# 1AC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8BHwR7X4wk> song :0

#### Welcome to TFA State. Here we gather in order to play our favorite game of all time… Among Us. The covid pandemic has articulated zones of violence of the death of workers and those outside of ethical perceptions. The pandemic frames our engagement with the imagined communities of the Crewmates through the process of striving to the truth of the imposter.

Lee 21 Death by Prox(y)imity: Participation with the Pandemic through the mobile multiplayer game Among Us (2018) By Andrew Martin Lee PhD Student, University of Chichester Performance of Prox(y)Imitity: Participation with the pandemic through the multiplayer game among us (2018) Saturday 24th April 2021 Conference Paper, Presented Communities and Connection: International Interdisciplinary Conference and Festival Written and Presented by Andrew Martin Leehttps://www.wearethemidnightflorists.org/performing-proxyimity. Lee goes to SUSsex. //avery

[Slide One] A stranger stands between you and your authority-mandated work task, getting too close to this stranger could mean your death sentence. The question is are you walking to your day job during the Covid-19 pandemic, or are you playing Innersloth’s 2018 online video game Among Us? The answer? Why not both. As in-person social interaction became the primary mode of transmission of the Covid-19 virus, alternative modes of social interaction were adopted to maintain interpersonal communication. Games, both analogue and digital, became a safe and engaging mode of communication often enabled by the accelerated developments in video conferencing software such as Zoom. [Slide 2] For the interests of the conference this presentation seeks to analyse Among Us and its internal game structures through the lens of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Main Message to assert that new modes of connection are created by the players, whilst simultaneously allowing them to process the pandemics ‘state of exception’ (Agamben, 2005) within a zero-threat digital environment. I will do this by creating an assemblage of five key ideas Goffman’s ‘Definition of the Situation’, Anderson's ‘Imagined Communities’, Agamben's ‘State of Exception’, FischerLicht’s ‘Autopoietic Feedback Loop’, and Murray's ‘Procedural Authorship’. [Slide 3] Erving Goffman wrote that ‘when an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. […] Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him.’ (Goffman, 1990: 15) In the world of Covid-19, a new definition of the social situation has been developed, masks, keeping distance, and hand sanitiser are all major features of this new definition, and when one breaks these social expectations, discomfort ensues. When everyone around you is wearing a mask, this visual information defines the situation, and what is expected of you. [Slide 4] In the four maps available in Among Us, the definition of the situation is equally understood. Up to ten avatars stand in their Personal Protective Equipment (or bright shiny space suites) preparing to complete several mini-games to invoke their victory conditions. But something stands in their way, one or more of them are imposters, they may look like a regular crewmate, but the imposter's victory conditions rely on killing off the crewmembers one by one. How do they do this? [Slide 5] By proximity. Hand sanitiser might not be needed in space, but distance certainty is. [Slide 6]This definition of the situation within the game world is constantly being reexamined. As I, in my Avatar form, enter into the electrical room to complete one of my many tasks, I am halted by seeing someone else inside. Are they a crewmate? Are they an imposter? If I approach my task on the other side of the room will they think me an imposter? How do I communicate that without the ability to speak to them? If playing on a public server I can only communicate with the directional motion of my expressionless avatar, when playing with friends on a private server however it is not uncommon to use zoom, skype, or discord to communicate via voice chat, although most house rules require silence during play, speaking only in meetings held when called by a player or when a body is found. In the real world, we perform the awkward dance of avoidance in the face of potential collisions and/or Covid transmission. In Among Us the same form of dancing is used to transmit information. “look at me moving in circles, I’m here, I’m not killing you, I’m clearly a crewmate” of course the player your signalling may interpret your circular dance as a ruse for them to let their guard down. For such is the mistrust, of both the digital definition of Among Us and the physical definition of Covid-19. You can’t be sure who has the potential to kill you. By hosting gatherings online in Among Us players can engage with the same fear of proximity they experience outside their homes, but it is only in the online world where death is not permanent. The impermanence of an online death allows one to be reckless, to be the asymptomatic like imposter, remove their mask and murder their friends, allowing a temporary reprieve from the anxiety caused by proximity in a viral pandemic. [Slide 7] Benedict Anderson’s notion of the Imagined Community was first posited in reference to nations. Now nations of vastly different political, social, economic, and historical backgrounds have, under the pandemic, gained a globally shared experience. Thisshared experience has created a new imagined community of those living in unprecedented times. Anderson wrote that this community ‘is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’ (Anderson, 1991: 6) We have been brought together in a new imagined community, as citizens of a pandemic, and yet the image of our communion is a deeply unequal one. As the upper and middle-classes who can afford to work from home do so, and our most vulnerable, our minimum waged ‘key’ and ‘front-line’ workers, contracted the virus at a higher rate than any other demographic. [Slide 8] But as Anderson continues ‘it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, […] not so much to kill, as willingly die for such limited imaginings.’ (Anderson, 1991: 7) In Among Us an imagined community is developed between the crewmates, imaginary as they do not know those who belong to the same affiliation, and a community as they are willing to die, all be it digitally, for their new nation, their team. [Slide 9] In the digital experience, the player becomes what Anderson describes as a ‘long-distanced nationalist’ (Anderson, 1992: 13) who holds no actual attachment to this nation, as in the player's eyes it is a temporary configuration, built purely on the arbitrary digital allocation of the crewmate role. But irregardless ‘finds it tempting to play identity politics by participating […] in the conflicts of his imagined Heimat [Home]’ (Anderson, 1992: 13) [Slide 10] How does the player connect with the game world and as a result connect with the strangers they are playing with? During the pre-game lobby, players have the opportunity to alter their avatars physical appearance through the selection of their PPE (space suite) colour. By enabling this form of customisation, a player becomes invested in their avatar and as a result the game world. But as colour choices are limited it breeds competition with your fellow players to get your preferred colour first. This competition connects the players through competitive kinship, which is further tested when the crewmate and imposter roles are allocated A conscious choice of geo-connection is made when selecting the server location to play from. Among Us had a relatively small player base until the pandemic, the rise in players has resulted in server strain, meaning players often have to choose servers located in Asia or the Americas rather than a European server. By consciously choosing a server location before play, the player is making a direct choice of geo-connection, rather than leaving it up to the algorithm. It enforces their attachment to the imagined community and their avatar. With so many players engaging on foreign servers a communal language was developed in order to cope with language barriers. Sus a shortening of suspicious, to Vent the process of an Imposter using a vent to move from one room to another (a mechanic only available to the imposter role), or even the elusive Third Imposter, meaning a crewmate who plays so badly they end up causing an Imposter Victory, are all methods of connecting one player to another. [Slide 11] Before I move onto Agamben’s State of Exception, I would first like to distance myself entirely from his position on Covid-19, most notably his statements regarding the ‘Irrational and entirely unfounded emergency measures adopted against an alleged epidemic’ (Agamben, 2020) and his liberal use of the National Research Council’s data to imply that the symptoms would be mild/moderate and be akin to ‘a sort of influenza’. As a care home manager during the pandemic, I have seen first-hand the necessity of such measures, and although I use his theory to explore Covid-19, I reject in their entirety, his views on the matter. [Slide 12] The state of exception as posited in Agamben’s 2005 book of the same name, explores the denegation of the basic rights of a territory’s citizens by its sovereign power enacted ‘In [a] time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed’ (Article 4.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) in order for that power to operate in total authority outside of the pre-existing rule of law. [Slide 13] He explains "In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference" (Agamben, 2005: 40). Within the U.K Government’s response to the pandemic, an argument could be made for the beginnings of a State of Exception. Where the ruling power has operated at odds with pre-existing forms of governance, such as the UK Government’s repeateddisregard of SAGE’s advice. This state of exception was ‘proclaimed’ at the Daily Press Briefing’s held from March 16th 2020. Where a running tally of the infected and the dead kept the need for the state of exception at the forefront of the public mind. [Slide 14] In Among Us a similar game mechanic exists in the form of the Emergency Meeting, called by a player from a singular location on the map, or by reporting a dead body when in its proximity. The Emergency Meeting automatically teleports the players to the same location, where through the games own State of Exception their autonomy and more specifically their mobility is removed, reducing them to voice chat if playing via conferencing software, or if not, a group messaging platform, similar to nations use of Twitter to discuss each briefing. The first phase of the emergency meeting is the visualisation of the dead. Here the surprise of unknown murders sets the tone, where the group must justify their actions and point out sus behaviour. A time limit is set on this discussion which culminates in the second phase, voting on the player one believes to be the imposter. The player with the most votes is unceremoniously removed from play, via an airlock, volcano or another elaborate form of digital execution. Only when a meeting is called, and the state of exception proclaimed, can the crewmates go against their implicit passive nature and inflict death. Even elements of the communal language developed around Among Us sustains the real-world State of Exception in-game. To Vent, or Vent Kill is the process whereby an imposter uses a vent to escape from the scene of a murder, or to quickly enter a room and to commit one. Death by ventilation then is one of the hardest to avoid as a crewmember, a situation echoed by the ill effects of coronavirus where only 1 in 5 healthy adults will survive being placed on a ventilator. That statistic rapidly drops for elderly patients and those with underlying health conditions. (Leeds NHS).

