Talk based on:
Playing Dystopia
Nightmarish Worlds in Video Games and the Player's Aesthetic Response

https://www.transcript-verlag.de/detail/index/sArticle/4330

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https://www.amazon.co.uk/Playing-Dystopia-Nightmarish-Aesthetic-Response/dp/3837645975/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1541699026&sr=8-1&keywords=playing+dystopia+farca

Gerald Farca

Playing Dystopia
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[transcript] BildundBit

Hypotheses

Video game dystopias function as **wish-fulfilments and hallucinatory visions** in desperate times.

They are triggered by trends hidden within the game designers' empirical present and are fuelled by the fear of losing something of value—that is to say, the future itself. They therefore may be described as vicious nightmares, *as anxiety dreams in the Freudian sense*, which have distorted and disguised their original meaning: *the wish for Utopia*.

As such, video game dystopias investigate the possibility of a worse future to *warn* players about potential trends apparent or present in their specific empirical present. They thus functions **as a strategy of Utopia** and retain the element of **hope (or ambiguity)**.

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[transcript] **BildundBit**

The Philosophy of Utopia

- "Utopia is forward-looking, yes. Always just around the corner, always on the other side of the horizon, Utopia is 'not yet', elusive, glimpsed but never grasped. That's one of the things I love about Utopia. And yet, like you [Ruth Levitas], I want the world to be very different from the way it is now. I want to ride the wave of utopian impulse toward a new now."

Levitas and Sargisson, "Utopia in Dark Times," 20.

- Utopia in the 21st century evokes a *cautious desire* and indicates "a direction for man to follow, but never a point to be reached." It thus takes on "the shape of a process" and "a programme for change and for a gradual betterment of the present."

Vieira, "Concept," 22; 23; cf. 22-23.
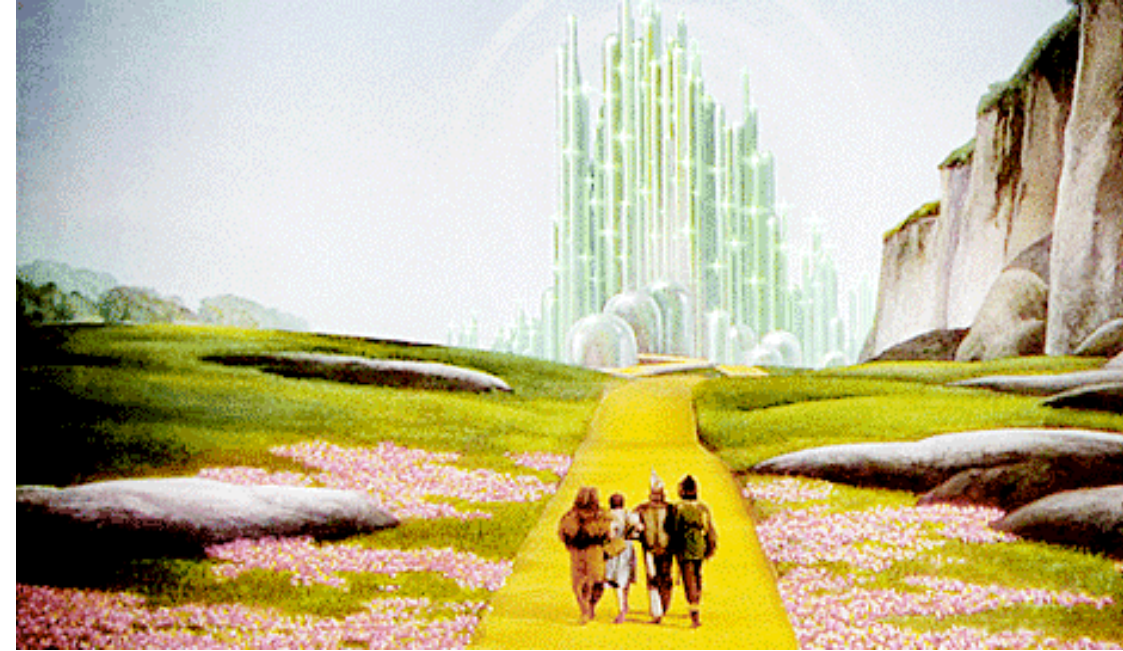
Utopian Impulse in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction

- "social dreaming," (Sargent, "Three," 3)

