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Компьютерные игры как источник формирования исторической памяти

Video games as a source of historical memory formation

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Introduction

In the era of total connectedness and virtualization of reality, the crucial importance for the balance of forces on the world stage requires the capacity of states in the informational sphere, particularly in the context of cyberspace. Information outburst and technological advancement now make it possible to create and use qualitatively new instruments towards achieving political and strategic goals. Arab Spring and the Ukranian crisis are both convincing evidence of the fact that nowadays global public opinion is formed by the active participation of advanced information and communication technologies. Interactive TV (iTV), the world wide web with its news portals and social networks have become effective tools in framing and driving both domestic and foreign policy in today's contemporary world. It thus becomes imperative for these new methodoligies to attract particular attention and demands a certain reflection.

According to Gartner's report, "the number of computers being used today has exceeded 1 billion"[1]. The number of Internet users is even larger: in 2014 it amounted to more than 3 billion people[2]. Nearly two billion of them are gamers[3]. The increasing role of communication technologies in the development of the information society has resulted in the natural growth of interest in their features on the part of academic community. The last 15 years have been marked by the appearance of the impressive number of publications related to the virtual space in general (Frasca, 2003; Burn, 2007; Gee, 2007; Linderoth, 2008); special attention was drawn to opportunities of the Internet and video games[4] in the field of their impact on users' minds (Heith, 2006; Gee, 2007; Norgrove, 2007; Juul, 2009). Many of these studies ascertained the potential hazard regarding such kind of amusement. It has been postulated that computer games may provoke aggression and addiction, inspire sexism, support stereotypes, and cause many other harmful effects (Egenfeld-Nielsen and Smith, 2003). In the past two to three years, games have also been considered as a powerful toolset that 'does memory work' and could be used as strong intruments of the soft power projection. In other words, there is a concern that computer games may somehow influence our interpretations of the past and present events and thus affect so-called collective memory (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015).

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[1] See: Forecast: PCs, Ultramobiles and Mobile Phones, Worldwide, 2010-2017. 4Q13 Update, https://www.gartner.com/doc/2639615 (accessed 12 March 2015).
[2] The International Telecommunication Union's Report.
[3] 2014 Global Games Market Report, http://www.newzoo.com/product/2014-global-games-market-report/ (accessed 12 March 2015).
[4] Terms 'video game', 'computer game' and 'electronic game' are equal and used in present paper to refer to all electronic games regardless of platform.

Many memory scholars emphasize that in 20th and 21st centuries it is media that plays the key role in the process of collective memory shaping (Kliger-Vilenchik *et al.,* 2014). These allegations actually have some basis: media currently not only contributes to the dissemination of scientific knowledge about history or the replicas of artistic images and personal historical experience, but also creates and transmits myths as well as ideological and propaganda clichés. Video games as a new media combine the features of art and media and posses the "presence effect" and "effect of coding" (Mazur, 2013). These effects are achieved by creation of visible picture with the usage of expressive means, which allows the gamer to feel like a participant in the events described. Games are an integral part of modern culture, along with cinema and literature. In addition, games have a unique feature, which is deprived in all other forms of media – they have a high degree of subjective immersion. Unlike the book, where the reader cannot influence the character in narrative, the gamer not only *can*, s/he *has to* manage and manipulate the character, otherwise the game will not just happen. Whereas the reader in a novel just passivelly follows the story, the gamer controls and directs it (or at least believes s/he does). Such albeit minimum involvement in events management multiplies the effect of identification. This peculiarity makes computer games extremely effective tool of manipulation and opinion formation.

The phenomenon of collective memory itself is a complex and ambiguously understood area of social consciousness (Tamm, 2013). In present paper, collective memory is considered as a set of historical messages, myths, and reflections on the past that is shared by the members of different social groups, passes on from generation to generation, has a subjective nature and is realized though symbolic objects (Rogozhina, 2015). Subjectivity of collective memory is of crucial importance for researchers of this phenomenon within the virtual space since collective memory does not focus on detailed and impartial reproduction of the past but rather constructs this past. Therefore, it could be affected by a variety of discources and memory cultures.

Some modern researchers pay special attention to the fact that "there are fewer and fewer historians interested in reconstructing, interpreting and giving meaning to historic events; so-called "memory studies" that look at how historic events are remembered, presented and used later on are becoming more popular" (Piirimäe, 2015). Put differently, the purpose of memory studies is to investigate the variety interpretations of the same historical facts held by different social groups. Video games in their turn are one of the new ways to interpret these events and therefore have to be investigated.

Research problem and research question

As mentioned above, modern social science cannot provide complete and reliable data concerning potential effects of computer games on gamers' consiousness. This question has been a subject of considerable debates for several decades; and still there is no clear and unambiguous answer. Some studies state that games indeed may provoke some aggression and addiction, inspire stereotypisation, rasim and sexism (Anderson and Bushman, 2001; Haagsima, 2008; Peck *et al.,* 2011; Karapetsas *et al.,* 2014). However, despite the fact that these findings have been obtained during research, they are often contested by other researchers' groups who investigated positive consequences of video game play such as positive effects of prosocial games on helping and positive impact of action games on visual-spartial skill (Green and Bavelier, 2007; Greitemeyer and Osswald, 2010). In many respects, the lack of strong methodological basis and methodological inaccuracy become the cause of such disputes (Egenfeldt-Nielsen and Smith, 2003).

In addition, although nowadays game studies become increasingly popular and even 'mainstream', one should note that these 'present-day' research 'deal with potential effects of video games to a very limited extend' (Egenfeldt-Nielsen and Smith, 2003, p. 4), concentrating primarly on games' negative effects (Anderson and Bushman, 2001; Sørensen and Jessen, 2002). Since 2002, there have been published several research dealing with potential positive effect of video games (such as strategic and critical thinking) (Durkin and Barber, 2002; Bavelir and Green, 2003; Kocurek, 2012). Nevetheless, there is still a gap in scientific knowledge about the possible impact of computer games on the formation of collective memory. Meanwhile, at present when society experiencing an accelerating transfer of historical knowledge and its interpretation (Kansteiner 2002), this issue is more of current interest than ever. Thus, the chosen research topic seems relevant both from the academic and practical perspectives.

The aim of the research

The main purpose of present study is to reveal the role of video games in the formation of collective memory.

The key research question, thereby, is formulated as following: "Do video games possess a role in the process of collective memory formation"?

The research object and subject

The object of study are video games as symbolic objects through which intersubjective representations of the past are realized.

The research subject is the representation of the past in video games.

Theoretical basis

A theoretical basis for the study of video games as a new form of media and tool of mass communication has been shaped by the concept of ludus and paidea introduced by G. Frasca (Frasca 2003) and developed by G. Voorhees (Voorhees, 2012). Besides, since the aim of given paper is to investigate the possible effect of video games on collective memory formation, classical theories of collective memory such as theory of individual and collective memory introdused by M. Halbwachs (Halbwachs, 1992), P. Nora's concept of mnemonic places (Nora, 1996), and M. Foucault's concept of memory and counter-memory (Foucault, 1977) were used as a basic theoretical frame.

The methods of research

During the study conduction, two main methods of data gathering were used:

o Discource analysis (official webpages and forums of games *Company of Heroes 2* and *Medal of Honor* series; media sources for the period from 2011 to 2015);

o Semi-structured interviews (with experts, game developers and gamers).

In general, fifteen interviews have been conducted in 2015/2016. There were two experts (culturologist and historian), three game developers working on 'historical games', and ten gamers (both professional and non-professional from the West (four) and East (six) Europe).

