

Quare Representations *In Absentia*: Non-Binary Black Characterization(s) In Video Games

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Why this paper? This article aims to evaluate the recent developments in non-binary Black identities in video games, mainly using discourse analysis, borrowing from other disciplines as well. It is also a confession of failure—not through a lack of trying, but through a resounding absence: the absence of quare people in mainstream video games or, rather, their extremely scarce portrayal. This paper cries for the representation in absentia of non-binary Black characters in a way that mixes gender studies and research-creation. It examines how it has, ultimately, been (im-) possible to write. It is a somewhat tongue-in-cheek adaptation of Boutet’s writing of the self (“écriture de soi” 24) about artistic endeavors—with a twist, as it deals with the writing of itself rather than the creators themselves.

The focal point of this essay is quareness, that is the deep interconnection of LGBTQIA+ and racial identity¹ as a counterpoint to White-perceived queerness; in the words of E. Patrick Johnson, I intend on exploring the limits of this “queer-within-the-queer” identity in video game discourse (1). Further studies have anchored the idea of quare portrayals within cultural studies (Crémieux) and how these had been evolutions from queer to quare representations. The simple yet effective consideration “Who can be quare, and who can be queer?” (Boylorn

¹ Thomas’ definitions of quareness differs in that it encompasses cisgender and heterosexual Black people (Thomas 2017). The importance of Black identity is palpable in this different view of queerness.

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and Adams 85) highlights the subtleties of crossing identities in autoethnographical works. As such, this article is also a cross between several methodologies and frameworks. My linguistics background, and especially, my concentration in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 110-2), take me through several stages, bringing together source materials (games, testimonies, anything pertaining to the questions at hand, from game researchers to actors of the field of games who have dealt with the issue), the interactions of these sources within the bigger context of the video game industry, as well as social context in itself. The games at hand are mostly taken from a pool of commercial games,² nor serious games or games developed by students. This analysis will be undertaken following several methodological and theoretical frameworks. Obviously, research-creation is important, even in video games (Sellier 18), and this will lead some of the explorations, which will borrow from cultural studies (Jenkins 1) as well as discourse analysis (Fairclough 1) and queer methodologies (Ahmed 1) along with queer game studies (Ruberg 32, Shaw 211-4), and minorities in video games (Malkowski and Russworm 1-16). The construction of this paper owes much to the concept of a “mixtape of [quare] thought,” to quote Russworm and Blackmon (1) about Black feminism: another close analysis of intersectional questions in video games. The discourse contained in this present article is also very much situated in another type of quareness: as a white-passing scholar with a North-African parent, as a queer person, as a French non-binary, female-presenting scholar, these experiences mold my sensibilities and the points of view developed here.

When submitting the first abstract for this paper, I had several questions: Is there an auto-ethnographic movement in video games? Are quare identities already implemented in video games?

These questions are prudently asked: they are indeed the questions leading this article, divided in several sections. First, I documented the steps taken to write this article, as well as a presentation of representational issues observed in video games for non-binary and Black characters. The second part will be devoted to the analysis of the depiction and perception of the (very few) non-binary Black characters found in mainstream video games.

² Indie or independent games are developed by small teams, with limited budgets—sometimes even nicknamed “one-dollar games” (Werning) and are, as such, not subjected to the same pressure when it comes to narratives, game mechanics, etc.

Elaborating This Paper: Representation In Video games

So it is important, in future evolutions of video games, to be aware of who is represented, as well as who is not represented, to whoever is speaking and to whoever is silent, that is to say: to focus on practices and identities that are being constructed in the shadow of the most famous productions and which often disagree with their embodiments.³ (Coville 11)

Marion Coville's warning comes as a founded fear: where are non-binary Black people in video games? What is represented in their absence? How are characters read as being non-white, non-cisgender? Ultimately, is it enough? This initial section tells of the tentative movements towards spotting examples to elaborate a robust enough corpus to offer a "mixtape" of sources and questions about queer identities, mainly taken from mainstream games. Now, a few clarifications about video games. "[A] game conveys what it's like to experience the subject as a system of rules" (Anthropy 3). Part of playing is to follow the rules established; part of being a game is to be a system of rules, an opposition traditionally found in the division between *ludus* and *paidia*.⁴ We know, through the study of video game characters, that there is a queer "avant-garde" in video games "because we're willing to do things other people aren't... We take the work of disrupting systems farther than other people can [...] if you're really interested in queering games, you can never rest" (Clark qtd. in Ruberg 1).

