Gameplay and historical consciousness in *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Dragon Age II* (Bioware)

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Abstract

This article deals with the historical consciousness in *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Dragon Age II* (2009-2011 BioWare) which is a single-player third-person role-playing video game series within the fantasy-medieval context. In order to know how gameplay operates with its dystopian fictional present, the article analyzes how the two video games create a spatial and temporal connection between past, present and future in a fictional history inspired by dystopian *Sword and Sorcery*-fantasy. This article is based on the assumption that understanding the projective identity through a Playing Character (PC) as a part of a flow of time with a past, a present and a future in the game, is a crucial part of the gameplay. This article stresses that the two games within the series turn out differently according to the gameplay; *Dragon Age: Origins* develop from an apocalyptic and dystopian place (a world full of threats) into a eutopian place (a good location) whereas *Dragon Age II* remains in a dystopian plot.

Keywords: Historical consciousness, gameplay, role-playing, fantasy, Dragon Age, Video game

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This article is about historical consciousness. The concept, which is central in didactic research, has been developed in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian research and captures the role that history plays in people's lives. Previous research has differentiated between historical consciousness and social memory according to the principal that social memory is based on subjective memories of individuals while historical consciousness is associated with the transmission of the past (Tosh 1984). Researchers differentiated between genuine and invented traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992). According to this way of thinking, popular culture and political rhetoric produce collective memories that manipulate and guide their audience, while the past, by virtue of its authority, gives people genuine identities.

Later research has moved the focus from how social memory differs from the transmission of the past to examining the different ways of using the past without differentiating between real or false memories. Media has assumed an increasingly forthcoming role in transmitting the past, and medialization has led to the globalization of memory and the boundaries between high culture and popular culture have been erased (Landsberg 2004). While research about social memory has moved from misuse to uses of the past, the concept historical consciousness has continued to appear primarily in research about the transmission of the past. This article contributes to the bringing together of research traditions by analyzing how a historical consciousness is created in a fantasy game based on a fictitious past. One objective is to analyze historical consciousness in dialectic with the gameplay. Another objective is to demonstrate that the use of the past, even when the purpose is not to transmit the past, is a resource in video games.

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To talk about historical consciousness in relation to fiction is paradoxical. The concept implies that there is a past that influences us and which we adopt an attitude towards. However, if the past is a fiction, then the fiction in all likelihood cannot constitute an already existing condition for the processes that shape identities. By focusing on peoples' need for history and not on how history is transmitted, I argue that historical consciousness can also be examined in the use of the past in fiction. One way of approaching this is to examine historical consciousness in relation to nostalgia and dystopia. Nostalgia does not presuppose an actual past, but is the longing for a distant past. Instead of focusing on whether a memory is a false memory or not, nostalgia can be interpreted as a political and ideological manifestation for groups for which the past, in the form of stories, has a politically explosive force (Boym 2001, Cook 2005, Hodgin 2011). In a study on cultural heritage tourism, I developed an idea about dystopia and nostalgia as parts of historical consciousness (Trenter 2009). Like nostalgia, neither is utopia (which means no place) a reality, but instead the dream about the ideal society, established by Thomas More 500 years ago. Dystopia, invented by John Stuart Mill 1868, is the image of the perfect nightmare, the opposite of the classical utopia. The counter image to a pessimistic dystopia is the critical utopia, or eutopia (a good location), which represents another outlook on the ominous future. Through actions in the present we can avoid the threatening danger (Levitas 1990).

Thus, it is nostalgia and dystopia/eutopia understood as narrative patterns in which a fictitious past and a dark present that constitutes the basis of the analysis of historical consciousness in fantasy video games. The case studies used in this article are Dragon Age: Origins and Dragon Age II (2009-2011 BioWare), a single-player third-person role-playing video game series within the fantasy-medieval context. I will begin with an introduction to historical consciousness using examples from video games, followed by a discussion of how DAO and DAII are a part of the dystopian fantasy genre. I will then present an analysis of

how a fictional past is constructed. Focus is on DAO, which is compared with the use of the past in DAII.