- "the basic human yearning for a better world" and "the urge to dream or speculate about a more perfect social order" (Ferns, *Narrating Utopia*, 32)

- as "obscure yet omnipresent … finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices." (Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 3)

Each time it is the ***universal wish*** within the dream, the hope for the betterment of society as a whole, that plays a vital role.
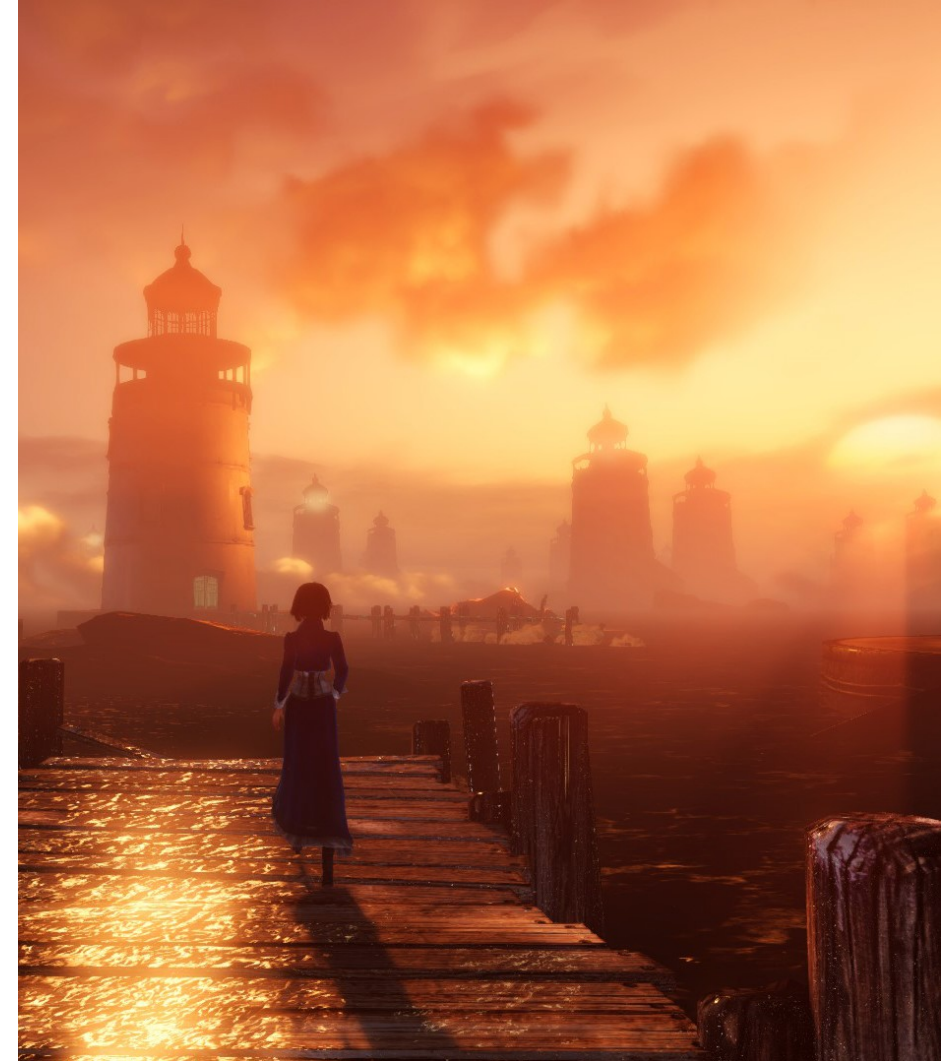
The Nature of the Utopian Dream

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- Are utopias **_progressive_** or **_regressive_**, are they directed towards the future of humankind or are they "nostalgic in that they look back to an idealized past which is then moved into the future?" (Sargent, *Utopianism*, 21)

- Sigmund Freud argues that "[*t*]*he dream is the* (*disguised*) **_fulfilment of a_** (**_suppressed, repressed_**) **_wish._**" "These wishes," he continues, "existing in repression are themselves of **infantile origin**." (*Dreams*, 68; 392).

The Nature of the Utopian Dream

- ***dream-thoughts*** (the undistorted dream harbouring the original wish) and ***dream-content*** (the manifest dream as experienced by the dreamer—after the dream work has *distorted* the original dream wish by means of *condensation* and *displacement* to ensure the sanity of the dreamer) (Freud, *Dreams*, 169ff., 190ff.)