Encompassing several identities is uncommon in video games. There may be various reasons for this, such as the rampant tokenization in games, where characters belonging to minorized archetypes (where the dominant character is understood as male, Caucasian and muscular) often only represent one type of minority, be it women, people of color, people with disabilities, etc. This is also what we can see in minority females in popular culture, as Martin shows in movies and TV series where, "for every minority female role on the market, there are countless traditional middle-class US-American white leads" (Martin 8).

³ Personal translation of the original—unless stated otherwise, I am responsible for all translations in this work.

⁴ For a synthesis and an analysis of the dichotomy, see Jensen, 69-80.

Non-Binary Characters. The portrayal of non-binary characters is an ongoing process which seems to be just beginning: “we can observe the appearance of non-binary characters in the media and a societal trend towards inclusivity and breaking down the binary conception of gender” (Rivas Ginel and Theroine 364). Very popular characters may also be invested by players as non-binary, such as fan-made non-binary characters in *Pokemon Reborn* (Kocik 3). This raises several issues, not only regarding the creation of accurate representations, but also how these characterizations are inserted within the media’s binary structure. Non-binary characters demand shifts in phrasings and vocabulary that imply a profound change in how people work in the gaming industry—on all levels. These include character and narrative design, localization and further promotional materials of games after their release, to avoid erasure, or reverting back to the dualistic default.

Personally, I worked on a project a couple of years ago where one of the main characters was a lady that wrote letters to the person she loved, and during six months we were wondering whether it was a man or a woman. So we interpreted it as a man since 99% of the time it is the case. However, two months before the release of the game, during the testing phase, the studio wrote back and told us that it was actually a non-binary character.⁵ (Techoueyres in Rivas Ginel and Theroine 364)

This story shows how easily a character’s non-binary nature might be lost in translation because of the frequent “erasure of non-binary gender identities [...] which are consequences of the non-recognition and a lack of understanding of non-binary genders in society” (Dev et al. 1). This erasure of identity is similar to color blindness when it comes to racism, as both simultaneously evade the issue of otherness, and assert the dominance of the standard model of White, binary identities (Gillborn 101), and the preservation of the unspoken consensus of power dynamics favoring predominant identities.

It is also visible in the way the gaming industry has tackled non-binary people: “while it might be the case that there is good non-binary gender representation in some other games, especially games developed by queer indie game developers [...], this does not always appear in AAA⁶ games” (Heritage,

⁵ Translated by Rivas Ginel and Theroine.

⁶ AAA games are developed by bigger studios and publishers, benefitting from million-dollar budgets and targeted at wide audiences.

227-8). In these games, such as BioWare's *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014), questions revolving around the integration of non-binary characters seems to be met with some resistance. The studio is known for being progressive in the way it portrays characters and minorities (Dym 23) and has included homosexual romances in its famous franchises (*Dragon Age, Mass Effect*), but there is more to creating an inclusive game than just including a gay or a lesbian romance. Some five years after the release of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, BioWare's user experience lead explained that "If you add, for instance, a non-binary player character, you also have to add the dialogue for a non-binary player character [...] That's a lot of content, so in some cases I think it's a question – it's crass, but it's true – it's a question of content. However, we're working on that" (Roos in McGlynn 2). Not including non-binary characters (understood as playable non-binary characters, according to what Roos says) amounts to increasing the workload for the studio. It implies "focus on content, on same-gender sex, and queer couple or marriage plots in ways that are, by and large, still window dressing, as the games provide menu-driven identities and represent sexuality as a series of yes-or-no choices" (Chang 228). Ultimately, "the privileged narrative of heteronormativity is, by design, in the very code of BioWare's video games" (Dym 31). AAA games perpetuate the expectations of dominant groups, and non-binary characterizations are scarce. The case of inherent racism within video games is discussed in more details below.