Historical Consciousness and Gameplay

The concept historical consciousness does primarily focus on mediation of the past, .i.e. how people operate a narrative competence by reflecting and integrating the past in the formation of an identity, meaning how to orient ourselves in time and space (Ricoeur 1984; Rüsen 2005). "History" has various purports though. When talking about "history" we speak of past time, but "history" also refers to the knowledge and images of the past such as museums, films and video games. The use of history is present everywhere because of its existential explosive force that questions origins of individuals, groups, regions and nations. Although "historical consciousness" suggests a conscious act, the most common use of history is unconscious. We refer to a diffuse past, intentionally or unintentionally, when using expressions like "The good old days" or "Nothing ever changes" (Aronsson 2004). These expressions suggest that we compare the present with the past, although the time-frames are vague. It does not only and primarily take correct facts or precise time-frames to mobilize a historical consciousness. The important feature is how we connect ourselves in the present with a past in its broadest sense. By reflecting the present in the past, we create images of who we are and what it takes to reach our goals.

If we consider that historical consciousness is an essential process of identity and take into account that the process mobilizes action, then there are good reasons to focus on how fantasy approach past-present-future and how gameplay employ historical consciousness; history is a fruitful element in the creation of an epical action-plot. By comparing DAO and DAII, I will demonstrate how the gameplay actually can change a historical consciousness.

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I believe that role-playing enhances a historical consciousness as the player relates to several aspects of identity while playing. James Paul Gee proposes three different aspect of gaming identity: the virtual identity (the Player Character or Supporting character), the real-world identity (The player) and a projective identity (the player´s emotional boundaries to the Player Character) (Gee 2007). The player brings her/his experiences into the play. How does the player interpret the universe in which the plot takes place? How does the fixed story-line communicate with previous experiences, for instance other video games or fantasy in general? How does the virtual character get mobilized by a historical consciousness within the game? A crucial question is how the interacting between the player and the virtual identity creates a projective identity through a historical consciousness.

It does not necessarily require strong bonds between the player and the player character to mobilize a historical consciousness in video games, but it is essential if the historical consciousness is used as a tool in gameplay and not only as an image in the fixed story-line. The complexity of role-playing in video game developed by BioWare is rather unique (Jørgensen 2010). The characters are interesting and create a depth in the gameplay. There have been discussions on how the player relates with engagement and empathy to the Player Character (Rush 2009, Lankoski 2010). The focus on supporting character and the impact on gameplay is discussed by Annika Waern, who identifies the "bleed-effect" when role-playing and romancing in *Dragon Age: Origins*. To "bleed" means that the player, when adopting a role, gets affected by the character and shares the characters emotions (to bleed-out) or vice versa; to let the character share emotions and identity with the player (to bleed-in) (Waern 2010).

The Dragon Age series is suitable for comparison. The two games are set in the same fantasy universe and narratively connected to each other. DAII is a chronological sequel to DAO and the plot begins where DAO ends. The player is allowed to import playthrough from

DAO to DAII and thereby influence on the fixed story in DAII. The fixed story-lines remind themselves of each other, but the gameplay differs due to different game mechanic and narrative approaches. The DAO expansion *Awakening* is not included because the gameplay is, with a few exceptions, similar to DAO.

The Use of History in Video Games

There are video games that mediate real-world history, for instance *Call of Duty* (2003-2012) and *JFK: Reloaded* (2007). The games and gaming culture help the player to interpret and even understand real world history (Whalen & Taylor Vanderbilt 2008). But as we need a prosthetic memory mediated in fiction to understand collective trauma in the past (Cook 2005), we need a fictional past in fantasy to make the fantasy world come true (Scott Card 1990). Already the title alludes to the concept of time; "Dragon Age" refers to the era in which the fantasy role-playing game takes place and "Origin" and "II" tell that the games are first and second in a series. There are other fantasy/historical fantasy game-series that take place in a fictional historical context in chronological order. *Assasin's Creed* (2007-2011) stands out among others. The protagonist, a descendent of Assassins, travel in time to solve problems during the era of the crusades (*Assassin's Creed I*), the Renaissance (*Assassin's Creed II Assassin's Creed: Revelations, Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood 2011*) and the American Revolution (*Assassin Creed III* 2012). The *Fable* series (2004-2011) takes place in the fictional nation of Albion referring to medieval England. The period of time progresses with each game; *Fable II* raises association of the Age of Enlightenment. *Fable III* takes place during the Industrial Revolution.