#### The U.S political sphere has become one of misinformation and explicit lack of objectivity. We no longer believe people stormed the capital on January 6th. Truth has become secondary to the condition of the American psyche.

Seelow 21 There is an Imposter ‘Among Us’: Teaching Truth in a Time of “The Big Lie”: Two Fun Games for Generating Serious Conversations about Contemporary Society June 8, 2021 in Uncategorized tagged gamebasedlearning / teaching truth / the big lie / truth and games by David Seelow, PhD David Seelow, PhD I learned to read through comics and that eventuated in an M.A. in English from Columbia and a PhD in comparative literature from Stony Brook. I have permanent teaching licenses in English 7–12 and social studies, as well as a permanent license in school district administration. I have 30 years of teaching experience, approximately seven at the secondary school level. I have taught virtually every literature course imaginable. My current affiliation is the College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York. I also write the Revolutionary Learning blog, and consult. I founded an award-winning online writing lab and the Center for Game and Simulation Based Learning. <https://revolutionarylearning.net/there-is-an-imposter-among-us-teaching-truth-in-a-time-of-the-big-lie-two-fun-games-for-generating-serious-conversations-about-contemporary-society/> //avery

Many people passed the time during COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions by playing casual games with a social aspect. Animal Crossing: New Horizons (Nintendo, 2020) certainly represents one such popular game, but no game achieved more rapid success than Among Us (Innersloth, 2018). Between mid-2020 and early 2021 virtually every one of my students played the game and many refer to the game as their favorite.1 A game this popular presents an opportunity for teachers to tap into student driven interests in a big way, and a way that touches a critical problem in political life: identifying the truth.

The truth serves the common good even through individual speech or behavior. The truth is not relative, and teachers cannot allow ideology to masquerade as truth, which is why teaching critical thinking amid social media spin, disinformation and opinion mongering has such urgency. No, a teacher should not inject personal beliefs into the classroom, but a teacher/professor cannot neither allow the spread of misinformation nor treat every perspective as some moral equivalent. Slavery was wrong. Racism is wrong. End of story. Science is not an opinion. The New York Times does not print fake news. If the truth becomes a lie and the imposture a leader then democracy teeters on authoritarianism and that is the dangerous situation of the United States in 2021.

