Ruins in Digital Games: A DiGRA 2019 Workshop

The contemporary figure of the ruin - ancient, modern, imagined or abstract - has persisted in the West from at least the Middle Ages to the present, transforming from romantic appreciation to post-war rubble and post-industrial decay; a wealth of ruin-imagery can be found in painting, literature, architecture, film and music. The resilience of the ruin speaks not only to the endurance of themes that are etched onto, or read through, the stones of the ruin, but also to the complexity of the trope, and its shifting, overlapping significations. As critics and theorists of ruination - including Rose Macaulay, Robert Ginsberg, Caitlin Desilvey, Dylan Trigg and Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle - have argued, the ruin stands as a monument to timeless endurance at the same time as it constitutes a memento mori and a symbol of impermanence and entropy; aesthetically, it encapsulates the beauty of surviving form as well as the sublimity of the fragment; politically, it can stand as 'heritage' or the remnant of empire around which a nostalgic form of national identity is celebrated, at the same time as it can mark a radical act of resistance.

The co-organisers of this workshop, Daniel Vella and Emma Fraser, argue that the strikingly numerous ruin-images in digital games thus stand in relation to a long tradition, both aesthetically and politically. Collectively, such images reflect and reinstate a number of inextricably intertwined, albeit thematically divergent, traditions of the ruin. The ruins of Pripyat in the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* games or of Washington DC in *Fallout 3* confront us with the ruins of modernity. The inhuman lost civilizations of *Shadow of the Colossus* or *The Last Guardian* present us with the ruin as the sublime, unaccountable trace of an unknowable past. *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* presents us with a vision of the classical world already bearing the mark of ruination.

It is no surprise, then, that the theme of ruins in digital games is one that has been explored in an established body of existing work (Watts 2011; Vella 2011; Lowe 2012; Fraser 2016; Fuchs 2016; Janik 2018). It is a theme that intersects with a number of research projects and concerns that are increasingly current in digital game studies: among many others, the theme of ruination relates to questions of architecture and landscape in games; game aesthetics; historical game studies; post-apocalyptic games; and so on.

This workshop aims to consolidate existing research on, or related to, ruins in digital games, and to bring researchers working in the field into a common discussion - potentially as the first step towards establishing a research network or community. Individual presentations will be followed by a communal discussion.

Relevant themes for the workshop would include, but are not limited to:
- Nostalgia, memory, remembrance and forgetting
- The aesthetics of the game ruin: the sublime, the uncanny, the picturesque
- Game ruins in relation to artistic traditions: (Neo)classicism, Romanticism, postmodernism
- Game ruins and cultural heritage
- Games and the ruins of antiquity and modernity
- Representations and reworkings of history in digital games
- Game ruins and the tradition of Haikyo
- Death, decay and game ruins as memento mori
- Dystopian and apocalyptic imagery in games
- The politics of the game ruin: as monument to empire, as site of resistance, colonial or decolonising, etc.
- Game ruins and architectural tradition(s)
- The spatiality of game ruins

- Exploration, interpretation, mystery, discovery: the game ruin and the player
- Games as ruins: abandonment, incompletion, brokenness

Format

The workshop will run for 170 minutes. The first section of the workshop will consist of 10 to 15-minute individual presentations. In line with the theme, experimental presentations (for example visual or interactive formats) will also be encouraged. The final hour will be dedicated to a moderated discussion and Q&A session involving all speakers and the audience.

HOW TO SUBMIT

Please submit an abstract of up to 400 words (plus bibliography) to (daniel.m.vella@um.edu.mt **AND** e.p.fraser@leeds.ac.uk) by June 1, 2019. Selections will be made by the organizers.

Given the exploratory nature of this workshop, work-in-progress submissions are welcome.

All workshop presenters have to be registered for the main DiGRA 2019 conference. However, it is not necessary for workshop presenters to have papers accepted in the main conference programme.

The workshop sessions are open to all DiGRA 2019 participants (non-presenters included).

BEFORE YOU SUBMIT: If you are not familiar with DiGRA, please check the website for conference fees, location, etc ahead of submitting an abstract: http://www.digra2019.org/

IMPORTANT DATES

Submission deadline: June 1 2019, 12.00 (GMT)
Notifications: June 6 2019 (at the latest)
Workshop: 6th August 2019, 16.00 - 18.50 (GMT+9)

ORGANIZERS
Daniel Vella (University of Malta)
Emma Fraser (University of Leeds)