Appraisal of the MA Thesis *Pushing the Game to Its Limits: Trans Literacies in Video Games* **by Alex Andriushchenko**

In this thesis, Alex Andriushchenko examines key elements of trans literacies exploring how young trans players play or observe others playing video games. A comprehensive introduction lays out video gaming as a cultural phenomenon, sketches its history and tensions including the hostilities against feminist, queer and trans players. Carefully tracing the absent presence of trans players in existing statistics demonstrates Alex's capacity to read with and against the grain in ways that put pressure on simplistic ideas of trans exclusion by focusing on the ways in which trans players (re)create and reroute video games. Zooming in on the insights of queer game studies the literature review distils important modes of attention, including queer gaming socialities and gender play and experimentation; trans character stereotypes; and queer trans literacy as the capacity to de- and recode or 'hack' verbal and nonverbal cues to 'countergame' plotlines, characters and structural or ludic elements.

Methodologically, the thesis combines six semi-structured interviews with the author's autoethnographic exploration and an analysis of two existing interviews with trans game developers. Somewhat surprisingly, the analysis of trans literacies is organised around these participants and methods of data generation. The interview analysis identifies key elements of trans literacies that reorient analysis from issues of identity and representation to the variegated ways in which players interact with video games. This includes the agency of players, including their ability to safely fail, and 'mod', or modify aspects of the game, as well as creating and embracing aspects of trans experience such as discomfort, dis/connection, in/visibility, struggle, and repeatedly dying and being reborn. The analysis of autoethnography adds attention to situatedness and the affordances and limits of bodily dis/ability for creatively engaging with particular games and not others. Finally, the analysis of the trajectories of trans game developers helps contextualise these capacities in the context of a dominant straight gaming industry

highlighting the significance of open access tools and alternative venues and communities. A conclusion zooms in four key components of trans literacy.

The thesis is written in an engaging manner that pays attention to detail and nuance of the accounts of these committed players and developers, clearly benefitting from the long-term involvement, theoretical grounding, and reflexivity of both the author and the thoughtful and engaged participants. It puts into practice what these participants demand and create in terms of complexity of characters, plot lines and game mechanics. I suggest that key parts of the thesis could be published in the form of an academic article.

For the defence, I would like to invite Alex to address the following questions:
First, based on your analysis, what difference does the genre of videogames make for the trans literacies distilled?
Second, are their any observations with respect to the effects of race for these literacies, given that three of the nine participants identify as people of colour? Any other differences that make a difference?
And third, what can you say about the process of data analysis? What are lessons learned?

I recommend the thesis for defence, and while the final grade will depend on the defence, recommend the grade excellent (1)

Prague 25.1.2024   Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer, Ph.D., supervisor