Chaos among the Crew: Playing ‘Among Us’ in Dark Times

Among Us is a perfect casual (social deduction) game. It is easy to learn, fast paced, strategic, social and free. A game can be played in 15 minutes, either online with strangers and/or friends or with friends and/or classmates over a local network. The game requires between four and ten players and customization allows for many variations on the game’s constraints. One person runs the game and players drop into the game as either crew members or imposters on a spaceship. Crew members go about completing a variety of tasks, some easy, some less easy, necessary to keep the ship moving while imposters try to sabotage the crew members in all manner of nefarious ways. The imposter seeks to kill crew members one by one as the crew works to ferret out the imposter(s), i.e., expose the truth before the entire crew is dead. Crew members cannot speak until a body is found. When the body is found, the crew or collective body, hold a meeting and vote. If the vote is unanimous regarding the suspected imposter the suspect is tossed off the ship into oblivion. Team play takes place through the game’s chat feature. The need to vote and reach consensus combined with the possibility that the wrong person is “discarded” makes for exciting drama. Emergency meetings can be called at any time. Once a player dies, the player becomes a ghost and can aid crew members’ work efforts.

There is inherent value in team play and the use of meetings as a vehicle for instructors to work with students on team decision making. There is also a deeper potential to explore the nature of truth and fabrication, a distinction so hard to discern in this new century. Art, and games are a form of art, bring these universal concerns- like truth and justice- to the forefront of serious discussion allowing us to examine the nature and fabric of the world we inhabit. As an example, let me turn back from a popular video game to some analogies from the popular theater of history’s greatest writer, Shakespeare.

Is Shakespeare’s Iago (Othello) the ultimate imposter? How does one insinuate oneself among the good to wreak havoc on their cohesiveness? How does one detect the imposter or improviser before it is too late, and you have strangled your innocent wife? World affairs? What about Emperor Julius Caesar, the world’s most powerful man? Is Caesar’s closest friend Brutus a friend or an imposter who has masqueraded as a friend? Betrayal speaks to insincerity at the deepest level. The trusted confidante as an imposter. What about the false flattery of Goneril and Regan proffered to their aged father King Lear and the fatal consequence of their lies to innocent Cordelia? Lear’s youngest daughter speaks honestly, but her truth is so buried by the lies saturating the court that honesty cannot be recognized, and the faithful Cordelia dies for truth. How does one tell if one is telling the truth? Is the ghost of Hamlet’s father telling the truth? Justice depends on Hamlet’s skillful discernment of facts. The doubt, the uncertainty, ends with Hamlet’s death (and many other deaths as well) and the collapse of the state of Denmark as a foreign power led by Fortinbras, a strong man, marches, unopposed to occupy his new conquest.

Shakespeare will always be our contemporary, students are much more likely all to have played Among Us then read the whole of Shakespeare and this contemporary game can be a springboard to discuss the nature of impostures, of liars and lying, not just pretty little liars, but big, important liars telling big socially significant lies. We have had a former president of the United States flat out lie to the American public by claiming the 2020 election was stolen from him, i.e., “Stop the Steal”. Despite no evidence to support the claim, and a plethora of court cases determining that there was no significant voter fraud thus dismissing the president’s claims one after the other the now former president persists in what the media has called “The Big Lie.” Many American’s believe this lie and take it as truth.

Equally incomprehensible, the insurrection that took place on January 6th at the United States’ Capitol has been whitewashed by many Republican members of Congress. Several elected national leaders claim that there was no actual insurrection despite news cameras having recorded the breach of the Capitol live with the same members of Congress who now deny or downplay the breach hiding as marauders ransacked the building. Facts clear to the senses are denied. The Republican Party refused to allow an independent bi-partisan commission to convene with the purpose of investigating the truth about the January 6th insurrection. Can you imagine never having investigated the Watergate scandal during President Nixon’s tenure? The failure to support the truth or even the attempt to discover the truth of a subversive act against democracy can only serve to weaken that democracy.

As a final example of how Among Us’s mechanic reaches into our current political dilemma take the issue of vaccination. As we emerge on the other end of the pandemic vaccination will be critical to preventing future mass outbreaks and managing a still dangerous virus. Like wearing masks getting vaccinated will be an existential choice for all individuals. Unlike wearing masks, vaccinations will not be subject to government mandates (though organizations may have their own rules regarding vaccination). We will be, as the CDC indicates, on an honor system.2 An honor system requires integrity, truth telling and a concern for the common good- a need for the utmost civility to protect each of us. Imagine going to a packed baseball stadium or movie cinema and not knowing who is vaccinated and who is not. Assume, as we now must, many people are not. Many of these people will play the imposter among us because they do not believe in science or they believe vaccination is a conspiracy of some sort. We now have a game of Russian Roulette- a game of pure chance. That is the wild chance element of Among Us– the imposter as social saboteur undermining our health as individuals and as a collective body- from within, and, in secret. A game of Among Us can be a metaphor for the game of life of truth or infection. That is a dangerous game to play.

#### Among us open up a space of recommunication that allows NEW political organizations and subjectivities that gather around a mutual affirmation of contingent trust and pursuit of the objective facts away from the lies of the imposter that exists amongst us.

