered. During an international crisis, the Great Powers are encouraged to take a side in the conflict.[78] In fact, if they decide to remain neutral, there is a penalty to the nations' prestige.[79] Unfortunately, the negative consequence of joining a side is that afterwards the player becomes committed to that side of the conflict and with each Great Power joining in the crisis, the crisis deepens and becomes more difficult to resolve.[80] The process can take many months [A44]in-game to end and with each day the game has a greater chance of creating a World War between

[74] Paradox, *Victoria II*.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Paradox, *Victoria II*.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

the Great Powers.[81] To make a simple analogy to WWI, Serbia would be considered the smaller nation claiming lands in Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire would be the 'backer' of Serbia, precipitating the crisis after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. Eventually, Germany would decide to choose the side of Austria, and France would choose the side of Russia and Serbia. Italy would be a neutral third power and the UK would be a supporter of France and Russia. Between the time of the beginning of the crisis (the assassination of the Archduke) to the beginning of the war, the crisis was further deepened as negotiations failed between the Great Powers and eventually war was declared. In this way, *Victoria II*'s model can produce an accurate simulation [A45]of the beginning of the war and is able to implicitly explain the beginning of WWI and the alliance system that existed in Europe at the time of the war. In this way, it is a valid example of historical representation.

In the end, videogames include a wide variety of games that have certain strengths and weaknesses when it comes to depicting WWI in terms of historical representation. On the one hand, *Battlefield 1* excels when it is depicting the human element of war and for giving an overall 'sense' of 'what could have happened' during WWI, but it fails with the elements chosen to be analysed in this thesis; namely, *Battlefield 1* does not cover trench warfare in depth, nor does it discuss the reasons for the war or explain the political alliance system. [A46]It does, however, give a good representation of the unnecessary nature of the war. On the other hand, *Victoria II* sacrifices the personal for other elements. Trench warfare is not shown or examined in detail, but it covers the reasons for

[81] Ibid.

the war and the political alliance system. While it may not always be accurate, *Victoria II* does certainly provide an example of how to represent the past in videogaming. Overall, videogames may not be accurate, but this is a fairly simplistic argument to make. Similar to Rosenstone's analysis of film, videogames must also be evaluated on how well they represent history. In this way, *Battlefield 1* and *Victoria II* adequately give a sense of what occurred in the past and, in a way, brings it closer to modern audiences. Despite their flaws, videogames provide an awareness of the past and are here to remain.

Chapter IV: YouTube

Videogames may only act as simulations of history, but YouTube is another, and perhaps more conventional, form of representing the past. YouTube is a platform, so this paper will analyse three YouTube channels instead of the platform itself. These channels are *Crash Course World History*, *The Great War* and *History Respawned* and they will be analysed in relation to the same themes used to assess videogames: trench warfare, the reasons for the war, and the WWI alliance system. This paper will argue that these channels aim to teach their viewers about the past and gives a good sense of "what really happened" in history.

The trenches, as previously expressed, were important aspects of WWI. In some regard, all of the channels discussed in this paper examine the trenches in some capacity.

Crash Course World History discusses the trenches during "Archdukes, Cynicism, and World War I." As host John Green says: "The lines of trenches on the Western Front covered only about 400 miles as the crow flies, but because of the endless zigzagging, the trenches themselves may have run as much as 25 000 miles."[82] Here, there are specific details about the trenches which the video discusses and they use the trenches in order to transition into another of their topics. For example, after Green delivers the line about trenches, he immediately states that trench warfare did not exist in every theatre of war, and in fact, he uses this as an opportunity to briefly introduce the more forgotten Eastern Front and the Ottoman theatre of war.[83] This creates a video which is constantly engaging and allows Green to mention multiple areas of interest to the audience, without sacrificing accuracy.