While *Assassin's Creed* plays with the historical plot in historical environments, *Fable* uses images of real-history to inspire gameplay. Does such a fictional approach entitle *Fable* or *Assassins Creed* to be historical? Not if we talk about history as reconstructions of the past, but it does make sense if we consider the use of history as a dominant element in the framing

of images of the world. The plots are a clear cut case of a consequent use of knowledge and images of the past. Or as Raphael Samuel puts it; it is a social form of knowledge (Samuel 1994). The use of history evoked by other motives than to reconstruct to past, could be defined as *prompters of memory*, fragments of historical knowledge that appears in other contexts than time and historical perspective (Trenter 2002). The prompter of memory does not necessarily correlate with historical facts but could very well be references to artifacts, narratives or images in a collective cultural memory.

The depth in the fictional historical Ferelden, the nation in which DAO take place, is created by images and artifacts that raise associations with ancient and medieval culture. The dragon, for instance, is the ultimate fantasy icon that plays an important part in DAO. The (western) dragon is associated with an ancient, powerful, greedy and presumably evil creature, an assumption for an epical hero.

Fantasy has been regarded as a powerful feature for understanding the real world due to its capacity of playing with social order and deepening the gaming experience (Murray&Maher 2011). There are similarities between Video games and fairy tales regarding a folkloristic genre "Both fairy tales and computer games offer playful arenas for testing the limits of the physical reality, of social and cultural norms, and of moral values" (Palmenfelt 2012 p.2). Kathryn Hume has suggested that fantasy should not be regarded as a genre but as an impulse. She believes that fantasy and mimesis are two basic impulses. Whereas mimesis involves the pursuit of realism, fantasy is the "desire to change givens and alter reality - out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need, for metaphoric images" (Hume 1984 p. 20). A vital feature in order to create imaginary mimesis is to mix the spectacular fantasy with realistic elements. To elaborate a fictional past that mobilizes a historical consciousness is a part of this strategy. To make images convincing, one has to make them authentic according to a certain genre (fantasy, action role-playing game).

The dragon in DAO is used as a temporal and spatial narrative tool to mobilize a historical consciousness. The player encounters the dragon already in the title. We learn that the dragon named an era, but that the creature is rare in the fictional present of Ferelden, the nation in which the plot takes part. How rare and unique dragons actually are, is illustrated by the fact that they appear only named and personified in three situations. The Archdemon is an old god, tainted by blood from darkspawn, who leads the Blight (http://dragonage.wikia.com/wiki/Archdemon). The Archdemon appears in nightmares as an approaching apocalyptic threat and shows up in the final battle. The second personified dragon is the NPC Flemeth, a shapeshifter and witch from the Wilds who plays an important part in the plot. She also appears in DA II. The third dragon is worshipped in the mountain town of Haven. She is an old dragon who slumbers on the rock and watches over the saint Andrastes ashes. She remains, according to the cinematic epilogue, a mythical tale of Ferelden if the PC does not choose to fight her.

There are dragons in the fictional present as well. They appear as dragonlings, nameless creatures much smaller than the personified dragons. Dragons are also a part of equipment possibilities since drake scale is a useful material for making great armor.

The way dragons are integrated into the past-present-future of Ferelden triggers a series of associations. The player encounters an era which is adjacent to a prehistoric age. The personified dragons function as indicators of a historical flow from past time to a fictional present and a future.

Personified Dragons as Markers of Time

Archdemon	Flemeth	The Guardian of Andrastes ashes
A tainted old god that repeatedly return in Blights (a cyclical perception of the past, present and future). Appears as apocalyptic nightmare to predict the Blight (the future of the PC). Appears in the final battle (in the present)	A shapeshifter with mysterious past (the past). She appears in the plot as a character with an important mission (the present). Her wisdom might affect future events (the future), if the Warden makes certain choices.	An old mythical dragon (the past) who protect the ashes of the saint (present) but remain a mythical legend in days to come (future).