Black Representations in Video Games. In AAA games, representations have been increasingly diverse. In *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, the Qunari dating option is Black-coded, as he is a very powerful foreigner from another race – quite literally – with massive horns, a muscular body with much bigger proportions than human or elf characters. His animalistic name, the Iron Bull, leaves little to the imagination about his physical prowess. Although not non-binary, his masculinity is made of several nuanced portrayals. First, he engages with the main character in a non-traditional, BDSM romantic partnership (or, if neither are romanced, he ends up with Dorian, the only gay character). His obvious friendship and respect for his second-in-command, Cremissius "Krem" Aclassi,⁷ who comes from enemy land (Tevinter) and who is a trans man, shows non-binary affinities in friendship

⁷ A deeper analysis of the character of Krem is available in a soon-to-be-published paper entitled "My identity by itself causes violence': educative and testimonial moments in queer videogames" (Goudet, n. d.).

if not in love and is in line with his general rejection of norms. The Qunaris are usually represented as stern members of a heavily codified society, which the Iron Bull seems to dismiss. Yet his bisexuality, refusal of monogamous relationship and insistence on consent are as far as this representation of non-normativity will go, in a series of games known for their inclusivity. The Iron Bull is a preliminary example of the way minority characters permit alternative behaviors and non-patriarchal depictions in games coming from studios where Black developers are underrepresented.

Otherness In Video Games: Representations of Romantic Figures. When trying to create a corpus for this article, dating games were my first intuition, as they present many various options. It is possible to date quite a vast array of birds in *Hatoful [sic] Boyfriend* (2011), Lovecraftian goddesses in *Sucker for Love* (2020), or (embody) a tentacled alien in the cooperative card game *Consentacle* (2015). The game *Parasite in Love* (2020) features a brain amoeba who is embodied as a beautiful man to the female main character's perception and who, in the bleakest paths of the game, manages to impregnate her and have a child – an embodiment of its propagating, really. This choice in lovers errs in the realms of horror, comedy, and other-worldly experiences. Leaving *Consentacle* aside, where the game mechanics themselves allow for a much more nuanced representation through players, these games only feature heterosexual romances with extraordinary – but quite traditional – non-playable characters. Non-binary, datable characters exist; the same goes for Black characters in many dating games, although the proportion of Black characters remains small. In the gay dating game *Coming Out on Top* (2014), out of the six primary romance option, there is only one Black man to choose from, when *Dream Daddy* (2017) boasts three Black men out of the seven dating alternatives. The latter's cast is more diverse as it contains an Asian American choice and a trans man as well. The problem inherent in the selection of dating games to find once-again elusive Black, non-binary representations is maybe within the contract of the dating simulation, where growing close to another character is the main goal, and where these potential partners must hold a stereotypical (or archetypal) role to be considered:

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of

dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other. (hooks 23)

This quote is precisely the problem in some dating simulation games. The “Other” characters are exotic in their appearance, as is the case in *Boyfriend Dungeon* (2021), in which White non-binary character Rowan is ageless and mystical while Sunder, one of the few non-white characters, is a vampire of Indian descent. The characters are created with special effort to show how different they are through dialogue. The game offers many opportunities to share intimate details and speak with characters having a diversity of life experiences (Valeria is in a polyamorous relationship, Sawyer is a non-binary teenager) on varied media: the player and characters exchange text messages, or go on missions in dungeons together, as well as meet inadvertently on the main map, go on dates. Creator Tanya X. Short declared in 2017: “I think inclusivity is important in every game [...] but especially in games about love and the bonds we forge with other people. [...] True love is always inclusive” (Chan 7). This blanket statement is virtuous indeed, but it also shows the very real work behind creating such characters in the development of games where intersectionality is still largely nonexistent.