The Great War also speaks of trench warfare, but does this slightly differently. *The Great War* makes specific videos about trench warfare. For example, their video "Trench Warfare in World War 1" identifies the trenches as a worthwhile topic in itself because, as host Indiana Neidell explains, "When people think of the First World War, one of the very first images that comes to mind is of soldiers in the filthy muddy trenches, fighting, smoking, or just being miserable."[84] While Neidell appears to betray his channel's objectives for covering the trenches (it is a popular topic and therefore the video will generate more views, which will generate more revenue) the video itself covers much

---

[82] "Archdukes, Cynicism, and World War I: Crash Course World History #36," YouTube video, 3:14 – 3:40, posted by *Crash Course*, September 27, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHXzMhY9-VU&t=1161s.
[83] "Archdukes, Cynicism, and World War I," 3:14 – 3:40, *Crash Course*.
[84] "Trench Warfare in World War 1: THE GREAT WAR Special," YouTube video, 0:00 – 0:15, posted by *The Great War*, November 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P92guhd7d-8&t=190s.

about the trenches. The history of trenches, how they came about, how they were supplied and what their conditions were, are all covered by Neidell.[85] Indeed, the detail with which Neidell covers the trenches seems to resonate with viewers, judging by the view count of the episode, which has one of the highest number of views on the channel, at 483 566 as of 4 April 2017.[86] Furthermore, *The Great War* makes sure to cite their materials in the description of their video. Their sources are often modern (the oldest work cited is from 2000) and include both German and English works.[87] Moreover, the works the makers of the show cite are by respected academics such as Peter Hart and John Keegan.[88]

History Respawned takes this analysis in a somewhat different direction; because its mandate is to review videogames, it is inherently limited in what it can discuss. In terms of trench warfare during WWI, Whitaker interviews historian Chris Kemphall about the inaccuracies in *Battlefield 1* in depicting the trenches, or rather the lack of time the player spends in the trenches. In the following quote, Kempshall is attempting to explain why the developers of *Battlefield 1*, Dice, decided to cut most trench warfare from their game[A47]. As he states:

> [Dice] [A48]avoids them almost entirely… because there's an element of the First [World War] that isn't fun to play constantly… I wonder if [it] basically becomes boring and [if] it would lose some of its emotional impact.[89]

[85] Ibid., 0:15 – 12:02.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] "Trench Warfare in World War 1," 0:00 – 0:15, *The Great War*.
[89] "History Respawned: Battlefield 1," 7:30 – 8:40, *History Respawned*.

In this way, YouTube is being used as a forum for critiquing other genres' representations of history, and in doing so, brings to the platform[A49] a fact-based discussion of history that is similar to an academic discourse. Indeed, *History Respawned* frequently takes the form of a discussion between two academic historians. For the episode on *Battlefield 1*, the video is both a discussion and an interview with Chris Kempshall, with the two historians discussing the inaccuracies and embellishments of trench warfare of *Battlefield 1*.[90] Overall, trench warfare is a topic which is treated with as much historical accuracy as possible in the three channels analysed in this paper and this approach successfully brings trench warfare closer to the audience as something which 'really happened.'

While YouTube channels may be factually correct in their discussions on trench warfare, the reasons for the outbreak of WWI are also an important barometer of how YouTube channels portray the past. *Crash Course* addresses the reasons for the war explicitly in a video series titled "How World War I Started" and "Who Started World War I." In "How World War I Started," Green explains [A50]how difficult it can be to describe how a historical event occurred. As Green notes:

> The question we're looking at today is how. And that's a much more modest question because we can simply discuss a series of events but it's still a complicated one because when you're talking about how, you're always picking from an uncountable number of things that happened.[91]

Here, Green explains an important aspect about historical understanding; namely, he is examining not only how the war occurred, but also how the audience must be careful in analysing the past and how cause and effect impacts our understanding of what occurred.

---

[90] Ibid.

[91] "How World War I Started: Crash Course World History 209," YouTube video, 1:39 – 1:50, posted by *Crash Course*, September 12, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd2ch4XV84s.