The structure of the MA thesis paper

The MA thesis paper consists of introduction, two chapters, conclusion, list of sources and appendixes. The introduction gives an overview of the research design. The first chapter contains the presentation of theoretical framework that could be applied for current research purposes. The second chapter analyzes games as new media and investigates historical reconstruction and narratives within the game space. The thrird chapter concentrates on the results of empirical research.

The conclusion presents the summary of MA paper with particular focus on general findings of the study that has been conducted. Finally, the list of sources and the appendixes provide additional information about the sources used in the research and presents specific data for the empirical analysis, including interview guides and transcripts' examples.

Chapter 1. Theoretical foundations for study of video games as a source of collective memory formation

Choosing computer games as an object of the study within memory studies creates several problems for the researcher. One of them is the lack of conceptual framework for investigation of games as a source – or mean – of collective memory[5] formation. The main reason is that computer games are a relatively new media form which appeared on the market about 40 years ago[6], but whose current advancements as influencers to imagination and as soft power tool have only taken shape in-terms of network connectivity only in the past 10 years, with advancement in network bandwidth and evolution of new technological interfaces. In addition, the 'sample set' of this data is very small and limited to a very particular set of group of people and mindsets. Thus, any generalization of 'statements' is baseless and provides a wider room for criticism and counter-argument. Therefore, an appropriate theoretical concept for their study has not yet been developed and verified. Meanwile, game studies per se have become increasingly popular and even 'mainstream' today. This contradiction results in controversial and ambiguous findings of games research. For instance, it is thus easy to find a number of articles in top scientific journals reporting that games cause aggressive behavior, and it is even easier to get papers stating completely the opposite argument (a simple search in the Google Scholar database verifies this). What is of crucial importance, however, is that many people involved in debates concerning potential negative or positive effects of computer games base their arguments on articles in *popular science* publications, or publicatons that are part of public discource rather than scientific. A good example of mixing and framing opposite positions and presenting it to public is the Danish daily newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*. One of its articles published back in 2003 states the following:

"Contrary to what has previously been believed, children's imaginations are destroyed by popular video games. However, international research shows that they adopt a far more strategic way of thinking" (Carstensen and Vestergård, 2003).

Commonly, public that receives such message from the media reffering to authority tends to unconditionally believe it. Thus, in addition to hardly replicatable and poorly respectable real studies we also have media as an actor that juggles different positions depending on its goal (sometimes explicitly abusing it) and creates additional difficulties for the phenomenon under study.

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5 In present paper, terms 'historical memory' and 'collective memory' are equal.

6 In that occasion, I consider video games that emerged in the early 1970s as well.

In academic field, the shift and the transition from the real society to the virual one has been already investigated by J. Baudrillard at the end of 1970s (Baudrillard, 1994). M. Casstels also can be considered as a pioneer of this field of social science due to his concept of the network society (Casstels, 1996). However, first attempts to create modern sociological models based on the concept of virtuality were made only in the end of 1990s (noteworthy, all they refer to the same year – Bühl, 1997; Becker and Paetau, 1997; Ivanov, 1997). Nevertheless, despite their substantial relevance for contemporary science, all these theories have one fundamental flaw – they are overly general, so they seem to be nonapplicable for the study of video games within present paper.

The problem can be solved by combining and using of middle-range theories. In particular, theoretical basis for the study of video games as a new form of media and tool of mass communication can be formed by the concept of ludus and paida that has been introduced by G. Frasca (Frasca 2003) and developed by G. Voorhees (Voorhees, 2012). Besides, since the aim of given paper is to investigate the possible effect of video games on collective memory formation, some theories of collective memory can be used as well. Among them first of all we should mention the theory of individual and collective memory introdused by M. Halbwachs (Halbwachs, 1992), P. Nora's concept of mnemonic places (Nora, 1996), and M. Foucault's concept of memory and counter-memory (Foucault, 1977).

At first sight, it may appear that three concepts of collective memory listed above do not fit each other as in many respects opposite schools. However, it is this motley mix that allows us to consider the game as 'doing memory work' (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015).

The aim of given chapter is to present preconditions for collective memory studies, conduct a brief comparison of several theoretical approaches to this phenomenon, which are relevant for contemporary social science, and draw basic conclusions that allow to analyze games as the agents of collective memory.

1.1. Collective memory: A definition and key concepts

Our generation is witnessing the acceleration of civilization development in all its manifestations, including informational one. This fact has not been questioned by any of the modern researcher (Lykova, 2007). It is impotant, however, to identify the structural changes of socio-cultural experience provoked by this devepoment.

Firstly, it causes an unprecedented growth of so-called 'relicts of civilization', i.e. obsoleted forms of experience, images of the world, norms and patterns of behaviour, which, in its turn, leads to the growth of irrelevant past that is not suitable for modern use. This is not the process lasts for generations anymore but rather loss of past experience structures, which [loss] is acutely perceived by contemporaries. To put it simplier, people's reactions on the acceleration of progress become more conservative while people are trying to root and slow down in order to catch the relationships between past and modernity (Lykova, 2007).

Secondly, a constantly growing rate of progress causes structural changes in relation to the future. Expansion of technologial, information, and social activity leads to the fact that the large space of the future become the subjects of ideological, political, and business design. At the same time, there is less confidence that future actions of people will be determined and estimated in accordance with today's standards and assessments (Lykova, 2007). Information oversaturation of modern society today demands a rigorous selection of what will be transferred to the future. Inability of many social institutions and individuals to keep and transmit such large amount of information forces them to decide *today* what their descendants will know about them *in the future*. The need for preserving the greatest possible amount of this social information is reflected in the compensatory mechanisms of preferences, personalization, and specialization, which increased the importance of 'unedited' individual, local, marginal, and other histories (Lykova, 2007).

Thirdly, the need for selection of facts, events, and institutions having a high resistance to obsolscence follows from the previous. Preserving some 'imperishable' elements is a basic need of social consciousness which is reflecled in design of socio-cultural 'places of memory' (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1996).

The problem of constructing past in order to explain or change the present and thereby influence the future remains of crucial importance and is solved through the development of relaively new concepts such as social and collective memory. Introduced in the early 20th

century, the concept of collective memory updates in the 1980s due to formation and operation of the new modern society and new role of knowledge in this process.

Nowadays, memory has become a subject of the broad interest in humanities and social science. The ambiguity of social memory brings together a variety of disciplines (sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, and even media and literary studies) and manifests itself in various terms. There are social memory, collective memory, cultural memory, individual memory, etc. All of them are subjects of a relatively new discipline called 'memory studies'. A 'memory boom', that began in the end of 1970s as a result of rethinking the experience of the WWII and further decades, has been reflected in the significant number of papers and studies focusing on the process of social construction of memory and the relationships between memory, history and historical science.

Memory is an indispensable attribute of human culture. Memory – both individual and collective – is a mandatory condition for existence and identity of any society and any individual. Mechanisms of memory formation thus, on the one hand, always indicate the features of a particular socio-cultural system. On the other hand, in many respects they determine the ways of being as well as the ways of thinking for people constituting those systems.

The present paper concentrates on collective memory as an opportunity to construct diverse representations of the past, so it focuses on the role that is played by different narratives and rituals designed to bring new generations the memory about outstanding events of the past. The attention is drawn to the issue of what people belonging to the same or different societies remember about past, how they interpret it, how the shared understanding of the events of this past is shaped, and finally, how it changes through the time. Thus, given paper consider the level of historical knowledge which M. Halbwachs calls a collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38).

According to Halbwachs (1992), each social group creates its own memory about the past – memory that emphasizes features of this particular group and distinguishes it from others. Recovered in social consciousness, these images of the past allow this group to present its history, its origin and evolution (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 86). Despite the fact that collective memory is beared by individuals, it is much wider than their personal autobiographical memory due to its transfer mechanism: collective memory is based on knowledge passing from one generation to another (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 44-49).