Nostalgic and Dystopian Fantasy

Utopias as well as nostalgia are crucial elements in Sci-Fi and fantasy with at least one thing in common; they depend on a present in which a protagonist has to fight an enemy. In fact, nostalgia as well as utopias requires a present that is as fraught with danger as it is to call for action to (restore) a bygone golden age, or to create a better society. The driving force is to (re) create a better world and therefore both nostalgia and utopia are based on a dystopian (a bad place to be) present (Trenter 2009). *Fallout* (1997) takes place in a post nuclear California and can be considered as an example of a dystopian game series. Sci-Fi has been described as dystopia, whereas fantasy dramatizes nostalgia (Jameson 2002). Tolkien's high fantasy world is an example of a nostalgic fictional present where the twilight land of memories of good old days reminds of a lost paradise. But there are other trends in fantasy as well.

The dystopian construction of the story is a trend in fantasy literature, film and video games. Rosemary Jackson categorizes the style as non-nostalgic and unsentimental. (Jackson 2003). She refers to a kind of fantasy which unlike Disney´s feel-good fantasy treats dissatisfaction with cultural orders. The non-nostalgic, and I would add dystopian plots, trend is recognizable in contemporary *Sword and Sorcery-fantasy(S&S)* that differs from epic or high fantasy such as Tolkien´s universe. The defining framework for the genre is based on

roughly speaking three components: 1) The environment which differs from our world. 2) The protagonist is a hero marginalized from society. 3) The plot involves a problem to be solved that initiates a mission lined by action, obstacles and adventure (Butler 2009). *The Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson 2001, 2002, 2003) and *300* (Zack Snyder 2006) are examples of *Sword and Sorcery*-films within the genre.

The *Dragon Age* series fit into the description. The universe is within a medieval fictional history established by the folklore and codex mediated by texts, images and by talking to NPC (cfr Gunneng 2012, Waengdahl 2012). The protagonist in DAO, Alistair, the royal bastard and an unwilling heir to the throne of Ferelden, is the typical hero from High fantasy, but with support from the Playing Character, Alistair changes into a devoted S & S warrior. The protagonist in DA II, Hawke, reminds more of a traditional S & S hero as well the protagonist in *Mass Effect II* (Jørgensen 2010) as Hawke starts with two empty hands and during the game creates wealth and fame by fighting and solving problems. The plots in the games comprise action, hand-to-hand combats and obstacles to overcome.

The dystopian element, as Rosemary Jackson outlines, is also present within the S&S genre. *The Witcher* (Andrej Sapkowski), the polish cult series about the protagonist Geralt of Rivia, has been adapted into a movie, video games series (*The Witcher* 2007, *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* 2011 CD Project RED) and graphic novels can be mentioned as a pioneer in a non-nostalgic fantasy-trend. Another example is George R. Martins *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1991-2011) better known as HBO´s miniseries A *Game of Thrones* (2011-12) and the video game (A *Game of Thrones* 2012).

The dystopian S&S creates fictional but mimetic worlds; the storyline resembles rather the history of ancient Rome than of an epic classic with a given protagonist and a happy ending. A regular approach is to reverse the established narrative tropes of the *Sword and sorcery* genre to create a less nostalgic plot. There are no romantic Byronic heroes such as

professor Snape in Harry Potter or Aragorn in *Lord of The Rings*. Good and evil are not given. There are plenty of examples of mindgaming mimesis in dystopian ironical fantasy. Just to mention a few highlights: *The First Law* trilogy (2006-2008) by Joe Abercrombie refers to Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, but it turns out that the aspirant for the title who himself hesitates on his skills for the mission as Aragorn does, actually turns out to be a bastard with no noble qualities whatsoever, only supported by the great Gandalf-like magician who turns out to be driven by greed for power. *Game of Thrones* refers to the Wagnerian twins and pure lovers Siegmund and Sieglinde personified in the perverted Lannister twins. The decadent king Robert dies during an arranged wild boar hunt as the innocent hero Siegfried get murdered in Wagner's opera. There are different strategies to arrange mimetic elements to mobilize a historical consciousness. The upside-down high fantasy references occur in the world of Dragon Age series. A striking example is the elves that have not got much in common with the fairy elves in Tolkien´s Middle Earth. City Elves live in ghetto in Denerim, the capital city and the dalish elves in diaspora deep in the woods. The concept is known from Nick Perumov´ s *Keeper of the Sword* series (2006-2013).

This is a sophisticated way of employing prompters of memory; by using irony and converted epical tropes, the plot flirts with our cultural identity. The twisted prompters of memory contribute to affinity. By using irony and re-uses of images from fantasy and other sources, the players historical consciousness get mobilized in a playful and unambitious way. So does the references to the gaming world, in this case *BioWares* other production. BioWare uses references from other games in DAO, only recognizable for player with experience from earlier productions.