This is a surprising account of history, as Green moves away from a simple narrative account of the war, but also moves into the significance of historical study itself. Of course, Green does examine how the war occurred, but he also does this in-depth and critically. For example, in "Who Started World War I," Green discusses how previous historians have argued that it was German militarism which began the war. He examines this argument through speaking to his "Me from the Past" [A51]persona who typically supplies Green the most commonly agreed-upon response in public discourse. Essentially, "Me from the Past" is John Green, but before he became educated about the subject matter. For the public, this is an effective device for showing how consciousness can be transformed through historical investigation. The following is a conversation on the reasons for the beginning of WWI:

Me from the Past (MP): "Mr. Green, Mr. Green! That's easy, the Germans started the war."
Green: "Well, Me from the Past, as it happens many historians and British politicians would agree with you. I mean, you have an opinion that can be defended…"
MP: "…Maybe they… really liked war? I'm not really in the defending positions business…"
Green: "…noted…. there's more to life than that."[92]

This quote exemplifies Green's engaging with commonly understood public discourse and prompts Green's excursion into who started the war because, as he notes, history is more complicated than the Germans simply wanting war. He discusses how this argument began in the 1960s when Fritz Fischer identified Germany as the chief cause of the war, but he also explains this idea likely began in public opinion due to Germany's guilt being written into the Treaty of Versailles, the "war guilt clause" in Article 231.[93] He also explains how it could be understandable that the European public would believe

[92] "Who Started World War I: Crash Course World History 210," YouTube video, 0:19 – 0:43, posted by *Crash Course*, September 20, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pFCpKtwCkI.
[93] Ibid., 1:09 – 1:29.

in German aggression being the main reason for the war given how WWII began due to the German invasion of Poland, and given the proximity of WWII to readers of the 1960s.[94] Having stated these points, Green goes on to refute the idea of Germany being solely responsible for the war. He accomplishes this by pointing out the irony of him living in the United States, a country which spends more on national defence than any other nation on Earth. As he says:

> …attributing characteristics like militarism or authoritarianism to entire national populations is a little problematic. Also, one nation's militarism is another nation's strong national defence, and when you live in the country, as I do, that spends more on defence than any other nation, it's probably not that good of an idea to call people militaristic.[95]

Here, Green makes history relevant to the present and begins to encourage the audience to question their own views and how similar they could be to the people of the past.

The Great War takes a slightly different approach for the reasoning for the war, as it operates under a constrained structure; namely, a week-by-week narration of the main events of the war itself. The channel does not provide a forum to analyse the arguments for the war and largely stays on the narrative and event-focused path. In the episode "The Outbreak of WWI – How Europe Spiraled Into the Great War," Neidell emphasizes the assassination of the Archduke of Austria-Hungary and the blank cheque given to Austria by Germany. Yet even *The Great War* attempts to dispel the idea that Germany was solely responsible for the war. As Neidell notes: "As an aside here[A52] – [the idea to go to war] was the opinion of the generals and some government leaders but it was not the

[94] Ibid., 1:29 – 1:45.
[95] "Who Started World War I," 1:58 – 2:20, *Crash Course*.

opinion of the German people at large."[96] Here, Neidell argues against the contemporary popular opinion of Germany starting the war and also continues the idea of teaching the audience about 'what really happened.' Neidell even points out that on 6 July 1914, the Kaiser took a three-week vacation to Norway.[97] As Neidell says, "[this] is kind of not what you'd do if you were basically the most powerful man in the world [and about to go to war]."[98] In this quote, Neidell does not offer any significant discussions about history, but he does suggest that commonly agreed upon opinions in the public (and some academic circles) do not always constitute the 'truth' of history. While it would have been better for *The Great War* to look at the wider academic discourse, the channel offers a solid narrative account of the war and attempts to make its own argument for the reasons for WWI. The channel does this by discussing how Austria-Hungary was the main culprit for the war. As Neidell states, "…Everybody except Austria thought [that the Serbian response to the Austrian ultimatum] was just fine, but Austria was determined to go to war."[99] Here, *The Great War* is able to position itself in wider debates on the reasons for WWI and also is able to later convey the complexity of placing blame on a country for WWI, as multiple powers were involved.

---

[96] "The Outbreak of WWI – How Europe Spiraled Into the GREAT WAR – Week 1," YouTube video, 3:30 – 3:38, posted by *The Great War*, July 28, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FgaL0xIazk&t=213s; Interestingly, Neidell fits this bit of historical interpretation 'as an aside,' or something which is incidental to the relations of events, as he believes other factors to be more important factors to the beginning of the war. For the narrative *The Great War* is attempting to tell, this is understandable because the main focus of this video is what the strongest causal links are to the beginning of the war, given the short video length.