Halbwachs's great contribution to the collective memory studies expresses, firstly, in the formation of the theoretical foundations of the study of this phenomenon, and secondly, in the introduction of the term 'collective memory' into circulation. He shifts the scientific focus from 'past' and 'history' to 'memory' and investigates the nature and constitution of memories, creating a new scientific direction called 'memory studies'. Moreover, Halbwachs does not just define collective memory – he makes a clear distinction between it and other forms of memory (such as individual autobiographical memory and historical consciousness) and emphasizes the importance of social context, social frameworks (*cadres sociaux*) for this phenomenon understanding (Zerubavel, 2011). Moreover, he contrasts memory and history as two opposing ways of representation of the past. History is a result of rigorous study of historical sources and not susceptible to the pressure of social environment, whereas collective memory is an integral part of social life and, therefore, transforms in response to changing needs of society (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 78-87). Collective memory and historical science are seen as two different stages in the process of human's cognition of the past. History as a science and the main mode of cognition occurs, when traditions weaken and social memory fades (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 78-83)[7].

Some of Halbwachs' foundational ideas were taken from E. Durkheim and H. Bergson, his scholarly predecessors – for a long time, Halbwachs' writings were considered as a kind of 'appendix' of the Durkheim's sociology (Romanovskaya, 2010, p. 39). For instance, from Durkheim's ethnographic work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Halbwachs borrows and reinterprets the concept of collective effervescence. From Bergsons, in its turn, Habwachs adopts ideas about the inner subjective time and two types of memory – habitual, or action-oriented memory, and memory that expresses a disinterest in present life (Romanovskaya, 2010, p. 43).

Developing ideas of Durkheim, Halbwachs identifies memory as a connecting element that held together brief periods of collective effervescence. Considering memory as a social construct (which is incidentally depend primarily upon language), social scientist describes the process of changing the meanings of memory through the time. Halbwachs demonstrates the collective ability of people to create a paradigm through the continual reconstruction of memories (Romanovskaya, 2010, p. 41).

With regard to collective memory, it is collective to the extend in which it fits into historical consciousness of the *group,* and social to the extend in which it fits into historical

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7 Many of today's experts, however, disagree with Halbwachs's views on historical science (see Hutton, 1993).

consciousness of the *society*. Collective memory substantively connected with reflected experience of social groups (generations, ethnicities, those in power, etc). There are common values, patterns, stereotypes, behavior types that have been produced by human memory and remain there. Collective memory is a memory about the historical past, or more precisely, its symbolic representation (Romanovskaya, 2010, p. 41). It is not only one of the main channels of experience and information transmission, but also an important component of the identity of individuals, social groups and society as a whole (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 39). Halbwachs is the first who proposes to consider collective memory as a social phenomenon, which is necessary for the survival of society. From this point of view, collective memory is the key to the identity of society. Introducing the concept of memory, Halbwachs proceeds from the assumption that individuals have two types of memory (an echo of Bergson's ideas), historical (collective) and autobiographical. The first one reaches the social actor only through different types of records (written, drawn, etc.), but can be kept alive through commemorations, festive enactment, and the like (Romanovskaya, 2010, p. 40). Periodic celebrations (e.g. May, 9th in Russia and July, 4th in the USA) thus serve as "focal points in the drama of reenacted citizen participation" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 243). Autobiographical memory, in its turn, is a memory of events that individual has personally experienced in the past. It may also contribute to reinforcing of the bonds between group members (for instance, in the case with college graduates who create alumni associations where they can reconstruct past shared college experience). Nevertheless, Halbwachs notes, such kind of memory tends to fade with time unless it is periodically reinforced through contact with person who has the same or similar experience. In the absence of contact during long period of time memory may be lost. In any event, he further concludes, autobiographical memory is always rooted in other people, i.e. social groups. However, when it comes to historical memory, the person does not remember events directly. This kind of memory can be stimulated only in indirect ways through reading, listening, watching, or in commemoration and festive occasions when people gather together to "remember the deeds and accomplishments of long-departed members of the group" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 244). In this case, the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions rather then by social groups.

As mentioned above, Halbwachs refers to the "memory – history" opposition and emphasizes the distinction between the types of the past which they recover. Memory seeks similarities between past and present, whilst history states for differences. History is critical towards the past. It rejects emotions which are associated with and affected by memory. Events and images that memory reconstitutes are fragile and vague, but historical evidences are reliable. Collective memory does not coincide with history, because the former creates the connection

between the past and the present, while the latter breaks this connection (Romanovskaya, 2010, p. 42).

Halbwachs states that collective memory has two features that allow opposing it to the history. Firstly, collective memory has no strict division into periods inherent in history. Secondly, unlike history that tends to universality and admits the existence of a single unified history of the world, there are several options for collective memory at the same time even within one country (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 70). This is determined by the simultaneous existence of several social groups that may be connected with the same individual. Again, Halbwachs stresses that collective memory is a social construct, and, hence, every collective memory depends upon specific groups that are delineated by space and time. In other words, the group constructs the memory and individuals "do the work of remembering" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 71).

However, such opposition is not entirely justified. First of all, no historical research (and, as a consequence, history itself) cannot claim to be exhaustive. It is inevitably limited by the author's views, the ways of selection and organization of information, and the genre of historical narrative (White, 1987). Historians may aspire to be impartial and objective, but they are an integral part of their society, so as its members they often are subjecs of the mainstream view of the past. They may not only share these premises which are the basis of collective memory, but also promote them through their work (Zerubavel, 2011).

At the same time, despite its dynamic nature, collective memory could not be reduced to completely random set of representations of the past and seen as absolutely independent in relation to historical science. Halbwachs (1992) states that collective memory is shaped by *present issues and understandings* (italics supplied). Groups select different memories to explain current issues and concerns. In order to explain the present, leaders of the group reconstruct the past, using rationalization to choose which events are remembered, and which are eliminated, and to rearrange events to conform to the social narrative. Therefore, changings in our knowledge of the past are connected with the changings in organizational needs and the transformations of the structure of society (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 235). However, these alligations are criticized by many memory scholars. According to Schwartz (1982), Halbwachs is too focused on the present and undermines the very concept of the continuity of the history of mankind, denying the objectivity of history and emphasizing the collective memory capacity to adaptation. 'Given the constraints of a recorded history, the past cannot be literally constructed; it can only be selectively exploited', comments Halbwachs' views Schwartz (1982, p. 396). Like a pendulum, collective memory is in perpetual motion from historical records to contemporary

social and political problems, from modernity back to the evidence of the past in trying to integrate them. Referring to historical sources, collective memory constantly changes its interpretation of events, selectively emphasizes some episodes and shades others, adds new touches. Memory and history thus do not exist independently and do not develop in opposite directions. They are in a constant struggle, and withal inevitable depend on each other (Zerubavel, 2011).

In modern society, the role of professional historians in shaping of prevailing in public consciousness images of the past goes to teachers, writers, journalists and other media actors. The heritage of 20th century – a wide range of formal and informal means, aimed to perpetuate the history of a given society, maintains collective memory's vitality. Celebrations, festivals, monuments and memorials, songs, theatrical performances, books, movies, and games – all these means remining of glorious past compete with interpretations of historian experts.