The fixed Story-line. Dystopian Setups in Dragon Age: Origins

The dystopian element is present in the Dragon Age series both by the plot (a local threat is averted but the dystopian danger remains) and by the absence of nostalgic Golden

Age-features. DAO begins with a cinematic intro that presents a dark and threatening plot. The intro starts with a quote from what appears to be a religious scripture:

"And so is the Golden City blackened

With each step you take in my Hall.

Marvel at perfection, for it is fleeting.

You have brought Sin to Heaven

And doom upon all the world."

- Canticle of Threnodies 8:13

To the sound of an increasing storm and while snowflakes are spread over the text, a voiceover tells: "*The chantry teaches us that it is the hubris of men which brough the Darkspawn into our world. The mages had sought to usurp the heaven but instead they destroyed it.*" An image of a couple of dark shapes with caps and hoods of which one raises his hand in a religious greeting, emerge as an illustration from a medieval text. "*They were cast out, twisted and cursed by their own corruption. They returned as monsters, the first of the darkspawn. They became Blight upon the lands, unstoppable and relentless*".

The picture changes into a chaotic depiction of the hooded figures falling messed with signs and detached letters as from a medieval script. The next cut is not a painting of the fall out of Eden but a cinematic description of what the darkspawn and the Blight did to the world. The Dwarven Kingdoms were the first to fall, the voice tells, and the moving pictures describe what happened in the deep road when the darkspawn fought the dwarves.

The next cut shows a black screen and the voice says: "*And then the Grey Wardens came*". And while showing warriors, assuming Grey Wardens, running to fight, the

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voiceover continues "*Men and women from every races, warriors and mages, barbarians and kings. The Grey Wardens sacrificed everything to stem the tide of darkness … and prevailed*." Dwarves, elves and humans are fighting the darkspawn with bows, swords and axes. The player is not only confronted by close combat but witnesses how the darkspawn kill civilians. A woman gets stabbed in her back when trying to escape.

The scenario ends abruptly and a black screen accompanied by the speaker "*It has been four centuries since that victory and we have kept our vigil. We have been watching and waiting for the darkspawn to return. But those who once called us heroes… have forgotten.* " indicates that we are now in a fictive present. The camera slides along a cliff and focuses on three bodies hanging from a tree. The owner of the voiceover now shows up. He gets attacked from the back by two darkspawn, and kills them both. He continues with an attitude of resignation: "*We are few now and our warnings have been ignored for too long. It might even be too late, for I have seen with my own eyes what lies on the Horizon. Maker, help us all.*" A player with experience from DAO knows that the warrior is Duncan, a Grey Warden who later on will recruit the PC for the Grey Warden. The camera sweeps over the horizon and in the distance we are confronted with light and sounds from war. The cinematic intro ends.

The 3.29 minutes long cinematic intro, designed to motivate the player, creates a dystopian historical consciousness. There is a dark past, a threatened present and an uncertain future. The message portends an apocalyptic doom. The religious script and the tale of the fall of the mages and the creation of darkspawn set the scene; we are dealing with the Fall. But there is no nostalgic flashback to a lost paradise. Instead we learn from the chantry mediated by old ancient scripts that "Marvel at perfection, for it is fleeting" and the player witness with Duncan, who declares *for I have seen with my own eyes what lies on the Horizon*, that the world has been, and is still under attack by the Blight. The player does also witness that there have been Grey Wardens who efficiently strike back. The past and the present and the future

merge into a dystopian threat. The combat scenes merge and the player does not know whether the fighters belong to earlier Blights or are part of a Blight in the fictional present. The player founding for a projective identity starts in a context of threat of violence and violence is present; Ferelden is certainly not a safe place to be. The player has to create a PC with a mission to avoid a threatening catastrophe. The action is not motivated by a will to restore Golden Ages but to avoid a coming disaster. A dystopian historical consciousness is mobilized.