When asking gamers I knew about non-binary Black characters in video games, the answer resembled the one given by my friends working in the game industry: “There is Chaos in *Hades*, and the game *Life is Strange: True Colors* maybe. And *Monster Prom* maybe but they’re not humans. We can have pronouns in the Sims now. *Boyfriend Dungeon*, too”.⁸ This is the most comprehensive answer I received in the year or so spent working on this paper. Most people forwent the African American aspect, often going for White, queer characters or POC who were not quare in the strictest sense. To be completely honest, the study of *Hades* and Sundance below does not fit the criteria either, because they are not strictly speaking American. However, the impossibility of finding characters is revealing in itself. First, people tend to turn to American-made media. Almost no Japanese games were named in the very informal inquiry I made, apart from *Life is Strange* (2015) and *Life is Strange: True Colors* (2021) where same-sex romances can be pursued, the latter featuring an Asian American main character. The African American identity is erased in favor of the queer identity, as if

⁸ I reproduce here the translation of our dialogue online.

intersectional elements did not matter.⁹ Trans and non-binary characterizations were conflated, as well as Black and more broadly non-White characters. A. Waszkiewicz who, at the time of handing this paper to its rightful reviewers, was writing an article about non-binary representations in video games with R. Longobardi Zingarelli, told me one of their points was that characters in game were exclusive: when selecting a pronoun, there was no option to select more than one pronoun, such as she/they, or to forgo pronouns altogether and choose not to decide, letting the machine select pronouns randomly, for instance. This cookie-cutter model of exclusive choices prevailed in my small circle of acquaintances working on inclusive video games, whether concerning in-game representations, the game's mechanics, or self-characterization.

Non-human, Black-coded characters did not carry the same value, as they may be likened to racist stereotypes, which has been the subject of papers and journal issues showing that video games are steeped in colonial (Mukherjee and Hammar 6) and racist ideas, reenacting real-life issues with little insight (Derfoufi 1; Mukherjee 1; Srauy 1).

Non-binary animalistic figures also exist but, as is the case for the Iron Bull, their Otherness is not congruent with an African American identity. The queer big cats in the gay dating simulator *Nekojishi* (2017) have far fewer hesitations about their being gay or attracted to the main character than he has about himself, as his humanness ties him to real-life issues in Taiwan when his potential love interests are much more detached from these questions. This relative genderqueer liberation in non-White characters should not, however, be conflated with quare identity as quareness is fundamentally grounded in African American culture, making even Brown skinned non-binary humanoid characters subject to scrutiny when it comes to discussing non-binary Black identities in video games.

Searching For Games Outside of Games. The inauguration, in May 2023, of the *Black Games Archive* website curating resources on Black video games, developers, and analyses was another possible source for games featuring non-binary Black characters. Founders S. Blackmon and T. Russworm describe it

⁹ In a similar fashion, I almost contacted media historian and an Assistant Professor at New York University media historian and Assistant Professor at New York University Whit Pow about their experience as a queer POC—forgetting in the process that they were not Black.

as a database on “Black culture, games, and play.”¹⁰ The site is brand new and focuses for the moment on an inventory of Black questions in game, and a thematic classification of their content, creating a cartography of sorts of what a Black game is. Russworm is used to working on minority representations (Russworm and Malkowski, 1-16) but her main focus remains Black history, when Blackmon works on feminist game studies. A mere 24 games are tagged as containing “intersectionality,” and there is no LGBTQ+ or queer theme available yet.¹¹

In lists often published in video game magazines, there are frequent calls to non-binarity or queer representations. “Video Game Characters that are non-binary”¹² in *GameRant*, “10 games with non-binary characters”¹³ in *The Gamer*, etc. These lists have little to do with genuine interest, but rather belong to the engagement landscape of streamed media (video games, TV series) which focus on the creation of networks of media content sharing the same characteristics, to break from a model where game stores would only display their goods, instead of linking together several media (Lotz 74). The same type of pages exists to rank Black characters, joining games via a single characteristic. However, the query for “non-binary Black characters in video games,” most likely too precise in its wording, does not return any hits.