Although Halbwachs (1992) emphasizes the flexibility and changeability of collective memory, he does not touch the issue of its transformation in his works. In this context, the concept of *commemoration* becomes central to understanding of memory changes. Commemoration within the given paper is understood as the entire set of the means and ways which serve for consolidation, preservation, and transfer of memory about the past in society (Zerubavel, 2011). Collective memory takes shape due to various forms of commemoration such as anniversary celebrations, reading stories, participating in memorial services and historical reconstructions, religious observance, etc. Through these rituals, a group forms representation of certain events of the past, produces their unity, select a particual verbal form for their articulation (see Durkheim, 1965). Participation in these rituals allows people not only refresh and confirm their memories of the past, but to modify, 'to rememory' them (see Morrison, 1987). At the level of individual communities, each act of commemoration gives the opportunity to introduce new interpretations of the past, although repetition of commemorative rituals itself maintains a sense of continuous memory in society.

The concept of commemorative events is directly related to the concept of *mnemonic places,* or places of memory (*les lieux de mémoire*) (Nora, 1996). Mnemonic places reinforces stereotypes of individuals' consciousness and awakes specific memories of the past. Visiting such places and observing of or participating in certain rituals associated with them could be one of the most effective ways to shape collective memory, especially for young generation (Nora, 1996).

The emergence of mnemonic plases happens largely due to spontaneous and dynamic nature of collective memory that 'remains in permanent evolition, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successife deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived' (Nora, 1989, p. 8). Memory places appear as a response to the dissapearance of natural memory: people face the need to preserve relics, documents, images, speeches and other material objects that are evidence of past events. Those place, however, are not places in a narrow, geographical sense. De facto, they have three separate meanings such as material, symbolic, and functional ones. Nora (1989, p. 12) defines mnemonic places as 'fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it'. In outline, they could be defined as a mental point of intersection and concentration of collective memory. The main function of mnemonic places, therefore, is to preserve collective memory. Places of memory can be represented by people, events, artificial and natural objects, buildings, traditions, legends and locations surrounded by distinct symbolic aura. It is important to understand that mnemonic places are not mnemonic unless our imagination and consciousness give a special mnemonic meaning to it. For instance, purely functional things such as school history textbook or veterans association become mnemonic solely on the basis of being an object of the ritual. Another illusrtation, a minute of silence that is an extreme example of symbolic meaning, is a material separation of time unity (Nora, 1996). These examples demonstrate that three aspects of mnemonic spaces are always coexisting complementing each other.

In many respects, memory places are also related to the fragmentary and tentative nature of memory images. Those images do not posses a coherent or associated value as long as individuals or groups do not project them into specific circumstances. Those circumstances, in their turn, are given to these groups by mnemonic places (Hutton, 1993).

Memory places are maintained through commemorative rituals, and this brings us back to the commemoration itself. Commemoration is a deliberate attempt to stop, or at least conceal the process of gradual change of tradition (Hutton, 1993). Commemorative mnemonic places enhance representations of the past. Thanks to this peculiarity, commemoration turns out to be politically significant. This kind of activity multiplies the power of memory places and provide the opportunity to strengthen blurring with time stereotypes of consciousness and make them specific imagery more comprehensible (Hutton, 1993).

Most people form the picture of days that are gone primarily under the influence of different commemoration forms. Moreover, as children are engaged in collective memory before their acquaintance with science of history, the former could have more significant impact on their perception of history. Traditionally, there are two actors (family and school) that play an important role in familiriazing a child with national traditions. Indeed, knowledge from an early childhood imprints the images and stories embodying collective memory of the particular community (Zerubavel, 2011). However, nowadays when children almost from their infancy have an access to computers and Internet, one should consider such actor as media in its broad sense (and games as its subspacies).

Each commemoration act reproduces a particular commemorative narrative – a story about different events that explains the reasons of commemoration and containts a moral lesson for the society members. Yet creating such narratives collective memory relies on historical records, the latters are used creatively and selectively. As a result, such commemorative narrative becomes more like historical writings rather than historical chronicles since it is exposed to a certain literary adaptation (narration) and from simple list of facts turns into coherent story (White, 1987).

As every commemoration act recreates only one segment of the past, collective memory acquires fragmented nature. However, takin together these actions compose a kind of general narrative structure – master commemorative narrative[8], or narrative scheme that arranges and systematizes collective memory (Zerubavel, 2011).

A power of collective memory, therefore, is not in a scrupulous, systematic or extremely accurate reconstruction of the past; it is in creation of simple and bright images that help to express and reinforce a certain ideological stance (Zerubavel, 2011). The inclination of collective memory to dichotomize the past and portray it in monochrome colors leads to increase of contrast between different historical periods and promotes unambiguous attitude towards particular stage of the society development. Thus, some stages are presented in collective memory as significant steps towards society evolution whilst the others are seen as the era of decline. As a rule, pioneers' epochs, a seizure of foreign lands, victorious wars or wars for independens have a positive evaluation in the history of nation. On the contrary, times when the nation was a part of empire or under the yoke have a negative connotation as eras that did not let the nation realize itself as an independent political entity (Zerubavel, 2011).

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8 A general representation of history, a basic storyline that forms common for all members of the group understanding of the past.

Bringing the concepts of the past to a certain system through the establishment of general narrative structure also reveals so-called *commemorative density* of particular historical periods (what Lévi-Strauss (1970, p. 259) calls 'the pressure of history'). Under commemorative density I follow Zerubavel (2011) and understand the value that society ascribes to the various segments of its past. While some periods occupy a privileged position in public consciousness, others may attract a little attention or be completely forgotten. Commemorative density is thereby higher for those eras and events that have a crutial importance for historical consciousness of a certain group and that are a subject of considerable efforts aimed at preserving memory. The lowest commemorative density characterizes those periods which receive almost no attention in the general narrative structure. Dates and events that are supressed and shadowed by collective memory become objects of *collective amnesia.* Whereas collective memory pays its attention to the most valuable aspects of the past, all other aspects (considered non-essential or potentially hazardous for narrative progress and transfer of the basic image of the past) are inevitably discarded (Zerubavel, 2011).

High commemorative density not only emphasizes historical significance of particular events, but also distinguishes them from a long series of episodes by giving them a special status of symbolic texts which serve as a key to understanding of history of the society. Indeed, one milestone event suits better for the purposes of rutialized memories than the gradual transition from one state to another[9]. Within the general narrative structure these events appear as 'turning points' that changed the course of the historical development of the past.

This is the way that historical event within the framework of collective memory may turn into *political myth* (Tudor, 1972, p. 137 – 140). This myth as a magnifying glass lets community members see the present and imagine future. Those turning points have a special symbolic meaning. For these reason, they are extremely controversial and hardly can be unambiguous interpreted. This ambiguity stems from the boundary position of tirning points between two epochs (as any rites of passage, they simultaneously represent departure from the past and movement towards the future) (Van Gepper, 1960). Such 'between state' of turning points gives them, on the one hand, the mentioned above ambiguity and duality; on the other hand, it contributes to their transformation into political myth that can be used in struggle of different forces (Zerubavel, 2011).

Boundary position of turning points gives space to a variety of interpretations. It smooths conflicts between different interpretations, and thus allows historical events to preserve their

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9 It is directly linked to the commemorative time, i.e. the time of memory. Unfortunately, given the limitations of present paper we cannot cover this topic. For more details, please see Genette, 1980.

sacred meaning and to hold their places in the general narrative structure. From time to time, however, the fragile coexistance of contradictory interpretations is broken, and myth cannot longer restrain the internal conflict between them. In such moments, an open struggle for the past starts. Competing social groups clash for the opportunity to interpret historical events from the most favourable for them perspectives. The conflict between dominant and alternative social views on historical events naturally provokes profound changes in the collective memory of the society.