- the primal architecture of **the *Utopian Imagination*"** and ***expressions of utopian thought***—that is "Utopian fancies" such as the literary utopia/dystopia (Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 44-45.)

The Nature of the Utopian Dream

Two Types of Wish-Fulfilment:

- "a repellent purely personal or **individual 'egoistic' type** [the artist's or a fictional character's]
  - Joel's wish to safe Ellie
  - Artyom's for a secure childhood with his mother.
  - Booker DeWitt's wish for the safety of Anna/Elizabeth
- and **a disguised version** which has somehow been universalized and made interesting, indeed often gripping and insistent, for other people." (Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 53).

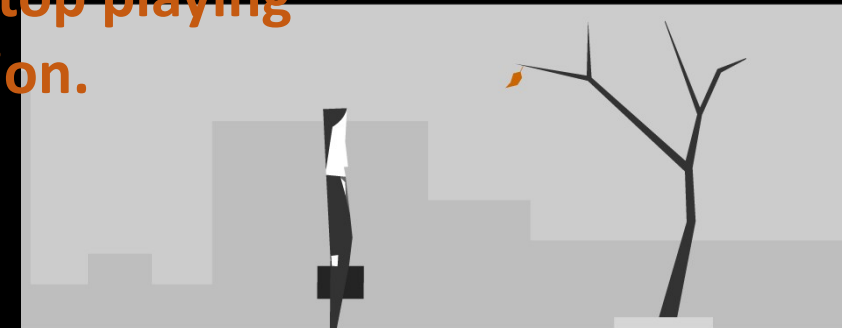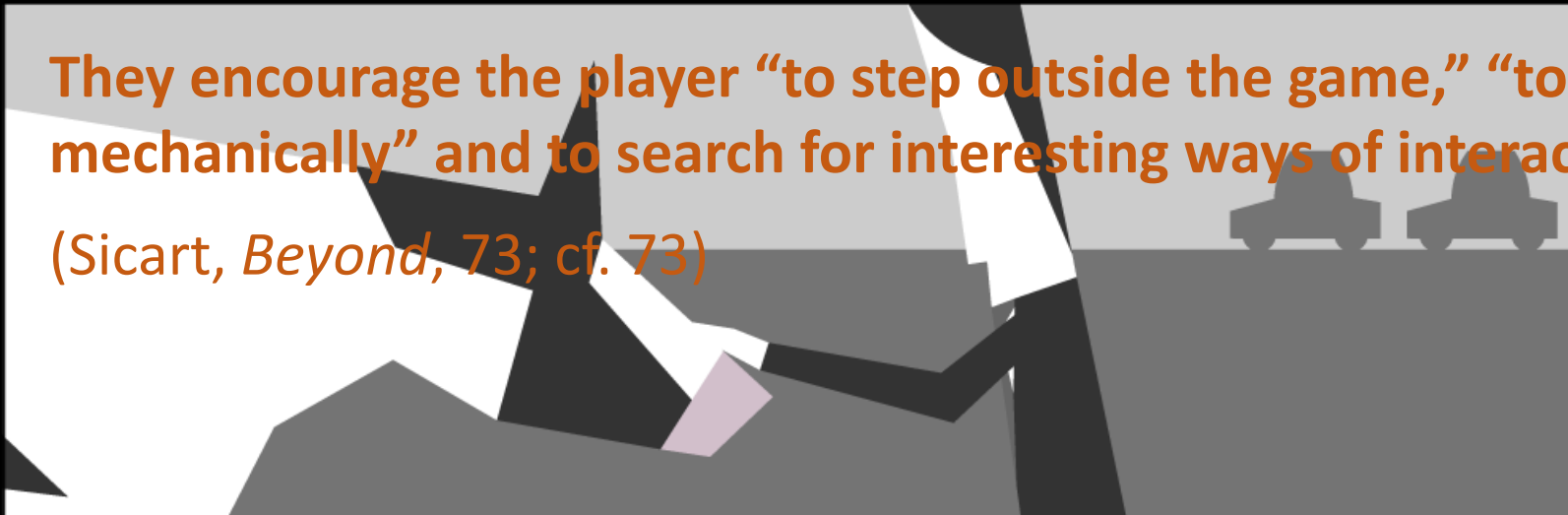➤ The wish for **Utopia** (in different forms)

Booker: Anna? Is that you?

