

Workshop Description

The notion of something holy or sacred is often embedded deep in a game's story, language, and world. Whether it is sources of mythology or other highly revered religious and secular texts, video games can call upon such works and use elements from them to construct their worlds. Video games are therefore, like many other forms of media, firmly situated at the cross section between sacralised texts and contemporary culture.

In this workshop, we will explore this phenomenon of moving aspects of sacralised texts into the virtual context of video games. Rather than assuming an inevitable desacralisation of the original texts, we argue that connecting the sacred in virtual worlds with real-life counterparts can also lead to sacralisation. Based on three talks, we aim to discuss the strategies used to sacralise material objects within the game's virtual world by comparing building blocks of the sacred in video games with real-world examples.

If video games can help us understand the meaning of sacralised texts in the contemporary world, they might also prove useful in deepening our understanding of the processes of de/sacralization in general.

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Workshop Venue

University of Tübingen
Brechtbau, R. 215
Wilhelmstraße 50
D-72074 Tübingen

Concept and Organisation

Project P1 “Sacred Narrative: The Political Dimension of Japanese Mythology” and Project P2 “Figurations of Inspiration, Authorisation, and Auratisation in English Literature”

Julia Dolkovski, M.A. (P1)
Louise Neubronner, M.A. (P1)
Prof. Dr. Angelika Zirker (P2)
Ina Berner, M.A. (Project Coordination)

This workshop will be held in a hybrid format. Please send a message to the e-mail address below if you wish to take part.

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DFG Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft



Mediality and Virtuality

De/Sacralisation in Video Games

June 14, 2024
Brechtbau (Wilhelmstraße 50),
R. 215

This workshop is part of the research unit
FOR 2828 De/Sacralisation of Texts



Programme

13:00–13:15

Welcome and introductory remarks

13:15–14:15

Stef Aupers

(KU Leuven)

Ironies of Secularisation: How Virtual Games Became Sacred Worlds in the Spiritual Experience Economy

Secularisation, it is often held in the sociology of religion, is a local (Western/North-European) phenomenon that indicates religious change rather than the decline of religion as such. Video games, I argue, are products of what I call ‘ironies of secularisation.’ In this talk, I will discuss three ideal-typical developments that contributed to a relocation of the sacred to contemporary games: technological progress, simulation and virtualisation (Baudrillard); the global market and “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore) and the rise of a more subjective epistemology in post-truth society – all disrupting stable boundaries between reality and myth; fact and fiction; truth and fantasy and, indeed, the secular/profane and the religious/sacred.

14:15–14:45

Coffee break

14:45–15:45

Dunja Sharbat Dar

(CERES – Ruhr University Bochum)

Religious Landscapes in Japanese Video Games

Religions often appear in video games as part of the narrative, the background, the design, and the game mechanics. As such, video games are increasingly drawing the attention of researchers of the study of religion. In this presentation, I will introduce the concept of “landscaping religion” as a tool to understand how believable religious landscapes are created in game worlds through means of narration and visualisation. Taking examples from the Japanese video game industry like *Grandia I* or *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*, I will analyse what story and visual elements are utilised to sculpt and curate a (digital) religious landscape that is convincing to the players and somewhat ‘authentic’ within a given world-building.

15:45–16:15

Coffee break

16:15–17:15

Philipp-Thomas Wehage

(Heidelberg University)

De/Sacralisation as Dynamic of Reception: Thinking about the Implicit Player

Inasmuch as computer games can be read as media akin but not equal to written texts – a somewhat contentious notion at the heart of the foundation of the discipline of game studies – theories of literary criticism can be applied to the triad player-game-system with some slight modification. This talk presents the notion of the *implicit player* as an analytic heuristic in order to attempt to locate the notion of de/sacralisation. That is de/sacralisation is not a dynamic within the game-text itself, but a particular form of media use – or of subjectivation of players in which these are active participants. The talk will explore the limits and potentials of this heuristic in the game *Blasphemous* (The Game Kitchen, 2019).

17:15–17:30

Closing remarks