An alternative narrative model that contradicts the general narrative structure and exists despite the superiority of the latter we should define as *counter-memory*. Using a term 'counter-memory', I follow M. Foucault's ideas about the oppositional nature of memory (Foucault, 1977). I noted earlier in present chapter that one of the modern historiographical approaches to the problem of memory is reducing memory to the representation of the past: moments of reminiscence are higlighted while repetitions and patterns of thinking are ignored. I also provide some theoretical foundation of this position called 'denial of tradition' developed by Halbwachs (1992), and now it makes sense to present Foucault's views on this issue.

Foucault denies the tradition as the basis of historical research since historians referring to tradition associate it thereby with individual, separate concept of the past. Meanwhile, history should study commemorative forms, and its main interest should lie in the field of politics dealing with memory. Historians do not tend to objective knowledge, they serve power and authorities, construct history within contemporary discourses. Tradition thus uses collective memory in the interests of the present. As a result, memory becomes a subject of political manipulation (Foucault, 1977). For this reason, we have to contrast collective memory as a 'set of knowledge and ideas of society about the past' (Foucault, 1977, p. 144) to counter-memory as 'a practice of memory formation that is social and political, one that runs counter to the official histories of governments, mainstream mass media, and the society of the spectacle' (Foucault, 1977, p. 145). This distinction is of special importance for present study for two reasons.

Firstly, counter memory, as it follows from its name, is an oppositional memory, an antagonist of prevailing collective memory that has 'subversive potential'. Where the general narrative structure tends to eradicate alternatives interpretation of the past, the counter-memory denies the verity of generally accepted ideas of the past and offers 'more accurate and truthful' version of events. Besides, counter-memory defies collective memory not only in symbolic sense, but in political one as well. The general narrative construction represents the image of the past that has been created by the political elite, it serves its interests and contributes to its

problems solving. Counter-memory challenges this hegemony offering narrative that differs from the general one and reflects views of supressed groups. At the same time, because of the disparity of resourses that are avaliable for those in power and those under pressure, counter-memory experiences a constant threat of marginalization and destruction by officials (Heineman, 2014). Memory, therefore, becomes a field of struggle between different political forces: using various commemorative events anf other activities aimed at preserving the memory of the past, rival groups present their interpretations of history in order to gain control over the political system or to justify their separatists position.

Secondly, considering mismatches between two memory discourses and related memories, one may trace 'how the past functions as a mediator of meaning' (Schwartz, 2000, p. 17) for various contexts and different societies. Collective memory "embodies a template that organizes and animates behavior and a frame within which people locate and find meaning for their present experience" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 18). When reasoning about mnemonic places, I have briefly touched on this issue.

Discussing memory, one shoud note that Foucault is confident in his belief concerning the fragmentarity of this phenomenon. However, this approach could be found too limited (Zerubavel, 2011). Counter-memory is not neccessarily bounded by one particular event. It can become an integral part of the entire set of ideas about the past that odds with the prevailing views. Even when counter-memory defies established interpretations of particular historical events, it inspires some concern because it affects representations of many other events and thus questions the general narrative structure that expresses collective memory about the past (Zerubavel, 2011).

Indeed, the mentioned above 'subversive potential' of collective memory is well recognized by political regimes that forbid various minorities group to perform certain rituals in order to supress or destruct the collective memory of the latters (a good example could be efforts of Bulgarian authorities aimed at suppression of turkish, gipsy and muslim folklore as 'foreign' in the process of creating 'purely Bulgarian' identity – see Silverman, 1989). Even in democratic societies, contradictions between collective memory and counter-memory can easily provoke fierce conflicts over how to present the past and and what representations of the past are closer to reality. One should note, however, that boundaries between official and counter-memory are often blurred. There is a "complex interaction between vernacular [counter] and official memory, and narrow definitions of the two groups do not allow for rich understanding of the processes involved with this interaction" (Rowe, 2012, p. 119). The pressure of counter-memory thus may

contribute to the maintenance and vitality of collective memory since the presence of the former stimulates the response from the latter. Collective memory may successfully crush oppositional memory or keep it under control; nonetheless, it may happen that counter-memory will receive a push to developlment, and with the growth of popularity counter-memory will lose its oppositional status and transform into collective memory, as it happened during the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution. Thereby, despite many researchers tend to accentuate disagreements and contradictions between official and vernacular memory, they inform, inflect, deflect and even support each other during tough times (Heineman, 2014).

Summarizing all mentioned above, one should emphasize again the difference between collective memory and historical consciousness. Unlike the consciousness, collective memory is actualized by realities of present and future and has a highly selective nature. Despite some incompletnesses, however, it yet has a striking feature to hold the most important historical events in minds, turning historical knowledge into various forms of ideological reception of the past experience and fixing it in collective unconscious (myths, legends, and stories). Finally, collective memory has one more peculiarity which is called hyperbole. It exaggregates certain moments (curiously, mostly recent) and therefore cannot claim on consistent and systematic reflection of the past. Such historical asymmetry, rejected by historians for its 'unscientific nature', is an extremely interesting subject for sociologists as it indicates a certain social request, deliberate or unperceived (Lykova, 2007).

Collective memory as symbolic representation of the past and some ideal reality combines different types of knowledge, not only scientific (incl. historical) but religious, ideological, cultural and everyday knowledge as well. Generally, history and historical science are seen as basis for collective memory, but in fact, the mechanism of their interaction is much more complex. First and foremost, 'professional historical knowledge' is a reflection of historical pattern of politicaly dominant groups. That is why many scholars define this history as 'official memory' (Hutton, 1993, p. 48). However, natural multiplicity of memory forms cannot be limited to only one version of the past; therefore, even in totalitarian societies there are 'secret' histories and counter-memory (Foucault, 1977). Thus, multiple representation and interpretation as well as conflict between them are universal phenomenon. The problem here lies in the finding of certain compromise that will satisfy both ideologically dominant group and representatives of other parties (Lykova, 2007).

One of the mechanisms of reconciliation with the past is the expansion of memory boundaries, inter alia through using of alternative information about it. Generally, this process is a result of disappearance of living witnesses and participants of historical events. As a result,

although history and historical knowledge remain to be a base for collective memory, other sources and agents of memory come to the fore (Lykova, 2007). There are everyday knowledge (from the family, for example), art (mostly popular), religion, educational and political institutions, and media. For greater clarity, key forming agents and collective memory properties are presented in table below:

Agent	Memory feature
Eyewitnesses	Heterogeneity
Family	An important element of social integration
Friends	A main channel of individual's position on relevant events formation
Significant others	An important element of personal identity
School	Unified within a separate state framework
Higher education and academic institutions	Able to intervent collective memory
Internet	Spontaneity
Media	Legitimizes political and economic culture
Government structures	Shapes national historical consciousness

Some of these agents serve as official memory sources (government stuctures, school), some of them produce counter-memory (witnesses, family, friends), some may operate in both directions (media, Internet). Memory properies are directly linked to their forming agents; therefore, collective memory is heterogeneous as different groups construct it differently. What is important for present reseearch is that power groups (primarily political) produce official memory in order to legitimate the existing political and economical order and justify their status quo. At the same time, those group supressed or situated at the periphery carry out opposing activity and are the bearers of counter-memory. Thus, the 'official national historical consciousness' (the most common historical picture of the world within particular state) is under the impact of counter-memory (Bogomiagkova *et al.*, 2015).

One more thing that should be considered within given chapter is the process of transformation of collective memory through the time. It is necessary to explore this issue due to its relevance to the analysis of games as sources of collective memory. So, four factors affecting collective memory could be identified: a death of the eyewitnesses, reliability reduction, 'present settings' introduction, and spontaneous political and ideological actualization (Bogomiagkova *et al.*, 2015).

