Body Count

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This presentation

• Ongoing work on representations of ability and disability in games, focusing this time on *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided*

Acknowledgements:

• A journal length version of the analysis of metaphor in *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided* has been accepted for *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* – as "Bodies that Count: Augmentation and Knowledge in a Science Fiction Game" (ed.s K. Allan and R. Cheyne, in press 2019).

• This work is being undertaken with the support of the AHRC as part of a large collaborative, interdisciplinary project, ‘Disability and Community: Dis/engagement, Dis/enfranchisement, Dis/parity and Dissent’ (2016-2020) – aka the D4D project
The D4D project: (2016-2020) Disability and Community: Dis/engagement, Dis/enfranchisement, Dis/parity and Dissent’

8 work-streams: collaboration between artists, academics, activists

D4D’s design was collaboratively work-shopped over several months. Community Partners and academics from a range of disciplines were active in the design from the start. The team came to agree that:

• Community needs to be understood in context, as co-constructed and performed

• Existing structures, discourses and practices (schools, workplaces, epistemologies, media texts) reify, position and perpetuate social groups in particular and sometimes problematic ways…

• Yet these can (at least potentially) become sites of critique, resistance, solidarity and dissent

• There’s diversity within communities and within disability

• More on the D4D project: https://playhouse.wordpress.com/
One of the 8 D4D work-streams: Playful Bodies

• This particular work-stream is made up of 5 units

• Unit 1. Disability perspectives on mainstream culture through science fictions – this is the bit that I will be speaking about this afternoon.

• Unit 2. Event: ‘Hacked Off’ – to critique the dominant tropes within game studies research on disability (e.g. the persistence of deficit and ‘we-fix-u’ models)

• Unit 3. Event with Disability Arts Online, looking at different perspectives on DA practice through ‘generationalism’ and exploring the implications for community and affiliation.

• Unit 4. Event: ‘Troubling legacies and fractured futures’ – exploring the links between disability, eugenics discourse and disability histories (and futures). In collaboration with Esther Fox (artist, CI and community partner).


• More on the D4D project: https://playhouse.wordpress.com/
Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

Eidos Montreal 2016
PS4 version
Method – textual analysis (broadly defined)

In my work on representation in games I’ve been moving between two kinds of ‘textual analysis’

(1) textual analysis narrowly defined, and

(2) textual analysis broadly defined

Textual analysis narrowly defined is about ‘textuality’ and epistemology - see this paper for example. Carr, D (2017) ‘Methodology, Representation, and Games’ for Games and Culture. In which I also mention the 2nd kind -

“A particular version of textual analysis is presented in this article because the topic is methodology. In other contexts, the use of a broader definition of textual analysis might be appropriate. One suggestion for a broad definition would be: Textual analysis is the exploratory application of a specific theory (of trans-textuality, or agency, or affect, for example) to games, through play.”

This presentation features this second kind of ‘textual analysis’ – in this instance, Mitchell and Snyder’s theory of ‘narrative prosthesis’ is being applied to the game-as-played.
Reading from a paper “Bodies that Count: Augmentation and Knowledge in a Science Fiction Game”

Using Mitchell and Snyder’s well known work on ‘Narrative prosthesis’

Key elements of their theory:
• Disability as the materialization of narrative themes
• Disability that evaporates / disappears once it has done its ‘job’
• Disability is ‘hidden’ under metaphor / denied as disability
It’s a game...

Materializing themes through fictional elements

Materializing themes through ludic elements and quantifiable performance
Application to Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

Materializing themes of:
- Violation
- Conspiracy
- Control
- Fragmentation
- Division (‘mankind divided’ up)
- Unreliability and disguise
When disability won’t go away

Mitchell and Snyder note that once disability has ‘done it’s job’ in a narrative, it tends to disappear.

But it doesn’t go away in Deus Ex: MD
Us and Them. Pronouns in DE: MD
Discussion of ‘the Aug incident’, augmentation and workers in DE:MD
Sites, regulation and discipline, obsolescence and otherness – ‘collective’ otherness
summary/findings:

In DE:HR, disability doesn’t disappear because it’s not individualized
Instead, it’s communal
And the community are migrants
They are (decommissioned, defunct, disabled) workers

Implications and questions:
Back to methodology – ‘reading formations’ and embodied interpretation
Following on from this work, I’ve got questions about

- Teleology and happiness
- Discourses of productivity and happiness
- Jensen’s ongoing problems with teleology and productivity
- Disability - Hollow victories and ‘falling short’
Abstract extract...

• contemporary happiness studies, starting with Soderfeldt and Verstraete’s ‘From Comparison to Indices: A disability perspective on the history of happiness’ (2013). Their analysis raises questions about the framing of goal attainment, ability and happiness as synonymous. They identify various historical discourses within which disability is constructed as incompatible with productivity, hence incompatible with happiness.

• Obviously, if “happiness is found where it is expected to be” (Ahmed, 2007/8 p 9), and if disability is framed as ‘naturally’ antipathetic to goal attainment or happiness or agency, there are serious implications for those of us who identify as disabled. Perhaps this is why Halberstam’s suggestion that it’s time to “poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” is so appealing (Halberstam 2011 p 3).

(Carr 2018, DiGRA abstract) –

Notes – so I’m thinking about able-identified/normate culture and about the links between teleological perspectives on ‘happiness’, productivity and ‘approved’ or validated subjectivity – and the implications for disabled subjectivity...or for mainstream constructions of disabled subjectivity (as anti-agentic / non-teleological – whatever the word is for that). I’m thinking about Adam Jensen as a disabled protagonist and ‘double agent’ and how he keeps winning and losing at the same time. For instance...
Embodied interpretations, continued: On teleology, affect and falling short

Even when Adam succeeds, things don’t go well.

“Teleology relates to the final goal of the game. Some games never reach a clear winning state, and could in principle go on endlessly. These games have an infinite teleology, while the games with clearly defined successful outcomes for one or more players are teleologically finite.”


Example:

Adam Jensen’s mission to retrieve the leader of Augmented Rights Coalition, Talos Rucker.
Adam Jensen manages to locate the ARC leader and talk him around (success). Then the ARC leader dies... he's been poisoned / sabotaged (fail).

Note references to history, 'others' and shared identity. Multiple references to the ARC leader as fallible.

Faux-teleology
Adam Jensen knows how to win and lose at the same time.
Returning to questions about embodied interpretations... Affect and interpretation: where do we ‘draw the line? (Is there a line?)
Conclusions

• Deus Ex: Mankind Divided
• Science fictions as enabling critical disability studies perspectives on mainstream culture
• Questions about intersectional subjectivities (as a place to work from / as represented in popular culture)
• Faux teleology: Performing productivity – and all that means, how it feels, and what’s at stake in able-identified culture, and the implications for those of us identifying as / identified as disabled.
For more / for background, see -

- Carr, D (reviewed/in press) Journal Literary and Cultural Disability Studies special issue on the Intersections of Disability and Science Fiction, as "Bodies that Count: Augmentation and Knowledge in a Science Fiction Game" (ed.s K. Allan and R. Cheyne, in press 2019)

- Carr, D (2017) ‘Methodology, Representation, and Games’ for Games and Culture http://journals.sagepub.com/toc/gaca/0/0 or, use this draft version CarrMethodRepGamesOnline)