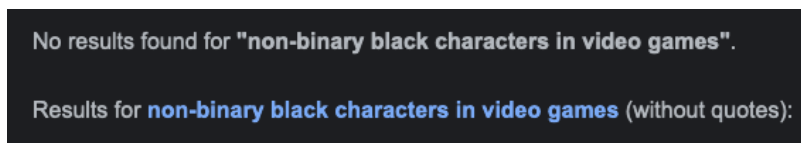


Figure 1. Absence of results for “non-binary Black characters in video games”

¹⁰ As of July, 2023. Both creators have released a video discussing the taxonomy here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkyKp7pk-4A>. Last access: 07/01/2023.

¹¹ As of July, 2023. Both creators have released a video discussing the taxonomy here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkyKp7pk-4A>. Last access: 07/01/2023.

¹² URL: https://gamerant.com/video-game-characters-non-binary/?newsletter_popup=1#bloodhound-ndash-apex-legends. Last access: 05/20/2023.

¹³ URL: <https://www.thegamer.com/non-binary-character-options-in-games/>. Last access: 05/22/2023.

At last! A search returned an interesting sentence: “As a non-binary, Black tall person, there’s no game where I see myself completely in that world.” The blog post had a promising title, *Black Gamers Still Don’t Fully See Themselves in Games*. However, the link pointed to a page so old¹⁴, which, once again, rerouted to a non-existent article.



Figure 2. Error on Wayback Machine

More research revealed the author was Cheyenne M. Davis, an independent content creator whose AllMyLinks page¹⁵ included a link to the article that also landed on Pop Sugar’s main page – the irony of a non-binary Black person raising the issue of the lack of representativity for them, in but a stub lost to the Internet, is not lost on me.

In articles or books, the same absence of resources is confirmed: non-binary issues are sometimes conflated with trans issues in the gender non-conforming spectrum, and racial and gender issues are treated as separate. The fact that Queer Game Studies is a White-dominated field is a reflection of this very issue.¹⁶ A query for “non-binary Black” or “non-binary African American” on journal and

¹⁴ URL: <https://www.popsugar.com.au/gaming/black-gamers-inclusive-character-customisation>. Last access: 06/04/2023.

¹⁵ URL: <https://allmylinks.com/cheymodee>. Last access: 02/29/2024.

¹⁶ As a piece of evidence, the book *Queer Game Studies* edited by B. Ruberg and A. Shaw contains no articles pertaining to the intersection of race and queerness, even if it features contributions by Black authors.

academic article search engines returns very few results, and none pertaining to the type of article I was set to write.¹⁷

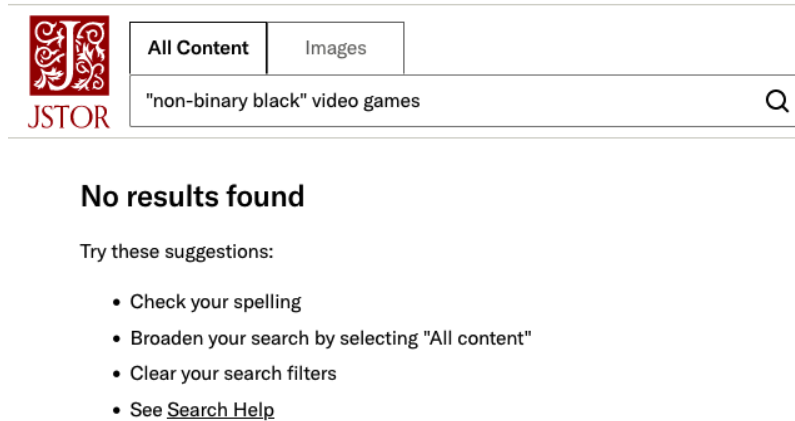


Figure 3. Unsuccessful search, Jstor

Now that the conditions in which this search *in absentia* has been laid out, from the context of games to the broader fields of journals, websites, and personal connections, it is time to turn to the representations found in games, however scarce.

Non-Binary Black Characters (?)