[97] "The Outbreak of WWI," 4:12, *The Great War*.

[98] Ibid.

[99] "The Outbreak of WWI," 6:02 – 6:08, *The Great War*.

As for *History Respawned*, it is still confined to looking at *Battlefield 1* and WWI more generally. As such, the discussion revolves around the war and does not speak of how it began in the first place, but Kempshall does allude to the fact that *Battlefield 1* does not address the reasons for the war, similar to my criticism of the game. Kempshall says:

> [Dice] declare that this is the war to end all wars and ended nothing. They never really tell you what the war was for… they mention something at one point about old empires not being able to exert will or anything like that but actually what the war was for and the outcomes of it are basically pushed to the side.[100]

Kempshall later attributes this lack of reasoning for the war to WWI having an easy-to-understand narrative, when compared to WWII.[101] In the end, these channels make a serious commitment about history and about 'getting it right' when it comes to the reasons for the war, if history may be able to be studied in an objective way.

The final point of examination for this paper is to assess if the YouTube platform is able 'to get it right' in regards to how the channels represent the political alliance system which existed in WWI. *Crash Course World History* begins this discussion with the video "How World War I Started." The main focus of this episode is to examine the events of July and August 1914 and how an assassination turned into a pan-European conflict. Green uses the 'Thought Bubble' [A53]to explain what occurred and how the alliances led to war. The 'Thought Bubble' is a device which is fully animated. Instead of the audience watching Green sitting statically in his chair, this device continues to hold the audience's attention while having moving images (cartoon figures) showing the

[100] "History Respawned: Battlefield 1," 11:38 – 11:57, *History Respawned*.
[101] "History Respawned: Battlefield 1," 11:57 – 12:05, *History Respawned*.

complexities of a topic. Green provides a voice-over for the animations as he continues to examine the occurrences leading up to an event. Green informs the viewer that, while he usually does not make a point of addressing dates specifically in the show, he will make an exception for the origins of WWI because of the sequence of events and their importance to the history of the war.[102] Green then goes on to mention that Russia had begun pre-mobilization efforts on 25 July 1914 and was the first nation to mobilize on 30 July 1914.[103] Austria had declared war on 28 July 1914, but as Green explains, this war was isolated between Serbia and Austria, with Russia not being threatened directly.[104] Germany warned Russia to stand down, but mobilized on 1 August 1914 and declared war on Russia.[105] France also mobilized on 1 August in support of Russia and Germany formally declared war on France on 3 August 1914.[106] Here, Green sorts through the minutiae of explaining both how the war began and how the alliances precipitated these declarations of war, ultimately tying the significance of the war to modern lessons for the audience. Green states:

> …please remember that we are always in the middle of a 'how.' Those living in June and July of 1914 could never have imagined how significant that month would be for human history… we also can't imagine what our decisions today will mean in 100 years.[107]

Here, Green once again makes sure to insert gravity into the value of present actions and how history is constantly being made.

---

[102] "How World War I Started," 5:52 – 5:58, *Crash Course*.
[103] Ibid., 5:58 – 7:04.
[104] "How World War I Started," 5:58 – 7:04, *Crash Course*.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 8:19 – 8:35.

The Great War may not dwell on the broader historical implications, but still presents an accurate account of the alliance system. The video "Europe Prior to World War I: Alliances and Enemies" not only explicitly examines Europe's web of alliances, but also mentions why the alliances existed. Neidell looks at the historical rivalry between Germany and France, Russian fears for the Dardanelles, and even the shaky alliance between the United Kingdom and France (they had contingency plans to invade the other in the early 20th century) as background to why the alliances existed in the way they did in 1914.[108] Neidell specifically delves into why the British may have sought protection in their historical rival France by explaining the Anglo-German naval race and explores how Germany provoked Britain to seek further protection in light of Germany challenging Britain's major defence: their navy.[109] While Neidell and the *Great War* team may not challenge commonly agreed-upon ideas about the beginning of the war, they give a better sense of the motivations of the European powers by explaining how the situation in June 1914 came to be. For example, in Russia's case, Neidell speaks of Russia's previous humiliations by Japan in 1905 and Russia's inability to prevent Bosnian annexation in 1908, a factor which contributed to the Tsar's later readiness to aggressively defend Russian interests in the Balkans.[110] In this way, *The Great War* alludes to a key element in historical studies; namely, that history seemingly cannot be defined to a clean timeframe[A54]. For instance, the reasons for WWI cannot be

