

Project Summary for the General Public

Research project objectives/Research hypothesis

Speculative genres and conventions have been, by many critics and commentators, considered one of the few cultural discourses which engage virtually all contemporary political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological problems. Using fantastic metaphors, tropes, figures and scenarios, science fiction but also fantasy and other allied conventions have addressed and critiqued such issues as future shock, globalization, economic inequality, political and ethnic conflict, social justice, unforeseen consequences of the development of science and technology, environmental degradation, and more. The proposed project will offer a comprehensive discussion of how speculative video games, both AAA and independent, represent and confront one of the timeliest challenges of our time: climate change. If science fiction and other genres are really tools to productively think about global problems, then visions – both overtly fictional and speculative – of the transformation of climate are invested with particular urgency. I seek to demonstrate that speculative video games can serve as both tools of critical interrogation of this issue but also as demobilizing vectors that convey a sense of complacency about it.

Research project methodology

Tackling the representation and rhetoric of climate change in speculative video games requires going beyond purely narrative concerns. Consequently, any analysis of game texts, and those that can be discussed through the lens of climate change are no exception, requires an eclectic critical apparatus. At the heart of the current project is the discipline of science fiction studies and its attention to the ways in which seemingly unrealistic stories are very much about the now-and-here. At the same time, a number of concepts need to be drawn from other disciplines in order to account for other dimensions of these texts. Thus, I will analyze the selected game titles with increased attention to the games' visuality (visual studies), composition and aesthetic style (art history), medium specificity and materiality (media studies), and performance and simulation (game studies).

Expected impact of the research project on the development of science

Climate change constitutes one of the largest challenges of contemporary world. The attempts to counteract its consequences should be accompanied by a reflection on its meaning and significance. The genre of science fiction has for decades been a privileged cultural site in which, using futuristic metaphors, our culture attempts to come to terms with phenomena eluding direct description. When it comes to climate change, there is ample critical literature on literary and cinematic texts. At the same time, the representations of climate change in speculative video games have remained virtually unaddressed. Nevertheless, the size of this body of texts and their high cultural visibility demand, to my mind, sustained critical attention.

Outcomes

The findings obtained in the course of research will become material for three journal articles/book chapters and the book proposal, which will, eventually, lead to the book manuscript. I intend to submit the book proposal to one of the presses listed as "Poziom II" on the Ministry of Higher Education's academic press list. Because of the previous record of interest, the most likely candidates are University of Minnesota Press, Duke University Press, MIT Press, and Routledge.