Kim 20 Red Is Lowkey Sus: A Political Reflection on “Among Us” What were you doing in electrical? An awkward question if you are Yellow. What were you doing in electrical? An awkward question if you are Yellow. Courtesy of Innersloth By Alina Kim October 5, 2020 <https://www.chicagomaroon.com/article/2020/10/5/red-lowkey-sus-political-reflection-among-us/> //avery

Among Us is a game I log on to after burning my eyes out in back-to-back Zoom meetings, which I suppose is the greatest ironic parallel of all: my avatar in Among Us is merely fixing wires and buying beverages as the world burns around her. I’m a student studying undergraduate-level politics as the presidential election threatens to shake the very infrastructure of the nation I’ve always known. Eerily, the narrative of the game reflects the bleakness of our own political reality—and whether we’re aware of it or not, as the crew members, we project the frustrations that the pandemic has encouraged and inflated upon the general public. We facepalm in frustration when the Impostor wins because the guilty has emerged victorious from an unjust bloodbath, and our blame-shifting has brought our demise. We find catharsis when the crew members win not simply because of a game well-played, but because Among Us has created an imaginary scenario in which we serve justice regardless of a flawed system that has kept a majority of us unaware of the violence committed. Additionally, when we are impostors, we come to realize how easy it is to cheat the system and place blame on an unaware player. All it takes is manipulative persuasion, scapegoating and, above all, extra added powers not bestowed upon the common crew member.

The objective of the game is an exhausting, disintegrating environment rigged against the crew members. Perhaps the most infuriating part comes not as a crew member, but as a murdered ghost, flying around the spacecraft to complete your tasks. You watch crew members discuss at the meeting table, unable to scream at them who the true impostors are, as they vote out another innocent player. The tension this deception capitalizes on reaches its most infuriating, posthumous peak when Armageddon ultimately crashes: the penultimate crew member is thrown out of the airlock, leaving the impostors victorious. Death is no release from the chaos of the spacecraft: in fact, it is another kind of isolation that forces you to watch faith between your crew members disintegrate. It’s torturous, and for lack of a better phrase, a metaphor for 2020 at best.

This isn’t to suck the fun out of Among Us—I’ve pulled all-nighters playing this for a reason. Seeing the self-destructive capabilities of the crew members is highly entertaining, and every wrong vote is a giddy guarantee that the impostor lives to see another murder spree. The best games I’ve played are a showdown between the last three avatars standing, a gamble of paranoid guessing with a sliver of hope that crew members might win, an exhilarating climax I, and many others, chase every game. With a fantastic player in the impostor role, we can recreate a fun, chaotic gameplay of bad faith actors, trolls, and a community of casual gamers. After the game ends, regardless of outcome, we return to the lobby to congratulate a successful impostor, share each other’s socials, and join Discord calls to babble about how stupid our logic was when Red was “lowkey sus” but no one acted on it. Among Us capitalizes on tension and disaster but offers a time to unravel with newfound peers. Sure, I might be salty at my friend who voted incorrectly when we depended on her, but the bitterness dissolves instantly after a “gg.” That’s the final framework that appeals to Among Us gamers: yes, the avatars exist within an Armageddon-like nightmare, but at the end of the day, we find ourselves coming back to this game because it’s like we’re at home, catching up with old friends when the world has returned to its normal state.

#### The traitor operates under the regime of misperceptions. People refuse to believe COVID vaccines are successful . People die from the onslaught of false news and the violence of growing fasism.

Stanfill 21 Orange is Sus: Among Us and Political Play Mel Stanfill University of Central Florida mel.stanfill@ucf.edu Anastasia Salter University of Central Florida anastasia@ucf.edu Anne Sullivan Georgia Institute of Technology [unicorn@gatech.edu](mailto:unicorn@gatech.edu) Orange is Sus: Among Us and Political Play Conference Paper · August 2021 //avery