The cinematic intro as producer of a dystopian historical consciousness

Past	Present	Future
Religious/scholarly/historical scripts and tales. Action that indicate that the scripts are true.	Grey Warden that are nowadays diminishing and forgotten heroes	An expecting Blight

After having been introduced to the dystopian problem, the player creates the PC as a mage, warrior or rogue with opportunity for seven different origins; human noble (rouge or warrior) human mage, City Elf (rouge or warrior), Dalish Elf (rouge or warrior), Elf as mage. Dwarf commoner (rouge or warrior), dwarf noble (rouge or warrior). Every origin has a background story. In contrast to the PC in for example *The Elder Scrolls* (Bethesda Softwork 2002-2011), who is without biographical memory, PC in *Dragon Age* has a personnel history within the social structure of Ferelden. A personal catastrophe, different for every background, motivates or forces the PC to join the Grey Warden. The mainquest consists of saving Ferelden from civil war and to gather an army to defeat the darkspawn and the impending Blight. In the background stories the projective identity is already motivated by the dystopian threat, via the PC who now gets a personal reason for entering the war.

The historical consciousness works on different levels in order to create an identity. The virtual identity, the PC/Warden, is dealing with a biographical forecoming catastrophe that forces her/him to join the Grey Warden. The real-world identity (The player as such) via a projective identity (the player connection to the PC) is affected by the historical consciousness in both the background story and the dystopian intro.

The fixed story-line mindgames cultural codes and mixes up established symbols. The Joining ritual, in which the PC, the new recruit, undergoes transformation into a Grey Warden, is a reversed communion. The blood from Darkspawns, that put the Grey Warden into connection with the Archdemon and the darkspawn, is distributed from a chalice whereas Alistair, the senior Grey Warden, says a prayer. The taint might kill the recruit but survivors become Grey Wardens. At the beginning of the final quest a significant annunciation is made by Morrigan, the witch from the Wilde who is a crucial companion to the Grey Warden. The PC has learned that the Grey Warden who struck the fatal blow to the Archdemon will die. Morrigan is offering a blood ritual that will allow the Warden to survive the deed. By fertilizing Morrigan the essence of the dying Archdemon will be transferred to the unborn child. The child will, according to Morrigan, be reborn as an ancient god, untouched by the corruption darkspawn. This is a postmodern and certainly an uncertain annunciation.

The epilogue underlines the dystopian feature of DAO. It presents various endings according to the choices the PC makes during the playtrough. All endings include possible happy endings for the characters. But there are no utopian solutions; all endings contain new societal and political conflicts.

Gameplay in Dragon Age: Origins

BioWares role-playing games are linear and story-driven. The mainquest, to gather an army to fight the darkspawn and defeat the Archdemon organizes the gameplay. But DAO

differs from the *Mass Effect series (2007, 2010)*, *Baldurs gate* (1998, 2002) or *Star Wars: Knight of the Old Republic (2003)*. Kristine Jørgensen points out that the protagonist in DAO is not the PC but the supporting character Alistair, the royal bastard. Although the PC-warden guides the companions, including Alistair, on the journey through Ferelden, and controls the development, it is Alistair who is the potential epic hero. (Jørgensen 2010)

Martin Willander (2010) makes the same conclusion; The PC and Alistair are "pratton", the Aristotelian term for the characters that provide or create action with their presence, as they are necessary to enable the story. Alistair is the only character that the PC cannot do away with whenever the player wishes to, until the penultimate quest *Landsmeet*. Willander concludes that supporting characters Morrigan and Leliana , functions as "ethos", that is, characters of moral and psychological significance, but not essential to the fixed story-line. The player, whenever he / she wish, may ask the Morrigan / Leliana to leave the group. A crucial point is that the supporting NPC are narrative tools to fulfill the story and features for the gameplay. Jørgensen propose that the narrative arrangement strengthen the bleed-effect in between the player and the PC (Jørgensen 2010).

The player's projective identity, the emotional boundaries between the Player and the PC, deepens by the approval rating game mechanics. Communication between PC and NPC occurs through dialogues. The Player chooses between various statements from a dialogue tree. Each statement is emotionally loaded with different attitudes such as sarcasm, diplomacy and care. By picking the tactically correct phrase, the PC gets approval points from the NPC who is involved in the chat, and vice versa. The dialogues between the PC and supporting characters, as well as between supporting characters, offer great opportunities for all kinds of affections. Anger, romantic and friendly actions are mediated by humorous approaches.