Every Day the Same Dream (Molleindustria, 2009)
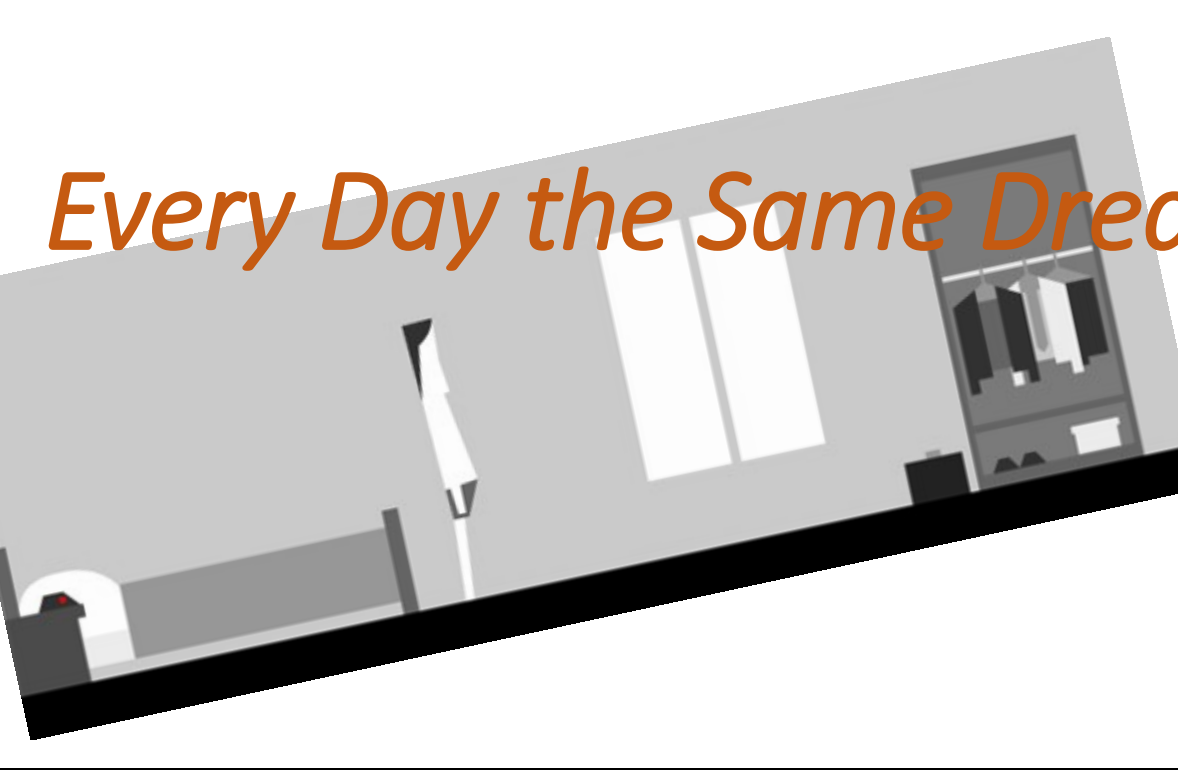
They encourage the player "to step outside the game," "to stop playing mechanically" and to search for interesting ways of interaction.

(Sicart, *Beyond*, 73; cf. 73)

Metro 2033 (4A Games, 2009)

So, that's the dead city. Welcome home, Artyom.

■ Take ammo   ◯ Refuse

Oh, God, poor Seryozha.... Thank you for saving my son...I can never repay you,
but take these cartridges, at least it's something.

You reap what you sow, [...] only brings death. To [...] without a[...]

There's not much useful in here — just hints at most, although it does show the way to D6. That's our destination, then.

what is he doing!?!

BioShock Infinite (Irrational Games, 2013)

Elizabeth: Who are you?

Comstock: I see every sin that blackens your soul. Wounded knee. The Pinkertons. The drinking and the gambling.

MONJMEN ISLAND

CAUTION!
CLOSED
OFF
LIMITS!
BY ORDER OF THE
COLUMBIA POLICE AUTHORITY

DANGER!
RISK OF
DEATH
OR
SERIOUS INJURY

CAUTION!
CLOSED
LIMITS!
CLOSED

DANGER!
RISK OF
DEATH
OR
SERIOUS INJURY
CLOSED

Press Y to switch weapons.