Historically, the traitor mechanic has been employed in many table-top games. Werewolf [17], Mafia [14], and similar party games rely upon the tensions created by an unknowing group of people hunting down potential traitors. This mechanic – “social deduction”— demands the discussion of inconclusive evidence by the group to progress [12]. Importantly for the current moment, this work to reason through a situation of imperfect information is not unlike the experience of watching social media debate over topics (such as COVID-19 vaccination) fraught with both intentional and unintentional misinformation, which is another way Among Us has been particularly resonant in the contemporary moment. Distrust, in fact, is integral to games with traitor mechanics. Zagal notes that both the original Mafia (1986) and better-known version Werewolf “operate under asymmetries of information,” and use “hidden information” to create distrust and suspicion [62]. While many games use hidden information to add strategic complexity to games, such as fog of war or hidden hands of cards [63], this type of hidden information is shared amongst all players—I can’t see your cards, but you also can’t see mine. As Zagal notes, it is the asymmetry of the information that is salient – not everyone has the same amount of information and those who have it are actively hiding it — and this asymmetry is what leads to distrust and suspicion. Board games relying on the traitor mechanism to create an ethical quandary frequently use survival scenarios or historical contexts to create motivation for paranoia. For example, Project Winter relies upon team survival, with a traitor trying to kill the team, while Town of Salem allows a Mafia-esque cohort to conspire against the other players. These games share a common play with morality, embodying in their mechanics what Sparrow, Gibbs, and Arnold describe as “ludomorality,” drawing on four elements: “game boundaries, consequences for play, player sensibilities, and virtuality” [57]. Such games can create real-world social conflict and are popular at parties in part for their opportunities for outrage and glee at successful deceit. Conversion of traitor games from physical to digital is challenging because of the loss of in-person limitations. For instance, many traitor games rely on players closing or opening their eyes to keep information hidden or shared. Maurer and Fuchsberger (2019) further note that these types of games are harder to translate to digital than most due to the need to design for “physicality, agency, and time in order to maintain a sense of co-location and social engagement” –the exact type of in-person social engagement that makes games of this type successful, and that was eliminated as an option for most people during pandemic socialization restrictions [37]. One of the most successful examples of migrating traitor mechanics from physical to digital gameplay is Secret Hitler [2]. Secret Hitler was launched with a Kickstarter by Goat, Wolf, & Cabbage in 2016 and made an argument about Donald Trump’s potential for fascist leadership through gameplay that encourages players to argue over the faction allegiance of their fellow politicians while creating escalating conflicts. More overtly, the game website includes the note “I don’t think there’s anything funny or cool about fascism. Who can I complain to?” with the White House mailing address [18]. While this overtly political game was never taken up broadly the way Among Us has been, in part due to limited play capacity and a lack of visual engagement elements, it demonstrates the usefulness of traitor mechanics for political representation. Among Us and similar social deduction games rely upon a mechanism of player elimination, which Rogerson, Gibbs, Carter, and Allison describe as a form of “permadeath” that transforms the player into a frustrated witness [53]. This experience of frustration is not unlike that of the expert witnessing the spread of disinformation online: as eyewitness to their character’s death, the eliminated player knows all, but cannot share their knowledge or interrupt the stream of speculation. In such ways, a game that relies on the combination of incomplete information, intentional misinformation, and distrust both reflects the offline realities of 2020 and gives players a fighting chance to triumph over them in a way that does not exist outside of the game. 3 IMPOSTOR AESTHETICS In addition to the appeal of its mechanics, we argue that the retro aesthetics of Among Us are important to its 2020 spike in popularity. In a moment of widespread uncertainty, the game gestures toward “retrogaming as nostalgia,” [21] bringing the impression of familiarity and simpler times. Retrogaming as nostalgia usually centers familiar games, or the ability to collectively return to a familiar space of play through technologies such as emulation, publisher re-releases, and fan-driven restoration of early games [23], but we extend it here to think about other kinds of nostalgic invocation. Notably, Jaako Suominen points out that the “nostalgic discourse” encompasses graphical design and nostalgia that is broader than the act of replay: that is to say, a game does not have to actually originate from a historical time to invoke nostalgia for the player [58]. The retro-inspired visual cues of Among Us can therefore have the same effect, creating nostalgia even though the game was designed recently. In an era of increasingly realistic 3D-rendered worlds and characters, Among Us instead relies on cartoony, minimalistic, 2D cel-shaded graphics, reminiscent of an earlier—and presumed simpler—time. The appeal of the nostalgic during the COVID-19 pandemic has been noted as the pursuit of stabilization through the comfortable and familiar: nostalgia has been associated with buffering “existential threat,” which was certainly a prevalent aspect of life in 2020 [30]. Pandemic-induced nostalgia has been noted in the popularity of classic shows and films on streaming services [29], but might also provide context for the popularity of familiar and retro patterns of gameplay, which Among Us graphically evokes. Garda places retro game design on a spectrum from “restorative” to “reflective” nostalgia [16], noting that the latter offers more potential for disruptive and transformative nostalgia towards the creation of something new. Among Us falls into the reflective category, evoking no specific classic game, but relying upon simplified shapes and palette, saturated colors, and highly stylized, hand-drawn aesthetic graphics to evoke the familiar. It is not just the retro-inspired graphics that are worth noting, however; the depersonalized player characters in Among Us, lacking in facial features as well as in indicators of gender, race, or any other identity, have become iconic. This removal of positionality perhaps speaks to a white liberal exhaustion with being asked to consider race and gender, recalling the classic tech utopianism discourse of “on the Internet, no one knows you’re a dog” in its elimination of identity personalization that results in a white default [42]. Aesthetically, these nostalgic avatars hold appeal to content creators on TikTok and other meme influence platforms, offering a swift and relatable iconic self. This lack of specificity in Among Us contrasts with its notorious contemporary Cyberpunk 2077 [5], which so centers its character customizer that everything down to penis size and pubic hair is customizable [59]. This extreme level of customization makes the minimalism of Among Us even more striking. The player initially only has a choice of which color avatar they will play and some basic outfit choices, although additional decorative content like pets and skins can be unlocked or purchased. The cartoon-like aesthetics of the avatar also suggests a nod to Scott McCloud’s discussion of the appeal of the cartoon—the avatar invites projection without specification [38]. However, it also marks an important reversal of attempts to build embodiment and what Paraetorius and Gorlich suggest as the enhancement of the “user-avatar bond” ‘through “self-similarity” [51]. In the case of Among Us, that lack of self-identification might also assist in enabling the central play of betrayal without any sense of personal culpability, a play mentality that is potentially cathartic given the overwhelming nature of contemporaneous political discourse and the collective weight of responsibility.

#### In Among Us, the free press ought to prioritize objectivity over advocacy

* To clarify, Among Us is a 2018 online multiplayer social deduction game developed and published by American game studio Innersloth.

#### The aff is a pedagogical performance of the embracement of Among Us as the autopoetic feedback loop of imagines futures and communities. New bonds are formed over shared experience through the digital medium of the crewmate ship.

Lee 21 Death by Prox(y)imity: Participation with the Pandemic through the mobile multiplayer game Among Us (2018) By Andrew Martin Lee PhD Student, University of Chichester Performance of Prox(y)Imitity: Participation with the pandemic through the multiplayer game among us (2018) Saturday 24th April 2021 Conference Paper, Presented Communities and Connection: International Interdisciplinary Conference and Festival Written and Presented by Andrew Martin Leehttps://www.wearethemidnightflorists.org/performing-proxyimity. Lee goes to SUSsex. //avery