BioWare is known for the making of supporting characters with of psychological depth and originality. Every supporting character has a complex personality which includes less sympathetic traits. The companions Morrigan, the witch, and Zevran, the assassin, are both by convention asocial. Sten, the qunari-warrior, is not only a murderer of a civil family but shows xenophobic and sexistic traits. Leliana, the bard, is in addition to being cloister sister also an assassin, and Wynne, the grand old lady and mage, turns out to have a dubious past. Alistair, the protagonist can be hardened and prepared for his royal mission, but if the player chooses not to harden him (or is not aware of how to harden him), he will remain a naive boy with bad self-confidence. Oghren, the dwarf and warrior, is a disillusioned drinker. But the companion also turns out to be loyal to the group (if the player treats them well) and true friends to the PC. The companions have personal quests that can be solved by the PC in order to gain approval points or to harden them. But the solving of personal quests does also affect the historical consciousness. As the personal quests include complicated past the companions feel released and grateful when the problems are solved; a troubled past enter into a satisfying present.

The gameplay in DAO also includes gifts to be looted or bought and given away to impact on the approval ratings. To figure out to whom a gift is dedicated is an important part of the tactical communication in search for approval points. To nurture the relationship is important for different reasons. Specializations are talents based upon the character´s class (Warrior, Mage or Rogue). Specializations require unlocking through a person who can teach it. As the companions possess useful specializations accessible at a particular approval point, the PC has to act in an appropriate manner to achieve approval points to a certain level.

In contrast to for example *Fable*, in which an evil profile does not disturb the fixed story-line, DAO´s gameplay depends on the relationship between the PC and the supporting characters. Willander concludes that DAO has no fixed standard. Instead it is the player / PC

that is the norm, as it is he/she who decides what is right and wrong. The characters in the game encourage acts as ethical markers that change / evolve, comment and act upon game character's moral conduct.

The player can choose how and whether to create an epic hero out of Alistair and make him a king or not. The story can end happily with Alistair at the throne or unhappily if he or the PC Warden sacrifices their lives in the final battle. But when it comes to the historical consciousness, the gameplay mechanics adds a new dimension to the dystopian story-line. While playing DAO the gameplay turns to a eutopian plot; catastrophe or not, Ferelden is a good place to make friendships, to act bravely, to fool around, and even to find love. As such, the gameplay in DAO creates a historical consciousness that is eutopia, meaning "the good location" by focusing on actions in the present and not the apocalyptic idea that Ferelden have a dark future ahead. It´s not only a question of feeling good; the eutopian aspect goes deeper than that. Eutopia emphasizes that actions as such reward us if we avoid the threat of future; it is actually necessary to nurture relationships to fulfill the main-quest.

Dragon Age II, Gameplay and historical consciousness

BioWare chooses another gameplay strategy in the sequel. The story in DAII picks up where DAO ends and the location is set in the same fantasy world introduced in *DAO*. To predefine a protagonist means that the designer takes control over the PC (Lankoski 2010). The predefine functions of the PC is further developed in DA II as compared to DAO. Hawke, the protagonist and PC (human male/female, warrior/rogue/mage), is a complete character although customizable. There is only one origin story. Hawke escapes from post-Blight to the city of Kirkwall as a refugee but becomes its legendary champion over a turbulent decade of political and social conflict. Jørgensen argues that a PC such as commander Shepard in *Mass Effect II* with a predefined personality correlate to the player by goal-sharing, embodiment and empathy, whereas a less predefined PC, as in DAO, establish possibilities for bleed effect

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since the PC is a tabula rasa and free for occupation with traits inspired by the player´s personality, emotions and attitudes (Jørgensen 2010). Hawke is predefined the same way as Shepard in *Mass Effect II*.

The fixed story is divided into a prologue and four acts. The time span between acts is three years. The game takes place in the form of a story told by one of Hawke's companions, the dwarf Varric. He relates it to a Chantry Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast, who is trying to find Hawke whose aid she needs to restore the chaos. The player gets to know Hawke through the conversation between Varric and the seeker. The player learns that Hawke has a reputation and that he / she is involved with Kirkwall's turbulent political life. No one is aware of Hawke's current location. The player, watching the cinematic intro from the sideline, is as curious as the seeker to find out the truth about Hawke. The cinematic prologue, interleaved in between the chapters, does not invite the player to mobilize a historical consciousness. There is an uncertain past (what part did Hawkes play in the political turbulence? Does Varric tell the seeker the entirely truth?), there is a hidden present (Where is Hawke? Is Varric really who he claims to be? Why does Cassandra Pentaghast need Hawke?) and the narrative future in the game which is to fill in the missing gap and play the story of Hawke, that is to write the history of the champion.