A vivid example of eyewitnesses leaving could be WWI and WWII. With the death of the last WWI veteran Florence Green (see Fox, 2012) we were deprived the opportunity to contact

eyewitnesses of this war directly and thus lost the chance to get information from the original source. With regard to the WWII, we still have the opportunity to talk with participants of those events, yet their number is getting smaller every year. However, even direct witnesses are not always a reliable source of information because of second problem that could be defined as reliability reduction.

As mentioned above, memory, both individual and collective, is not constant. Memories are actualized according to current relevant situation and modified each time they are going through the process of actualization. With time, any authentic information transforms, accumulates myths and non-existing items, still considering being reliable by the society. Curiously, even direct participants of the events tend to take for granted these 'edited' versions.

A 'present settings' introduction manifest itself in the transference of current realities on the past. For example, a young person who have never read 'Romeo and Juliet' will probably imagine this pair of lovers as twenty-something years old young men and girl whose relatively long-term relationships were doomed because of the feud between their families. In fact, as we know, Juliet was 13, Romeo was 16, and the whole tradegy lasted less than a week. Such contemporary understanding and interpretation of the past events allows us to trace the process of present settings implementation (Bogomiagkova *et al.*, 2015).

Finally, any historical event could be actualized from political or ideological point of view not only within the official memory but in the framework of counter-memory as well. This process has a spontaneous nature. For example, when public attention is directed to underline the positive international relations between Russia and Germany, referring to a long shared history, German presence in Russian imperor family and politics are quite common. With the deterioration of the affairs, consequently, negative memories about WWI, WWII, Holocaust, etc are actualized (Bogomiagkova *et al.*, 2015).

One more thing that should be outlined in given chapter before we proceed to detailed examination of computer games, is the fact that there is a possibility for both spontaneous and deliberate penetration into collective memory, its images, shapes, and interpretations, both real and fictioned (constructed). Examples of revolutions given above demonstrate how easy memory images can be manipulated in order to reduce pluralism of the past and, consequently, the present and the future.

In modern world, expressive collective memory of oral tradition (traditions, habits, popular wisdom that is unconsciously passeв from generation to generation) seemingly gave a way to introspective personal memory of written culture. While the former, also known as communicative memory, or oral history, reflects the recent past and is transmitted rather unofficially, the latter requires special mechanisms, institutions and actors of its dissemination (Lykova, 2007). Informational age and its children, among which we may name computer games as well, provides wide and unique opportunities for memory preservation, revival, modification and manipulation of collective memory.

Thus, taking into account the analysis of theoretical concepts addressing the issues of collective memory construction and distribution that has been carried out in the present chapter, one should refine the definition of collective memory that is used as basic one within the given paper. Collective memory is a set of historical messages, myths, and reflections on the past that is shared by the members of different social groups, passes on from generation to generation, has a subjective nature and *is realized in and through symbolic objects.* The next chapter presents the category of symbolic objects and introduces video games as a new dimention of those objects, treating them simultaneously as new media.

1.2. Defining video games

Finding an appropriate theoretical concept within memory studies is only a part of a problem that lies in wait for researcher who explores games as a sourse of collective memory. Another challenge for scholar is to choose the perspective that allows investigate the game phenomenon itself as fully as possible.

When speaking about memory in terms of socio-cultural values, one as a rule implies its location outside the human body and mind. We consider the embodyment of cultural values and norms in some tangible carriers, which are defined by specific socio-historical conditions and, in particular, by the level of information technologies' development. Memory in its essence is those information forms that mankind translates as its past, be they narratives of memorates and fabulates, or manuscripts and books, or documentary films, or computer games. What is important to stress is the fact that the past is always tangibly recorded, although its fixing forms could be different. A humanity creates literally its memory as a construct and an image of the time – "an image of the present in the image of the past" (Maslenkova, 2014, p. 117).

The previous section demonstrates that academic research could be considered fixated to some extend as they concentrate on opposition between official and counter-memory, elite and popular practises, etc. They focus on mnemonic places and rituals of commemoration, its inspirers, constructors, direct and indirect participants (see Bodnar, 1992; Haskins, 2003; Foucault, 1996). Nevertheless, taking into account Foucault's understanding of binary nature of opposition between two types of memory, one should be more critical towards this approach. In modern world, researchers deal with the multiple construction of alternative histories rather than counter-memory in its traditional sense. In that case, games could be seen as one of the form of collective memory construction that is based on alternative history.

With the development of media studies and general trend towards virtualization and informatization of society, some researchers suggest to conceptualize computer games based on historical events as sites of collective memory (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015). Notwithstanding, advanced games such as *Medal of Honor* (hereinafter – *MoH*) and *Company of Heroes* (hereinafter – *CoH*), which will be explored in given thesis, "frustrate the bifurcation" of official and collective memory due to its "played historical realism and development within the military entertainment complex" (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015). Therefore, there should be a special combination of theoretical concepts that will allow to explore this phenomenon in its entirety.

Changes caused by the development of media and the emergence of e-culture alter before our eyes the content and forms of transmission of collective memory. Internet becomes a means

of materialization of collective and individual memory; the newest, most popular and spectacular today cultural form, computer game, is of interest as a means of modeling past and, as a consequence, as a way of receiving a personal experience, which at the same time is connected with the general social models of memory. However, this experience is rather specific as well as the form of its translation. Electronic methods of information encoding have determined new particularities of users behavior that were unknown in the era of so-called traditional media (e.g. print media, radio and television). Web 2.0 era with its interactive basis makes the phenomena of modern communicative culture exist in a new form (Maslenkova, 2014). Computer games translate new cultural content associated with the development of virtual resources of identity, newly discovered patterns of cybersocialization, and further opportunities of human-computer interaction. Many contemporary researchers are inclined to attribute video games to the contemporary art that productively masters virtual reality as a new art resource (Savitskaya, 2012). While traditional art bases on mimetic and symbolic expression and the principles of aesthetic contemplation, virtual reality significantly modifies or completely rejects them. In virtual reality, a person does not represent, express, or contemplates something but really *lives* and *acts* in a virtual living environment under the special rules of the game (Bychkov, 2012).

But what is a game itself? How could one define this phenomenon in all its complexity? There are various definitions of game that emphasize game's specific features. In present paper, however, I deliberately chose to use to some extend 'classical' definition. Under computer, or video, or electronic game I understand any game that "employes electronics to create an interactive system with which a player can play" (Karapetsas *et al.,* 2014). Modern games may employ computers (both laptops and tablets), smartphones, gaming consoles, virtual reality headsets and many other gaming devices. Nowadays, the most popular games presuppose Internet access for online gaming; nevertheless, many of them still have offline modes that allow user to play independently.

However, the definition provided above covers only one, purely technical side of the issue. Meanwhile, given research needs an understanding of video games in a more ontological way. Thererfore, some possible definitions are introduced below.

Some researchers see video games as "a false recreation of an event or action" (Eglington, 2014). Dino (2002) considers games as a kind of stepping stones into a mix up of reality and virtualuty that creates simulacra - players are immersed into a virtual world, they switch to the game objectives and lose the touch with reality. One of the best definitions of the game per se is introduced by the game scholar J. Huizinga. For better understanding, it makes

sense to quote his game description fully: a game is a "voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that is different from ordinary life" (Huizinga, 1968). This definition draws attention to several key features of the game that are especially important for present study -- it stresses its volunteer nature, emphasizes its time and space limits, notes rules as an integral element of the game and, finally, underlines a special experience that differs from everyday life.