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Elizabeth: Hello! Oh, this is wonderful! Oh come dance with me, Mr. DeWitt!

KEEP THIS AREA

CLEAN

IT IS YOUR

JOB

Bathroom Attendant: This ain't no place for you, sir. You best be on your way, or there's gonna be trouble for us both.
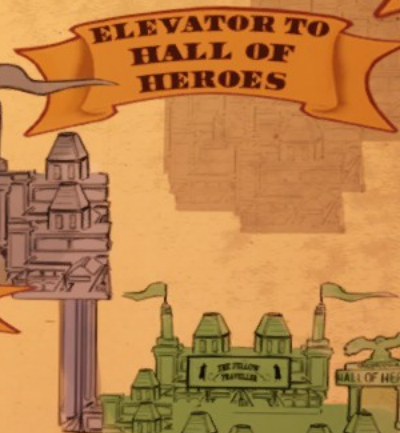
Fink Propaganda: Well, I'll tell you what: I'll be damned if I'd let any of you poor folk get robbed at some shady establishment.
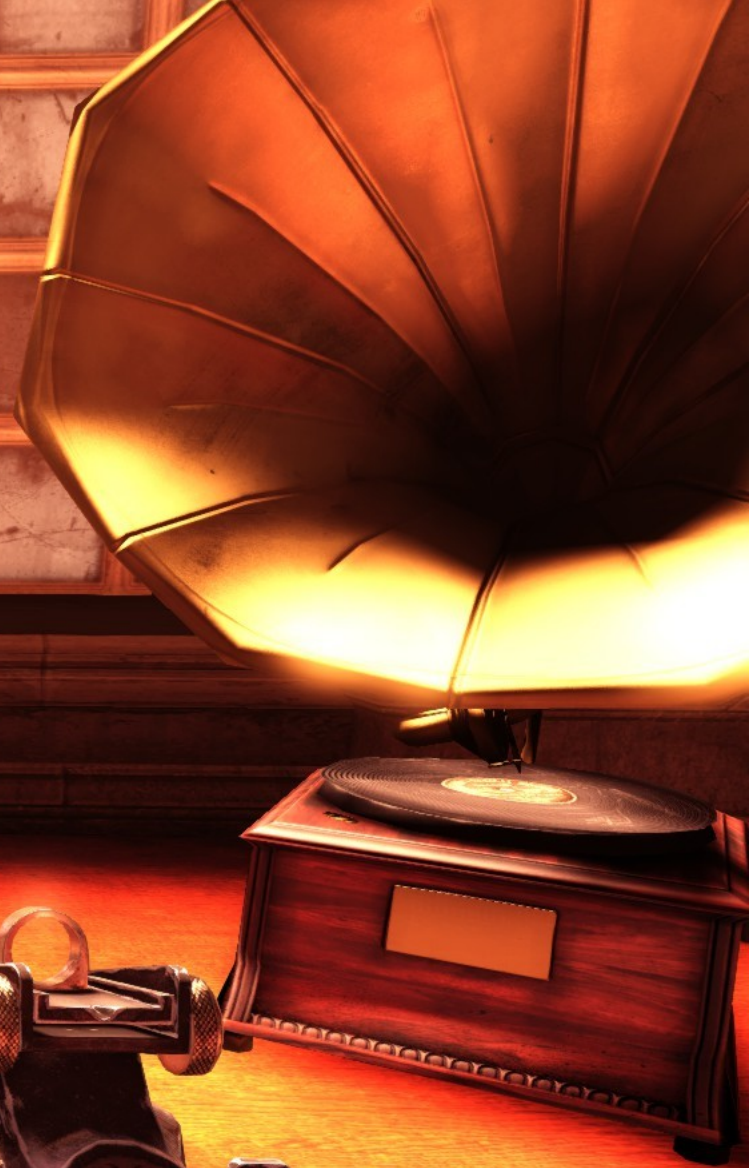
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Elizabeth: If he were to take me back...that's death, Mr. DeWitt. Or something so like it, I cannot tell the difference.

Booker: Nothing is finished! You lock her up for her whole life. You cut off her finger, and you put it on me!

Booker: No, there was no baby. And if there was, I sure as hell wouldn't give it over to this guy!

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