Out of all the characters evoked in these pages, only two can be said to fit the bill. Both come from American studios, and both are non-binary, non-White characters. The game genres they belong to are quite different. *Battlefield 2024* is a first-person shooter set in the future; *Hades* is a rogue-like¹⁸ game set in the depths of the Greek underworld. The characters do share a common point: their identity is unlike any other characters' in the game and they represent a hybridity that is translated by their ethos.

Sundance is the first non-binary and first LGBTQ+ character to be introduced in the *Battlefield* franchise. They belong to the most offensive character class of

¹⁷ This test was made on *Google Scholar*, *Internet Archive Scholar* and *Jstor*.

¹⁸ Rogue games take the player through various maps, dying in the process but becoming more and more powerful in the process/as they advance (to avoid the repetition of "in the process").

the game, an assault specialist, and they are the only non-male in this category. They are presented in the Electronic Arts promotional material as quite a rough character. In the screensaver provided by the game,¹⁹ there are two armed men – a glass of wine in one hand and a pistol in the other. Compared to other supportive characters in the same game,²⁰ they are much more menacing: Irish, for example, is shown with his son,²¹ and Maria Falck delivers a baby to a smiling woman on a gurney. Sundance’s identity is also twofold in their background, as both a former member of organized crime, and of the army; they are also the only character equipped with a wingsuit which allows them to glide in the air and land where needed, contrary to others who have a parachute. Ambivalence is part of their characterization and their gender expression is stated through the ambiguous situations they experience. The fact that they present as a woman and that their gender has no influence on the game shows the kind of ambiguous gender identity (Thach 34) present in games where gender identity plays no role in the character’s development. They have a feminine first name (Emma), are voiced by Aurélie Konaté (a French actress), and aside from a few sentences they utter on the battlefield, they remain mostly silent so that their gender identity cannot truly become part of the game. They are tokenized in more than one way. For example, their hair is also notably curly²² which is an uncommon feature in games. They are described in *The Gamer* as “the complete diversity package all in a single character” (Murray 5). Is their race and gender important for the game? Hardly. Is it important representation-wise? Maybe more so.

Grey Figures: Chaos as a Quare Chorus of Voices. The color gray is both a reference to the sexual orientation and the blurry nature of the identification of the characters. One character who fits this description is Chaos in *Hades*. In this game

¹⁹ URL: <https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-2042/game-overview/specialists/emma-rosier>. Last access: 06/04/2023.

²⁰ : <https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-2042/game-overview/specialists/kimble-irish-graves>. Last access: 06/04/2023.

²¹ URL: <https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-2042/game-overview/specialists/maria-falck>. Last access: 06/04/2023.

²² See Ivanescu for discussions about “the absence of Black hair textures and styles” (7) in video games.

featuring characters from the Greek mythology, mostly gods and semi-gods, the personal qualities of the characters are mostly essentialized, through their godly attributes. Chaos depicts the primordial force behind creation and, as such, is agender, lives in a space of their own, between godly and mortal plans, and does not actually interact much with other characters, noting their presence only in the lines of dialogue shared with Zagreus, the hero embodied by the player. The existence of such a grey character suggests yet another question: quare portrayals are not always androgynous, devoid of identifying traits linked to traditional male or female representations (Lan 10). Such a character is also too far from reality to be a representation of us, humans, but it is telling in the way grayness is portrayed in this American video game. The character is actually made of a multitude of others: the human-looking headstands on top of a skeleton torso seemingly clothed with an indistinct mass of humanoid faces and other unidentified elements wrapped around their neck as a scarf or massive collar—they have no visible lower body besides this girth-like growth. They are quite serene and seem content with merely being. Chaos' voice is made of a chorus of half-whispered, genderless voices and Chaos is addressed using they/them pronouns. They are described in game as being “an ancient presence from which sprang forth every manner of existence.” When they meet the main character, Chaos tells him that they “know everybody, here and there.” They are omnipotent and presented as the “primordial originator” and yet, they do nothing but exist, in their retired realm. They are generally liked by players, who praise their appearance as “an absolute non-binary icon,”²³ regardless of their ethnic background—or absence thereof. However, their presence is also noted by Black players as: “Lacking any real material desire, Chaos, it seemed, only wanted respect. I related to them; in their cool suave and in the outside realms' collective unknowing. What interest's Chaos? What do those who live, at once, within and without the world actually *want*?” (Love 1, emphasis in original). Their being both a chorus of voices (both metaphorically and physically) and an identifiable character whose powers reflect their deeply intersectional nature is the embodiment of the crossed identities of quare characters – and that of players too.