---

[108] "Europe Prior to World War I: Alliances and Enemies: PRELUDE TO WWI – Part 1/3," YouTube video, 5:58 – 6:45, posted by *The Great War*, July 31, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f11CKYB2FCA.
[109] Ibid., 7:06 – 8:52.
[110] "Tinderbox Europe – From Balkan Troubles to World War: PRELUDE TO WWI – Part 2/3," YouTube video, 6:55 – 7:00, posted by *The Great War*, August 1, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYrofaDfMKI.

determined by looking at the year 1914 alone: one must go back to 1905 and (much more often) go back even further to understand events in history. Indeed, one may even examine the Mughal Empire to understand Russian aggressiveness, as an example. The point is that *The Great War* teaches the audience about the causal relationship of history and how, to understand one event, historians must look back even further. Moreover, this shows how history is not always simple.

This sentiment contrasts with a game such as *Battlefield 1*, which attempts to simplify the war. *History Respawned* analyses the simplicity of *Battlefield 1* during the episode dealing with the videogame. Whitaker makes mention of the alliances and how the game privileges the Entente powers, and specifically the English-speaking Americans and British, during *Battlefield 1*'s campaign.[111] This is a problematic interpretation, as Whitaker and Kempshall allude to in their review of the game, because it oversimplifies WWI. Indeed, Kempshall finds the fact that the Central Powers were left out of the game "curious," especially when considering one of the main aspects of the war is that "there are no bad guys. Everybody suffers in this war and if there are no bad guys, why can't you play as Germany?"[112] Here, *History Respawned* acknowledges the shortcomings of *Battlefield 1* when it comes to portraying WWI and questions why the alliance of the Central Powers is not represented as playable characters during the campaign, or even as 'good guys.' Overall, the three channels analysed here often ask broader questions about history, further educating those who are willing to watch their episodes.

---

[111] "History Respawned: Battlefield 1," 22:28, *History Respawned*.
[112] Ibid., 24:14 – 24:19.

In the end, YouTube may not be a conventional medium through which to understand the past, yet these channels demonstrate a conscious striving for accuracy in the pursuit of historical 'truth' and to represent how history 'actually was.' The channels *Crash Course World History*, *The Great War* and *History Respawned* all address trench warfare, the reasons for the war and the WWI alliance system in their own ways, but fundamentally share this same core principle. These channels also seek to educate their audiences, and with many young people turning to YouTube increasingly for entertainment and learning, this may not be a negative development in the way history is disseminated to the public.

Chapter V: A Note on Education

Before continuing to the main conclusion of this paper, it appears to be necessary to acknowledge the implicit argument that is being in this thesis; namely, that younger people are capable of learning from videogames and YouTube. While statistics have been cited earlier in this work about how often young people are turning to these media, this is a fundamental, and until now implicit, argument of this paper, which will be addressed in this brief section in the form of Simon Egenfeldt's article and Atsusi Hirumi's book, *Playing Games in School*.

Videogames and YouTube are capable of teaching younger audiences about the past. There have been several academic articles and works which point to the videogame as becoming options for students to learn new material. As Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen points out after analysing twenty different studies, "[the studies] overwhelmingly support that you learn from computer games, and that most students appreciate games in

education."[113] This leads Egenfeldt-Nelson to conclude that, due to the fact that students can learn from games, there needs to be a broader learning approach to computer games and "we need to appreciate how content, skills and attitudes are not just transferable, and neither merely a question of interaction between player and computer game."[114]

A specific study that brings videogames and education together is found in Atsusi Hirumi's *Playing Games in School*. As Hirumi notes in the study, before the introduction of videogames, "some students were clearly disengaged in the regular classroom: heads were down on desks and eyes were unfocused."[115] When the game began to be played, in this case *Making History* by developer Muzzy Lane, the atmosphere was drastically different.[116] *Making History* is a World War II turn-based strategy game where players play against each other in setting policy, creating treaties and planning military strategy.[117] In the classroom, students began to chat more frequently and plan their own strategies as they were broken into groups and played as a specific country.[118] While not a scientific study, both the teacher and the students noted that "the students were more likely to learn if they were engaged and attentive, which was the case when the game was used."[119] Here, Atsusi makes the ultimate claim that videogames are beneficial when used in conjunction with knowledge from a teacher, but videogames are found outside of