[Slide 15] While playing the game, a connection is developed between players via a series of autopoietic feedback Loops. First imagined by Erika Fischer-Licht, as a selfreplicating exchange of focus between performer and audience, where the performance occurs not on the stage but ‘between the actors and spectators, and even between the spectators themselves.’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 33). It exists in the middle ground between the presentation of the artistic artefact and its perception by the audience. But in Among Us, a digitized version of this feedback loop exists in the in-between space between the players and their actions on screen as well as between each other. [Slide 16] Fischer-Lichte states that ‘while presence brings forth the human body in its materiality, as energetic body and living organism, technical and electronic media create the impression of human presence by dematerializing and disembodying it.’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 100). It is this impression of human presence that allows for intimate and human connection through the collaborative autopoiesis of the feedback loop. [Slide 17] In the same way that video images of our faces in this very digital conference give off the impression of materiality via dematerialization and representation, so do the avatars of Among Us, giving off that same impression, representing the dematerialized self in a digital form, allowing for a representational but still very real ‘bodily co-presence of actors and spectators [that] enables and constitutes performance.’ (FischerLichte, 2008: 32) In the playing of Among Us, in the performance of the players as Crewmates and Imposters, very real connections are established. [Slide 18] Janet Murray in Hamlet on The Holodeck posits the idea of procedural authorship, a form of feedback loop developed purely for the digitized sphere, built through collaborative story-making by participants within and with a digital environment. By playing Among Us the participants develop a shared story, not as involved as the grand narratives of roleplaying games, and yet by lacking a grand narrative all its own it allows those immersed within it to develop their own meta stories via procedural authorship. Through these meta-narratives and the games internal structures, we can process a small part of the pandemic experience. She explains that ‘A good story serves … [to give] us something safely outside of ourselves (because it is made by someone else) upon which we can project our feelings.’ (Murray: 1997: 100) [Slide 19] As our experience of the pandemic was reduced to screens both as work, play, socialisation and information ‘Digital narratives [… offer] us the opportunity to enact stories rather than to merely witness them’ (Murray, 1997: 170) it is this enacting that allows us to remain engaged in a world that prohibits our participation. [Slide 20] She continues by stating that ‘Enacted events have a transformative power that exceeds both the narrated and conventionally dramatized events because we assimilate them as personal experience. The emotional impact of enactment within an immersive environment is so strong that virtual reality installations have been found to be effective for psychotherapy.’ (Murray, 1997: 170) [Slide 21] As the pandemic has stretched on, and our existence has moved ever more online, the digital culture has taught us that although a mediatised presence is not the same as a physical one, it is never-the-less able to create strong and emotional connections between representations of ourselves online, be it a represented face on a zoom call or an avatar in an online game. Complex sociological and psychological processes are at work such as procedural authorship of online space, feedback loops between participants, or the creation of imagined communities that allow us to process the startling changes brought on by the pandemic and its state of exception, in a way that feels less like government-mandated isolation and more like sustained socially distanced connection just waiting for a time when we can be together again. In the absence of physical proximity, a dematerialised version of ourselves in a brightly coloured space suite allows us one way of connecting and processing a wildly different world.

#### Empirics prove that games centered around cultivating new political imaginaries have a sizeable impact on modeling public health policy and tort reform

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After collecting numerous iterations of this same sentiment, I concluded that *The Howard Dean for Iowa* game hadn’t failed in its mission — create a procedural representation of grassroots outreach — but in its conception. And that conception ran deep into the heart of the Dean campaign itself. When I shared our qualitative assessment of these responses with the campaign, encouraging them to use such evidence as a reason to talk more about policy and less about grassroots supporters, I was kindly reminded that the main challenge the campaign faced was indeed numbers — getting as many people as possible involved. I remain convinced that this failure to put coherent political rhetoric in the hands of its army of supporters was the Achilles’ heel of the campaign.

Taking this lesson to heart, I focused special attention on the procedural representation of public policy in later election games. In the early fall 2004, the Illinois House Republicans commissioned a game I designed to represent their positions on several public policy issues at the center of their 2004 state legislative election. These issues — medical malpractice tort reform, education standards policy, and local economic development — are abstract and dry at best. As such, citizens would be even less likely to have engaged them in the public or private forum, which provided only soapbox sound bites or lengthy, unreadable policy documentation. Moreover these topics, like most public policy issues, are tightly interwoven with one another. Educational quality affects job qualification, which in turn affects economic welfare. *Take Back Illinois* (Persuasive Games, 2004) was an attempt to create a complex, interrelated procedural rhetoric that communicated the candidates’ positions on these topics.

*Take Back Illinois* offered four games in one, three for each of the policy issues and one Howard Dean–like game about the power of citizen participation. These sub–games were interrelated; play in one affects performance in the others. Each sub–game provides a goal for the player you have to reach. For example, in the Medical Malpractice Reform sub–game, the player must raise the public heath level above 80 percent. The sub–game goal and the player’s progress toward it were displayed directly under the game field. A small calendar served as a timer for the game. The calendar starts at 1 January and counts up one day for every few seconds of game time. To win, the player had to reach the goal before the calendar reaches the end of the year.

The procedural rhetoric for each policy issue was carefully designed to compress as much detail into the smallest possible ruleset. For example, in the Medical Malpractice Reform sub–game, a representation of a city was filled with citizens of varying health (health, ill, gravely ill). Unwell citizens were contagious, and healthy citizens nearby them would eventually become ill themselves. If left untreated, gravely ill citizens would die. The city contained several medical offices, and the player could send sick citizens to those offices for treatment. However, Illinois suffered under unusually high medical malpractice insurance rates, much higher than its neighboring states. The candidates’ position on tort reform was partially motivated by the potential reduction in insurance rates such changes would encourage. The game provided a “Policy Panel” which allowed the player to change simple public policy settings for the game environment. In this case, the player could alter maximum non–economic damages awarded in medical malpractice lawsuits as well as money invested in medical research to prevent repeat tragedies. In the Medical Malpractice sub–game, maintaining a high threshold on non–economic damages keeps insurance rates high, which is likely to cause doctors to leave the state. Once this happens, the medical office dims and the player can no longer treat citizens there.

The other policy sub–games created similar procedural rhetorics for each of the issues. In the Education Reform sub–game, players had to simultaneously manage a handful of school districts across the state. Some districts started out with different educational standards in place, and some districts enjoyed disproportionate teacher funding. To play the game, the player had to “teach” in each district by keying in a Simon–like memory sequence that corresponded with the educational standard in each district. The policy position embodied in the game’s procedural rhetoric was precisely that maintaining multiple standards across the state made the educational system on the whole difficult to manage. Players would quickly understand this position upon being forced to remember four or five different memory sequences for all the schools. To play more efficiently, the player could reassign standards on a district–by–district basis using the Policy Panel. The player could also reassign funding to needy schools in order to raise their educational output.

