

# Interviewed Workers and Industry Worldviews at Ubisoft Montréal's *Assassin's Creed*

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## INTRODUCTION

Videogame companies are made up of capital, resources, and workers. One such group of workers goes to work every day in the largest physical game development studio in the world: Ubisoft Montréal. I interviewed 22 such people who have worked on the *Assassin's Creed* franchise (Ubisoft, 2007), who were selected for their role in the decision-making that led to one of the best-selling franchises in the world. Participants included almost all Creative Directors who ever worked on the franchise, most of its 'Brand Team,' various designers, writers, programmers, artists, and other roles (Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS, LITERATURE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

**Who** decides to put certain worldviews into a game? **How** do they do so, and **why**? These research questions pose two main contributions. Firstly, it adds to our understanding of the inner workings at big game development companies. Most studies are:

1. either cultural-sociological studies of small teams or independent developers (e.g., Bulut, 2021; Keogh, 2023; Ozimek, 2021; Pelletier, 2022), meaning they look primarily at individuals—which is helpful because it shows us how and why games are made by people;
2. or are political-economic studies of large-scale 'AAA' (i.e., big budget) game production (e.g., Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009; Nieborg, 2011; van Roessel & Švelch, 2021; Švelch, 2022), meaning they look primarily at the larger economic structure of development—which is helpful because it shows us how and why games are made by companies.

## Workers

3. However, this study combines a cultural-sociological study of workers at Ubisoft, with a political-economic study of the large-scale AAA corporate context in which they work (cf. Kerr, 2017; O'Donnell, 2014), meaning it looks

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at how and why games are made by people *in* a company—which is helpful because it shows us how and why game-making involves crushing the individuality of workers under corporate capitalist cultural production.

## Worldviews

Secondly, while a lot has been written about which worldviews are represented in videogames and how the “culture industry” more generally produces worldviews, or even “ideology” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947); only a combination of cultural-sociological and political-economic study of how workers (re)produce worldviews can contribute to knowing how such ideologically charged cultural products actually come to exist. *Assassin’s Creed* was chosen as a case study specifically because it is a game *about* worldviews – specifically about (competing) conspiratorial and religious worldviews; which is odd because most of labour force and most of its audience consists of non-religious demographics (de Wildt, 2023).

## METHOD, DATA AND ANALYSIS

Based on 22 interviews (Table 1), five months of ethnography in Montréal, and analysis of internal and external documentation, I argue that the ‘**Who**’ of Ubisoft was once a person with a very clear (anti-religious, anti-dogmatic) idea (Patrice Désilets); while showing how *Assassin’s Creed* became subsequently standardized into a codified manufacturing process. **How?** Marketing, editorial and production teams curb creative teams into reproducing a formula: the commodified ‘marketable’ worldview of *Assassin’s Creed*.

## CONCLUSION:

**Why?** So that this ‘marketable’ (standardized, commodified) worldview can be consumed by everyone; regardless of cultural background or conviction. By providing a genealogy of how one company and its workers successfully accomplished this, this paper adds an empirically grounded perspective on the ‘who,’ ‘why’ and ‘how’ of cultural industries’ and its workers’ successful commodification of worldviews.

## FIGURES AND TABLES

**Table 1:** List of participants, roles and games from the first *Assassin’s Creed* [AC1] (Ubisoft, 2007), to *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey* [Ody] (Ubisoft, 2018). (Order based on International Game Developers’ Association’s “Game Crediting Guidelines” [IGDA, 2014]).

	Name	Role(s)	Games										
			AC1	AC2	Bro	Rev	AC3	AC4	Rog	Uni	Syn	Ori	Ody
1	Patrice Désilets	Original Creator, Creative Director	✓	✓	✓								
2	Jean Guesdon	Head of Brand,	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

		Creative Director, Producer											
3	Alexandre Amancio	Creative Director, Writer, Artist				✓				✓			
4	Alex Hutchinson	Creative Director					✓						
5	Maxime Durand	Brand Historian				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
6	Aymar Azaizia	Brand Content Manager, Production		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Anon-brand	Brand, Production, Marketing	Seven games (anonymized).										
8	Russell Lees	Writer					✓			✓	✓	✓	
9	Mustapha Mahrach	Writer, Level Design Director, Mission Director		✓		✓		✓					✓
10	Anon-writer	Writer	Four games (anonymized).										
11	David Chateau-neuf	Level Design Director	✓										
12	Gaelec Simard	Game Director, Mission Director, Lead Level design	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓			
13	Nicolas Guérin	Level Design Director				✓				✓	✓	✓	
14	Steven Masters	Lead Game Designer	✓		✓		✓						
	Anon-level1	Lead Mission Designer, Level Designer	Five games (anonymized).										

16	Gregory Belacel	Level Designer, Game Designer	✓			✓								
17	Anon-level2	Level Designer, Mission Designer	Three games (anonymized).											
18	Maxime Ciccotti	Mission Designer								✓	✓			
19	Anon-mission	Mission Designer	One game (anonymized).											
20	Anon-tech	Gameplay / AI Programmer	One game (anonymized).											
21	Gilles Beloeil	Concept Artist		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
22	Maxime Faucher	Quality Control, Production		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		

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## ENDNOTES

1 (As a consequence, many of the interviews are not anonymized; they are expert interviews: it did not make sense to, e.g., anonymize the person who came up with the initial concept of *Assassin's Creed*; nor many of the other influential decision-makers in developing the franchise.)