[113] Egenfeldt-Nelson, "Use of Computer Games," 272.
[114] Ibid., 275.
[115] Hirumi, *Playing Games*, 187.
[116] Ibid., 188.
[117] Ibid., 185.
[118] Ibid., 188.
[119] Ibid., 189.

educational settings and, whether we as historians approve of this or not, they engage their audiences and provide a sense of what the past 'could have been.'[120]

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Natalie Zemon Davis thought of two main ideas for historians to keep in mind when they are working on, and evaluating, popular representations of history in the media, specifically film. As she states, "Under historical criteria, I mean two things: first, constructing an image of a past time and place that is plausible, and second, following the lines of the historical plot so that it does not do serious violence to what evidence we have."[121] In this way, videogames and YouTube appear to meet Davis' criteria. On the one hand, if evaluating videogames based on their representations of history, similar to Rosenstone and his analysis of film, then *Battlefield 1* and *Victoria II* have different strengths and weaknesses when looking through the lens of how the games represent WWI through trench warfare, the reasons for the war and the systems of alliances which

[120] YouTube is not a topic explicitly discussed here because of the lack of secondary sources to firmly argue that YouTube definitively teaches audiences about the past; however, if the results from studies on videogames are to be believed, it is highly likely that the engagement of YouTube videos also leads to increased historical awareness.
[121] Zemon Davis, "Movie or Monograph?", 47.

existed before the war. *Battlefield 1* gives the audience a good sense of how the war was perceived and the human toll of the war, but is guilty of oversimplifying the war to make it more appealing to audiences. *Victoria II* is about diplomacy, and as a result, showcases the difficulty of negotiations between the world powers and how difficult it must have been to stop a political crisis from devolving into war. On the other hand, YouTube and the three channels *Crash Course World History, The Great War* and *History Respawned* attempt to depict the past 'as it actually was' and adheres more closely to a documentary style approach, where 'truth' is the first objective. As one can appreciate from these channels, the ideas of this 'truth' of the war can vary, due to the different interpretations of what was important to the ideas of trench warfare, the reasons for the war and the systems of alliances. Much like a debate between academics, individuals with different biases decide that some elements are more important. In fact, John Green alludes to this when he says:

> …looking at the diplomatic causes of the war also reveals something to us about the pitfalls of writing history… historians have to sift through all of these sources and make choices about which ones to emphasize… we had to make choices that many of you will disagree with. Either because you don't think we gave enough evidence or because you don't like the things that we emphasized, and that's great. It's these constructive and critical conversations that lead us to dig deeper, to consult more primary sources, to read more broadly, and that in turn leads to a richer understanding of the world and a more engaged life.[122]

Here, Green acknowledges the biases of the show and acknowledges that its interpretation of the war is not necessarily the only one that can be made, making *Crash Course* good educational material, not only about WWI, but also about history itself.

[122] "Who Started World War I," 9:25 – 10:11, *Crash Course*.

In the end, younger audiences are engaging more with the media of videogames and YouTube and are learning about history through these media. Due to the centennial of the conflict in the 2010s, WWI has captured the public imagination and as a result is increasingly represented through these media. These forms of new media also appear to be here to stay, and will only continue to capture more of the public imagination in the future. Therefore, while these sources of history perform their respective functions in representing the past, we, as historians, need to begin to engage with these media more regularly in order to ensure the past is represented, as Davis argues, in a matter that 'does not do serious violence to what evidence we have.'[123]

Bibliography

Aldrich, Chris. *Learning by Doing: A Comprehensive Guide to Simulations, Computer Games, and Pedagogy in e-Learning and Other Educational Experiences*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2005.

"Archdukes, Cynicism, and World War I: Crash Course World History #36." YouTube video. Posted by *Crash Course*, September 27, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHXzMhY9-VU&t=1161s.