In public forums, policy issues are often discussed independently, even though most are bound to one another in significant ways. To communicate the rhetoric of interrelations, *Take Back Illinois* maintained a set of scores for each sub–game and used those scores as inputs for settings in other games. For example, higher performance in the Educational Reform sub–game increased the efficiency of job training centers in the Economic Development game.

To play the game successfully, the player is forced to acknowledge the campaign’s position on the issues it represents — for example, it is impossible to win the Medical Malpractice Reform sub–game without reducing maximum non–economic damages for malpractice lawsuits. The game’s procedural rhetoric is a compressed version of the campaign’s policy position. In playing the game, the player is not “brainwashed” or otherwise fooled into adopting the candidates’ policy position, but rather he is afforded an understanding of that position for further inquiry, agreement, or disapproval.

#### The affs political project bolsters interest in video games as a form of community --- one day the gamer be simply an anomaly

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Instead of chasing after a mythical videogame Citizen Kane or trying to reconcile all videogames with one monolithic set of laws for design and reception, what if we followed Ecko’s provocation to demystify games. What if we allowed that videogames have many possible goals and purposes, each of which couples with many possible aesthetics and designs to create many possible player experiences, none of which bears any necessary relationship to the commercial videogame industry as we currently know it. The more things games can do, the more the general public will become accepting of, and interested in, the medium in general. ∂ A summary of that future would have no place on a T-shirt or poster. It wouldn’t be worth quoting as a sound bite on television or splashed across the cover of a nonfiction bestseller. It would state the obvious, with humility: videogames can do many things. They do so every day, whether or not people notice them. They do so in public and in private. They do so with and without fanfare. Counterintuitive though it may be, that’s a future in which videogames win their battle in the culture wars and become relevant and lasting. ∂ For decades, videogames have been played primarily by the people who already play videogames and who consider the playing of videogames a part of their identity. But other sorts of people abound: people who fly for business more than three times a month, people who read all of the Sunday newspaper, or people who have kids with food allergies. I am sure these people read magazines and watch television and listen to the radio, but no right-minded person would label them ziners or tubers or airwavers. They’re just people, with interests, who sometimes consume different kinds of media as they go about their lives. ∂ If videogame playership is indeed broadening, then videogames will no longer fall under the sole purview of the games industry. There’ll no longer be a single court in which the legitimacy of games will be tried. There’ll no longer be an oligarchy of videogame industrialist-gods to whom all creators and players will pay homage. Instead, there’ll be many smaller groups, communities, and individuals with a wide variety of interests, some of them occasionally intersecting with particular videogame titles. ∂ Some might argue that as videogames broaden in appeal, players’ demands will only increase. Games will have to become more and more gamey, more like commercial videogames of the current industrial variety to meet the increasingly sophisticated demands of these new players as more and more of them become gamers. But I suggest the opposite: as videogames broaden in appeal, being a “gamer” will actually become less common, if being a gamer means consuming games as one’s primary media diet or identifying with videogames as a primary part of one’s identity. The demands of players will surely increase and deepen, but those demands may bear little resemblance to the ones gamers place on games today. ∂ Soon gamers will be the anomaly. If we’re very fortunate, they’ll disappear altogether. Instead we’ll just find people, ordinary people of all sorts. And sometimes those people will play videogames. And it won’t be a big deal, at all.

#### The RoB is to endorse method of political community. Our method is k2 analyzing and generating new forms of political communication in order to search through the lies and find the truth of our modern political condition

Stanfill 21 Orange is Sus: Among Us and Political Play Mel Stanfill University of Central Florida mel.stanfill@ucf.edu Anastasia Salter University of Central Florida anastasia@ucf.edu Anne Sullivan Georgia Institute of Technology [unicorn@gatech.edu](mailto:unicorn@gatech.edu) Orange is Sus: Among Us and Political Play Conference Paper · August 2021 //avery