The fixed story is mindgaming the historical consciousness. Gone is the mindgaming irony and comical effects from DAO (with few exceptions, for instance *The Long Road,* a companion quest for the companion Aveline in which Hawke becomes a matchmaker) for the benefit of references to global political issues. The post-Blight world is characterized by the conflicts between Templars and Mages, an unequal relationship already depicted in DAO. Because the mages have dangerous gifts (they abused their power, as was said in the prologue in DAO) the Templars have to control the activities in the Circle of Magi, the location for mages, to prevent blood-magi. In DA II the conflicts increases. Mages are now hunted and

imprisoned, and react violently with actions that resemble terrorist deeds. Mimetic effects are made in to real world problems.

The approval rating mechanics are secondary whereas the combat mechanics are in focus. Specializations are, unlike in DAO, not needed to be unlocked. The PC receives one specialization at level 7 and another at level 14, which motivate actions to level, that is to fighting rather than achieve high approval ratings. The play does not include a necessary nurturing of the companions, which does not mean that there is no need for teamwork. An important strategy in combat is to set up combinations between the companions.

DA II differs from DAO when it comes to strengthening the historical consciousness by impacting biographical developments of the companions. The companions do develop, but Hawke does not get involved in their changes by for instance personal quests with roots in the past as in DAO. The epilogue is a converted prologue from DAO. After the final battle and Hawkes success, Varrics voiceover tells that a legend was born, while sheet from a book picturing stylized images of companions and views from Kirkwall are shown and finally closed in a book. The seeker asks if the Champion is dead. Varric answers "I doubt that" and the seeker sets him free. She gets out to the waiting people and notes that the Champion is not to be found. The game ends as an appetizer for Dragon Age III.

The fixed story-line is as dystopian as DAO. The PC is more of a traditional S & S hero but the narrative is not linear as in DAO. The mimetic approach is more realistic than in DAO but both are still in the genre of S & S fantasy. The differences are in the gameplay. Even though Hawke can get involved in relationships, rivalry as well as loyalty, the game-play does not include the necessity of taking care of companions. The dystopian plot cannot be changed; you can have a good time in Kirkwall even if the role-playing is secondary, but you do not need to nurture relationships because the narrative focus still is on the catastrophe in the ending. Kirkwall and DA II is not a eutopian place. The game remains a dystopian universe.

How does historical consciousness influence video games and how do video games influence historical consciousness?

In this article, I have examined how in video games historical consciousness can be a resource that is more than simply a means of transmitting the past. Bearing in mind the need people have for dreaming about the past and the future, I have discussed nostalgia/dystopia and eutopia in relation to historical consciousness. The Dragon Age series demonstrates that history can be more that simply background scenery in video games. A historical consciousness actively contributes to the creation of excitement as well as increases the incentive for action and for proceeding in the game. The comparison between DAO and DAII also shows that the uses of the past are not only guided by the game's story, but also by the gameplay of the game. The player experiences a dystopian and threatening world that, via gameplay in DAO, is transformed to a place where actions create a eutopia(a good place), while gameplay in DAII does not allow the player to mobilize a historical consciousness that deviates from the storyline.

My examination of the Dragon Age series shows that a historical consciousness can be action normative even if the story is fiction. Even though the fixed storyline in DAO can have either a happy or a sad ending, depending on whether the player allows PC and the protagonist Alistair to survive or not, the historical consciousness is utopian. Thus, a historical consciousness can be created through the player's actions, regardless of which historical consciousness the fixed storyline mobilizes.

Research on historical consciousness has much to learn from how the gaming world uses the past. The question is whether it is possible, in any other use of the past than via the game's gameplay, to observe how each individual mobilizes a historical consciousness in dialectic with a fixed storyline. Consequently, research on how historical consciousness is

established in video games can enrich game designs through making tools available for increasing and deepening the excitement, as well as enrich the research on historical consciousness, through making apparent how each individual manages their narrative competence in relation to a past, a present and a future.

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