Black, Jeremy. *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World*. New York: Continuum, 2011.

Brose, Erin Dorn. *A History of the Great War: World War One and the International Crisis of the Early Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Chapman, Adam. "Privileging Form Over Content: Analysing Historical Videogames." *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no.2 (Spring 2012): n.p. http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-2/privileging-form-over-content-by-adam-chapman/.

Clark, Christopher. *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2012.

[123] Zemon Davis, "Movie or Monograph?", 47.

Crash Course. "Crash Course is creating Smarter People." Patreon. https://www.patreon.com/crashcourse (accessed 20 January 2017).

Davis, Natalie Zemon. "Movie or Monograph? A Historian/Filmmaker's Perspective." *The Public Historian* 25, no.3 (Summer 2003): 45-48. JSTOR.

De Groot, Jerome. *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Duggan, Maeve. "1. Who plays video games and identifies as a 'gamer." *Pew Research Center* (December 15, 2015), http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/12/15/gaming-and-gamers/.

Electronic Arts. *Battlefield 1*. Directed by Jörgen Carlström, Stefan Strandberg and Lars Gustavsson. Stockholm, Sweden: EA DICE, 2016.

Electronic Arts. "Storm of Steel." *Battlefield 1*. Directed by Jörgen Carlström, Stefan Strandberg and Lars Gustavsson. Stockholm, Sweden: EA DICE, 2016.

Egenfeldt-Nelson, Simon. "Third Generation Use of Computer Games." *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia* 16, no.3 (2007): 263 - 281, http://egenfeldt.eu/papers/third_generation_JEM_egenfeldt-nielsen.pdf.

"Europe Prior to World War I: Alliances and Enemies: PRELUDE TO WWI – Part 1/3." YouTube video. Posted by *The Great War*, July 31, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f11CKYB2FCA.

Hirumi, Atsusi. *Playing Games in School: Video Games and Simulations for Primary and Secondary Education*. Washington, D.C: International Society for Technology in Education, 2010.

History Respawned. "About." YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyx1mPZXobOxCyzO2CwmDZA/about (accessed 20 January 2017).

"History Respawned: Battlefield 1." YouTube video. Posted by *History Respawned*, November 17, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHXzMhY9-VU&t=1161s.

"How World War I Started: Crash Course World History 209." YouTube video. Posted by *Crash Course*, September 12, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd2ch4XV84s.

Kempshall, Chris. *The First World War in Computer Games*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/book/10.1057/9781137491763.

Paradox Entertainment. *Victoria II*. Directed by Thomas Johnansson. Stockholm, Sweden: Paradox Development Studio, 2010.

Rosenstone, Robert A. *History on Film / Film on History*. 2nd edition. New York: Pearson, 2012.

Rosenstone, Robert A. "A historian in spite of myself," *Rethinking History* 11, no.4 (December 2007): 589 - 595, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642520701652145.

Tharakan, Anya George. "EA profit, revenue top estimates on strong 'Battlefield 1' sales." Reuters. January 31, 2017. Technology News. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-electronic-arts-results-idUSKBN15F2LQ.

THE GREAT WAR. "Indy Neidell is creating THE GREAT WAR DOCUMENTARY SERIES." Patreon. https://www.patreon.com/thegreatwar (accessed 20 January 2017).

"The Outbreak of WWI – How Europe Spiraled Into the GREAT WAR – Week 1." YouTube video. Posted by *The Great War*, July 28, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FgaL0xIazk&t=213s.

"Tinderbox Europe – From Balkan Troubles to World War: PRELUDE TO WWI – Part 2/3." YouTube video. Posted by *The Great War*, August 1, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYrofaDfMKI.

"Trench Warfare in World War 1: THE GREAT WAR Special." YouTube video. Posted by *The Great War*, November 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P92guhd7d-8&t=190s.

Whitaker, Robert. "Backward Compatible: Gamers as a Public History Audience." *Perspectives on History* (January 2016): n.p., https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2016/backward-compatible-gamers-as-a-public-history-audience.

"Who Started World War I: Crash Course World History 210." YouTube video. Posted by *Crash Course*, September 20, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pFCpKtwCkI.

YouTube. "Statistics." https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html (accessed 15 February 2017).