On October 19th, 2020, U.S. Representative Ocasio-Cortez tweeted her interest in playing Among Us on Twitch as a “Get Out the Vote” event: “Anyone want to play Among Us with me on Twitch to get out the vote? (I’ve never played but it looks like a lot of fun)” [44]. Twitch stars quickly volunteered to co-host, and her first stream took place the following day. The stream was immediately noted as one of the top five most concurrent viewers on a Twitch stream, with more than 435,000 viewers at its height, rising to “nearlyUnlike many of her fellow politicians, one journalist pointed out, “Ocasio-Cortez games,” and brings both authenticity and knowledge to Twitch [6]. Press coverage of the event noted Ocasio-Cortez’s success in presenting herself as a comfortable streamer and player. One story highlighted the aspects of the stream that made her convincing: “She felt at ease on stream, addressing audio level issues live (a common thing to see on streams), and inquiring about specific mechanics, such as whether Impostor players have a special animation when they crawl through vents, showing her familiarity with how video game physics and animation can dictate how games are played” [47]. Another journalist noted that Ocasio-Cortez’s consistent digital engagement led “her recent Twitch stream to seem less like a political stunt and more like another genuine attempt to reach people where they live”; “‘Pokémon Go to the polls’ this is not,” she added, referencing an infamously artificial 2016 comment from then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton [22]. The way Ocasio-Cortez’s engagement tended to be perceived as genuine resonated with common questions about whether politicians are sincere and relate to everyday people as opposed to being out of touch elites, but also with the structural question of whether any given player in Among Us is genuine—or an Impostor. Importantly, the acts of persuasion that are essential to political success are equally essential to success in Among Us, and in both cases, this is true whether they are sincere or not. As one critic noted, “Like President Donald Trump having his signature printed on pandemic-relief checks that Democrats proposed and fought for over Republican objections, an imposter who successfully claims to have completed a task may gain more credibility than a crewmate who really did one” [60]. The strategy has a further parallel in election and campaign advertisements, which similarly seek to divide and entice through creations of allegiance and perceived communal benefit and connection. In Among Us, as in politics, appearances are everything. Both Among Us and contemporary US politics involve active cultivation of false realities. In Among Us, Impostors can use a tactic called “marinating”: “When an imposter marinates a player, they stay near them without killing them for an extended period of time, hoping the other player will then vouch for them as not being an imposter, because they had a chance to kill and did not” [60]. As Izaak describes, “the marinated player, convinced of your innocence, can then be used to drive a wedge between the crew, to split up votes, and attack other crewmates. This can allow you some freedom to move about the map and score kills, not to mention it could help you win 50/50s where a vote hinges on whether or not you can convince someone to vote along with you” [26]. Marinating was used in Ocasio-Cortez’s first stream, with AOC falling victim to the strategy and actively defending one of the traitors, thus inviting viewers to consider the implications of whose information can be trusted. One critic compared this to the fake news and conspiracy ecosystem that has emerged in the past few years in the US, saying, “The point is to make people distrust those targets and trust them, implicitly, instead. If they’ll swallow the little lies now, maybe they’ll accept a big lie later” [60]. During the stream, Ocasio-Cortez wove together gameplay and political goals through humor. She proposed a ghost union, as shown in her comments “perfect time to unionize” and “haunting rights” (see Figure 2). She encouraged people to vote blue, which both suggests that the player in blue might be the Impostor and serves as an encouragement for voting for the Democratic Party, labeled blue since the 2000 election [11]. She also said she wanted to declare orange “sus”—also speaking at multiple levels, indicating the player in orange is behaving suspiciously as well as indicating opposition to Donald Trump, known for his orange-cast spray tan. Through such comments, she tied electoral politics into the game’s mechanics. Rhetorically, Ocasio-Cortez’s usage of the game’s mechanics as fuel for political discourse throughout her streams worked to continually recontextualize play, drawing attention back to the parallels between the challenges of political cooperation and the game’s mechanics and gameplay. Perhaps inevitably, once Among Us was leveraged for political use, it was politicized. Following Ocasio-Cortez’s streams, the game was hit with pro-Trump spam in what appeared to be an attempt to balance the exposure Ocasio-Cortez had gotten. “Hundreds of players in public matches found their in-game chats had been hijacked to broadcast new messages, primarily pro-Donald Trump slogans and demands that users subscribe to a YouTube channel called ‘Eris Loris”’ [61]. The person who had hijacked these chats spoke to Eurogamer about the goal of both gaining publicity and amplifying Trump slogans: “I’ve been making cheats for lots of video games and I sell them, this is just a publicity stunt...I have received hundreds of threats, such as death threats lol, but I don’t mind them and heavily doubt any of them are actually going to be executed...I’m a college student and I support Trump, with the election and this hopefully getting publicity wanted to add that” [33]. The rhetoric used by the attacker is very familiar from the historical discourse of trolling, and included a nod to the “lulz,” or the justification of harassment as motivated by the pursuit of humor rather than genuine hostility [50]. The rhetoric of self-justification is common to trolling, and particularly prevalent in spaces like gaming where hostile environments are often justified as part of play. These challenges are a reminder that it is impossible for any platform to remain neutral: if there is a space for user speech, then trolling and conflict are likely. The minimalist aesthetics and limited chat capabilities of Among Us are, like the fields of Second Life [34] before them, easily overrun [9]. Ocasio-Cortez’s successful streaming events, and the backlash that ensued, helped raise the profile of Among Us, leading to surges in downloads and streaming as the game was more thoroughly integrated with electoral politics—a causal relationship also seen from how 6 AMONG US BEYOND GAMING: ALL YOUR SPACE ARE BELONG TO SUS As Among Us gained in popularity, aspects of play circulated outside the game itself and entered broader culture. This was particularly visible in shifting linguistic usage of key terms “Impostor” and “sus.” It is important to note that as an abbreviation for “suspicious,” “sus” predates the game. As noted by linguist Gretchen McCulloch, crediting gaming entirely with the term’s popularity risks “columbusing,” or discovering something other people, especially people of color, already knew about [39]. It also risks erasing the homophobic usages of the term, such as “sus boi,” that can carry over into game-related uses. Popular histories of the term have also noted its connection to police jargon and more generally the bias inherent in labeling something or someone as suspicious, which is a practice frequently directed against those who are already marginalized [45]. However, much like Among Us itself has become political beyond its intent and design, so too has “sus” spread and morphed to take up a new cultural meaning. In particular, the “Orange is Sus” phrase mentioned by Ocasio-Cortez and noted above, has transcended ingame usage, appearing everywhere from campaign yard signs to tshirts. Modified versions of the featureless Crewmate suit frequently add Trump-ian hair to cement the reference (see Figure 3). Similarly, the appeal of the iconic sequence in which the suspected Crewmate is “voted out” is particularly strong for memetic content (see Figure 4). The politicization of the game thus exceeds the game itself. Moreover, while imperfect as a metric, the search interest in the term “impostor” spikes abruptly with the advent of the Twitch streamer play and prior to the US election (see Figure 5). Notably, while interest appears across the map, it is concentrated in Democratic-leaning states [24], perhaps pointing to the contours of who felt under siege in 2020 from teammates that were committing sabotage rather than helping. Likely, both the term and Among Us itself will diminish as the US continues its post-election resolution, but the sharp change is indicative of how dramatically Among Us has entered popular culture in the pandemic and election period.