This success amongst players who see themselves in this powerful character is ultimately all that may matter in quare representations in video games. Even if

²³ In the non-binary section of Reddit. URL: https://www.reddit.com/r/ennnnnnnnnnnbbbbbby/comments/10b5xu/shoutout_to_chaos_from_hades_primordeal/?rdt=48908

Chaos is not Black – they are gray with Caucasian features – they are, strictly speaking, not White and the dilution of their identity – or, rather, the fact that they embody any and all identities at once – is enough for players to perceive them as non-binary in the strictest sense of the term (not binary), and a positive representation.

Conclusion

Video games have long suffered from the dichotomy created by competitions, where matches heighten inherent oppositions within society. The latter is better represented in the conversations that can be heard in the online vocal chat rooms when gamers use various swearwords to playfully castigate each other – something that reminds of certain behaviors in European soccer stadiums. As put by a Black game designer named Saint in an interview about the slow shift in attitude towards Black people within the gaming community, “It’s worth noting that every slur thrown out on voice chat – “nigger,” “faggot,” “pussy,” “dyke” – is really code for “different,” in the same way that “relatable” when spoken by a marketer is shorthand for “straight, white and male.” But I don’t think it’s unique to the game industry at all. The racial issues we deal with are endemic in our society; just so happens the gaming industry is a part of society as well” (Saint qtd. in Condit). Is the saturation of identities embodied by Chaos, the endless potentialities they represent, the way to go to erase and represent any and all intersectional identities? Or is such a grey identity merely a portrayal of every intersectional identity, resonating in quare people?

“Queerness and video games share a common ethos: the longing to imagine alternative ways of being and to make space within structures of power for resistance through play” (Ruberg). The tension between queer and quare game studies is made apparent by their circulating in different circles, producing research about conceptually different alternatives to mainstream games.²⁴ In the present article, I hoped to encompass all the issues regarding the representation of non-binary Black characters in video games. I believe my repeated failed attempts show the systemic failures in the way certain intersectional identities are presented in popular culture. Non-binary Black characters are depicted with

²⁴ The question of representation in games is often that of female representation; adding sexual identification points to gender identity is one of the focuses of queer game studies, where quare game studies add yet another layer, that of racial identity.

special focus on their identities. However, we know that “when representation is reduced to character/avatar aesthetics, it cannot actually encompass the experience of inhabiting the world with a specific identity” (Shaw 213). Subversion of expected identities, of pigeonholed characters, may be found in limited representations – and maybe in the oblique representation offered by characters like Chaos.

A game such as *Spirit Swap*, whose release is expected in 2024, is perhaps a good place to end. Created by an inclusive cast, with a clear queer orientation, this game is a sign of potential shifts in the way queer games may effortlessly include non-binary, African American cast members, simply because their developers resemble the characters. It suggests that future endeavors on this subject should focus on indie games as an alternative to mainstream productions, to represent both queer characters and game mechanics.²⁵ This is but a potential, as “identity formation – even body-coded ethnic and gender identity – is a chaotic process that can have no end” (Gilroy 238). This article has itself been a chaotic process made of fumbling and intersectional trials striving to show how lacking these incomplete representations are and how much even partial representation may resonate in players.

Data Corpus

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Don't Nod, Deck Nine, Feral Interactive. *Life is Strange*. Square Enix, 2015

Game Grumps. *Dream Daddy*. Game Grumps, 2017.

²⁵ Queer game mechanics focus more closely on the affect and on player-centered experiences, resorting to personal testimonies, as opposed to capitalistic game mechanics where winning means colonizing territories and amassing fortunes or killing others.

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