Also, a crutial importance for present study has a need to distinguish what Frasca, following Caillois and Piaget, calls *paidea* and *ludus* (2004). As he notices, all games could be divide into two groups: those played by young children (paidea) and those which audience are teenagers and adults (ludus) (Frasca, 2004). However, unlike Caillois, who advocates that the only difference between two types of game is the presence of absence of game rules and the level of their complexity, Frasca defines *ludus* as games that necessarily presuppose winner and loosers, while *paidea* do not have such categorization (2004). He gives an example that illustrates such a differenciation (Frasca, 2004):

Table 2

Game	Category	Paidea rules	Ludus rules
Merry-go-round	Paidea	To turn in circles, players must hold hands	None
Chess	Ludus	Pawns move on square at a time	To take the other player's king

The present table provides a single rule of each type for both games. In fact, there could be much more paidea and ludus rules in ludus games. However, it is impossible that paidia game has ludus rules -- in this case, the game goes into ludus category. Paidea takes place on the playground, ludus happens on the relatively open space, be it chessboard, football field, or digital map.

Ludology analyses video games and game culture as "critical locations for understanding the role of digital technologies in mediating and constituting the social interaction and organization of subjects in late modern information societies" (Simon, 2006, p. 66). The

advantage of this approach is that it stresses the difference between games and traditional media (what brings us to the idea of considering games as *new* media form) and pay attention (albeit not as significant as it is requred) to the effects of interactivity (Juul, 2001).

The biggest part of computer games belongs to the ludus category. Even simpliest and familiar to many Soliter game, which is installed by default on all PCs that operate under Windows OS, is an example of ludus game. When it comes to more complex games, one may be confident that almost all of them are ludus games. They represent a world, real or fictional one, they give care about details, and they have goals -- although in the number of games these goals are unclear and vague (Le Diberder, 1993). However, the last means only that the player has an opportunity to establish his/her own goals.

At the same time, one should note that many games, including historical ones, provide an opportunity to switch from ludus mode to paidea (such transitions are very popular among different simulations). In RPGs and strategies, this switching could be more difficult, yet it remains possible. Some historical games have a goal to involve a player in history – those games are not necessarily about winning. They focus rather on stimulating a responce from the player, a certain reaction that goes beyond virtual space and affect the user's mind, or mental state when the game itself is over (Rogers, 2016). Thus, one may conclude that any game could be neither *paidea* or *ludus* under certain conditions. What has to be remembered is the fact that regardless of game designers' idea and solution the final decision is always made by the player.

As B. Laurel states in her work, video games attract people because they are able to "represent action in which the humans could participate" (1993). This idea runs all through the present study as it is extremely important to realize game's participatory nature and to understand how it influence game representations. The next section focuses closer on the issues of computer game uniqueness as compared with other media, investigates its features and the process of participation in the game. In the present chapter, I concentrate on game's mechanics in order to understand its ways of representation and interpretation and briefly outline them.

Mentioned already B. Laurel pays a particular attention to issues of user experience and user performance. This perspective allows researcher to consider computer as a kind of medium for desired actions. In the process of interaction with computer and content that it provides, user simultaneously acts as direct drama participant and detached audience member (Laurel, 1993). Computer itself is seen as a theater, a stage where the interaction between the user and the machine takes. Such an idea in the best tradtions of Hoffman deserves a deeper investigation.

However, the storytelling approach to computers and through them to computer games, developed by J. Murray, has got much more supporters and followers. As a result, narrative approach to computer games prevails nowadays in game studies. Within its framework, the present study has been conducted.

According to this perspective, computer games as a medium possesses three main features: immersion, agency, and transformation (all three originally came from ludology – see Hess, 2007). Immersion here is seen as the ability of medium to construct a belief that user really interacts with the environment that will be accepted by the him/her. Generally, immersion is considered to be the most important characteristic of computer game, especially for studies that adress collective memory construction in new media. Modern technologies allow game creators and user to (re)consume objects of the past, they give an opportunity to (re)experience, (re)create and interact directly with authentic items. No other media form makes it possible (Heineman, 2014).

Further, agency could be described as the game ability to give its user freedom of such interaction that may affect the final representation. Lastly, transformation is understood as the "ability to morph into multy-perspective, simulated worlds" that intensifies immersion and agency (Murray, 1997). In fact, computer game is considered to be a new form of storytelling that actively employs new possibilities provided by technological progress -- first of all, it engages interactivity (Frasca, 2004).

One more interesing perspective is the analysis of textual representations. Although the present paper does not concentrates deeply on textual analysis of games, one cannot help but mention it in this chapter. Along with other issues, it also deals with the problems of interpretation: there are as many possible interpretations of the text (regardless of its final form) as many reader interact with it. Aarseth (1997) argues that even traditional texts (he gives an example of *Les Misérables*) could have a thousand of interpretations while the sequence of signs (letters, sentences, chapters) are fixed. This observation holds true for video games as well. The only thing that distinguishes computer game as a text from a traditional text is what Aarseth calls "nontrivial effort" (1997). These are certain actions -- such as clicking or typing -- that change the process of interaction with the text but do not influence it itself. However, as Murray stresses, in certain situations the user of modern games may influence the course of the game (1997). In that case, Aarseth's assumptions incorrect as the 'reader' *shapes* the text while 'reading' it.

Such a brief overview is aimed only to stress how undeveloped is this area of theoretical knowledge in comparison with the area adresses the issues of collective memory) and how many problems and inconsistencies are in those number of concepts that exist nowadays. Next sections explore deeply those questions that are in focus of given study -- how game operates as a new media and what features contribute to it; how players interact with and interpret the game content; and finally, how game authors create and craft their creations.

Chapter 2. Games: Nostalgic memories or a threat to the future?
2.2. Games as new media

Games are now the subject of a growing number of studies, surveys, confecences, and publications in sociology, media studies, education, political science and many other disciplines. Taken into account a wide range of possible theoretical directions, I chose to consider games as a new media form since they, despite resonance Frank Lantz's opinion (2009), *do carry an idea from one place to another*.

The idea to explore games as new media has several fundamental preconditions. As Aarseth notices, computer games "combine the aesthetic and the social in a way the old mass media, such as theater, movies, TV shows and nowels never could" (2001). The growing popularity of the Internet as a platform for hosting official and counter-memory, the unexampled before accessability of databases providing an incredible number of digitilized historical records, the impossible previously opportunity to compare and evaluate the past, the ease of creation and dissemination of different interpretations of the past (including fabricated ones) require a thorough revision of the traditional relations established between the media and the recollection of the past (Neiger *et al.*, 2011).

Media posses a distinc role in the process of collective memory construction: they are universally recognized platforms for socio-cultural cofrontation. Simultaneously, they also are direct participants of those struggles positioned (and accepted) as "authoritative storytellers of the past" (Neiger *et al.*, 2011). Games could be considered as one of the channels proposing different genres that select and construct certain questions in various ways, which contradict each other often enough (Meyers and Zandberg, 2002).

There are five basic features of the process of collective memory construction. Neiger *et al.* (2011) define this process as a "multidirectional process of concretizing a narrative of the past into a functional, social-political construct". By this definition, one may identify the following characteristics of this process. Firstly, it has a continuous and multidirectional nature. It can be described as a simultaneous movement from the past to the present and, vice verca, from the present to the past. The construction of collective memory is a complex, nonlinear and dynamic process that depends on the context and environment (Zelizer, 1995). Secondly, it has to be concretesized: Although collective memory per se is rather an abstract entity, it should be materialized and realized through certain artifacts and commemorative places, or symbolic objects (see below), both physical and virtual (rituals, memorials, records, games, etc) (Katriel,

1997). Thirdly, collective memory is essentially narrational, its construction takes place within a specific cultural pattern. As a rule, it has a classic structure (prologue, exposition, culmination, and epilogue) and is personalized through characters. (Narrativization and personification, as it is known from media studies, are among the most effective ways to attract and keep the attention of a large number of people to particular story) (Khokhlova, 2015). Finally, it is functional and represent itself as a socio-political construct. There are a variety of causes for social groups to recollect their past; moreover, collective memory is the only one of many *interpretations* of the past shared by different groups (see ch. 1). Taking into account giving characteristics, it makes sense to consider this process within the framework of the two most important for media memory studies concepts – agency and context.

