

Anthropocene Temporalities in Climate Change Video Games

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

“Where are all the climate change games?” ask Abraham and Jayemanne in their 2017 article. Early attempts at mapping the field of climate change games have yielded few, and often unsatisfying results (Reckien et al. 2013). But, taking their cue from Deborah Jordan that “climate change is so pervasive an issue that it exceeds its own explicit thematization, springing up in other less direct ways” Abraham and Jayemanne conclude, building on work by Alenda Chang, that human-nature interaction features in most, not to say all video games (78). One of the questions they raise is how to “conceptualize this broadening of the climate problem and how it does, or could, appear in games?” (84). My paper proposes a temporal conceptualization well prepared to tackle the abstract nature of climate change, built on the notion of Anthropocene temporality. This angle of investigation is deeply indebted to environmental humanities scholarship on time and temporality by scholars like Barbara Adam and Michelle Bastian as a way of making sense of the current environmental crisis.

In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, Mary Louise Pratt describes the Anthropocene as both a concept and a chronotope. As a concept the term functions as a device, a tool: “an invitation, for Western identified subjects to resituate themselves in the space-time-matter of the planet” (2017, G171). Taken up in writing, Pratt suggests this invitation results in a chronotope, Mikhail Bakhtin’s term to denote: “a particular configuration of time and space that generates stories through which a society can examine itself,” a sort of thickening of time, which makes it “artistically visible” (Bakhtin qtd. in Pratt 2017, G170). I argue that such a thickening of time does not just occur in writing, but also characterizes a number of climate change video games, from Will Wright’s *SimEarth* (Maxis 1990), to better known titles such as *Fate of the World* (Red Redemption 2011), *Anno 2070* (Ubisoft 2011) and *Civilization VI: Gathering Storm*, to indie titles like *The Stillness of the Wind* (Memory of God / Lambic Studios 2019), and forthcoming releases like *Imagine Earth* (Serious Brothers) and *The Universim* (Crytivo).

My paper explores what kind of stories and experiences emerge from the Anthropocene chronotopes that are available in climate change games – whether they perpetuate business as usual narratives that rely on the foreshortening of the future under capitalist logic (‘crunch time’ or the ‘flow time of petrocapiatalism’); apocalyptic narratives that indulge a kind of spectacular fatalism (‘end times’); or more revolutionary alternatives, informed by environmental temporal perspectives like care-time (Puig De La Bellacasa) and deep-time, which contextualizes the present by placing it in the long

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past and deep future of the planet. By looking at experiences of temporality, this paper provides an original angle of analysis within the developing field of environmental video games studies, which stands to uncover the way in which our thinking about the environment is grounded in the way we think about time.

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