Term 'agency' here adresses the questions related to the "capacity and authority" of individuals, institutions and various media platforms to "operate as memory agents" (Neiger *et al.*, 2011). The issue of authority is fundamental here as the rise of new informational technologies and means of communication along with booming mass culture take away the right to shape and narrate the past from political elites and academic community. Internet and new media (incl. games), TV, newspapers and radio (to a less degree) appropriates what has always been the exclusive priviledge of narrow and closed circles of professionals and those in power. In such a situation, media has a unique status: it is positioned as a public arena (see Bosk and Hilgartner, 1988) for a numerous agents of memory that struggle for the opportunity to shape collective memory in a favourable for them manner. At the same time, media itself could be considered as a memory agent that claims to provide its own representation and narrativization of the past.

The feature of new media in the era of 'digital memories' (Garde-Hansen *et al.,* 2009) is that they change the boundaries of social collectivities and tightly connects them with its audience. The audience of new media thus is transformed from a passive consumer of into its active creator. New media are a new means of construction: imposing and manipulating relatively less active as compared with traditional media, they create a situation when their content is produed by their audience. Therefore, new media could be considered rather as meta-agent as it promotes the most widespread constructs of the past and simultaneously leaves open the opportunity to provide interpretations from many other agents of memory (Neiger *et al.*, 2011).

As a new media form, game operates in three dimensions that concerns shared recollections: as a kind of reservoir for them, as their provider and disseminator, and as the

'place' (physical or virtual) where commemorative rituals take place. In the era of 'postmemory' (Hirsh, 2001) when the audience adapts the events that it has never experienced, one may presuppose that new media is gradually taking shape of social review of individually constructed patterns.

Term 'context' refers to the circumstances, places and environments where the shared memories may be observed, experienced, and inversigated (Neiger *et al.*, 2011). As it has been stressed in the previous chapter, the most common apporach to the context within memory studies concerns the issues of the impact of present realities on the interpretations of the past, less popular are efforts to explore the opposite process and track the affect of the past on the interpretations of the present. Such concentration on memory itself is resulted in the relative underestimation of the media producers as agents of collective memory. Because of the routine nature of their work it is much more difficult to identify and analyze their ways of past and present construction and representation in comparison with 'apparent' commemorative rituals, memorials, state-sponsored events (see Nossek, 1994) (nevertheless, given paper makes such an attempt – see ch. 3). However, only an aggregation of both these processes demonstrates the complexity of media as an agent of memory.

Furthermore, new media and game studies are impossible to imagine without issues of information encoding and decoding. Commonly, there are three main areas of research focus that explore the issues related to media texts, features and problems of media production, and the ways of interpretation of the media content by the audience. It parially overlaps with the textual analysis in memory studies. Combining these research methods, one obtains the interdisciplinary themes such as storytelling and narrativization patterns, their features, and moral and ideological components which are built-in in media narratives and shape memory recollection (Neiger *et al.*, 2011). The present thesis is aimed to pay attention to this issues as well.

Thereby, media-- and games after them-- might be seen as a kind of core around which revolves the process of shaping of collective memory. A researcher should investigate the role of the media, both traditional and new, in order to understand the ways, it is constructed in. It need comparisons of different media genres and production and consumption qualities as well as different media forms – from newspapers and radio to the Internet and computer games. For new media, according to Schudson's (1997) critical remark, these 'roads are less travelled', and that makes them particularly interesting and deserving special attention from the academic community.

2.3. Possible approaches to investigation of videogames: At the intersection of memory and media studies

There are two possible directions to investigate computer games within the media studies framework. The first is known among games scholars as Active User perspective and focuses on meaning, role and functions of game, whilst the second, Active Media perspective concentrates on behavioral effects and changes in attitudes and worldviews (Egenfeld-Nielsen and Smith, 2003).

Active user approach presupposes relatively competence and selectiveness of the user, stresses the possibility of multiple meanings for the same media product and emphasizes that users' meaning construction *depends on context* (see Bondebjerg, 2000). Indeed, numerous studies have shown that people differently interpret the same books, movies, and computer games (Egenfeld-Nielsen and Smith, 2003). These interpretations are based on various cultural background as well as depend on the situation in which person encounters those products. It follows from this that it is relatively hard to predict people's reaction on a particular product. For computer games, this perspective states that no one game regardless of genre and subject does not have any harm. The problem of potential negative effects of video games roots in the contexts and environment that surrounds a player. Back in 1980s, it has been claimed that the interpretation of a given media product mostly depends on the codes that s/he learned from the surroundings (Egenfeld-Nielsen and Smith, 2003). However, the doubfulness of the ability to deside on the meaning of particular product for a particular user is a weak point of given perspective. It deprives the researcher the very possibility to find out what a gamer may get out of a video game. The last applies in particular to potential censorship and limitations of children's and teenagers' presence in games.

Unlike the previous one, active media perspective suggests that one particular media may have a certain effect on people. Theoretical background of such approach is presented by several starting points, the most interesing from them for the current research are the following: social learning theory and cultivation theory.

Social learning theory which proponents claim that computer games are extremely effective due to their ability to demand user's full attention and contribute to the identification with a game avatar that is managed by player. It also assumes that actions and events learned through the screen will be transferred from the game into the real world and will remain as a part of user's life experience (Durkin and Barber, 2002).

Cultivation theory seeks to answer the question of how and to what degree media may distort and mispresent the perception of social reality (for instance, by virtue of stereotypes). Despite the fact that initially this concept was taken up by TV scholars, currently it is common in game studies. However, some its followers admire that they still cannot certainly say to what extent video games have an impact on the user's perception of the outside world (Egenfeld-Nielsen and Smith, 2003). For example, Durkin and Barber's (2002) findings show that games inforces stereotypes, although they are not able to convincingly demonstrate how strong is this influence and to what degree it determines the general picture of the world. At the same time, one of the most respected people in the field of psychology, professor Mark Griffiths (1997) concludes that the impact of CGs on children is much stronger than on teenagers and older young people: children aged from 4 to 8 have significant difficulties with demarcation of reality and fantasy.

Active media perspective is widely criticized for its two flaws: ignoring of user's meaning construction and inability to determine the exact extent of the games' affect per se, apart from the related context and environment. Additionally, both AM and AU approaches have methodological problems, one of the biggest concerns is the problem of validation and replication. However, these two concepts remain to be the the most applicable studies considering game as a new media. Active user approach pays attention to inner gamer's perspective, while active media framework allows to investigate game as an independent agent of memory (Egenfeld-Nielsen and Smith, 2003). The present paper is an attempt to offer a comprehencive and integrative approach to this subject.

Within a chosen framework, computer games may be seen as a kind of medium that explains how and why events of days that are gone are represented in contemporary culture (Hess, 2007). A complexity of production and development of contemporary games, their visual and semantic components and realism have long surpassed traditional media such as cinema and books. Therefore, games are particularly effective in 'narrative memorializing' and 'doing memory work' (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015) as they give gamers 'active but private role in memory making' (Hess, 2007, p. 341). Games provide interactive simulation that create a certain historical situation in gamers 'own homes' (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015, p. 353), and prior research have shown how games' scenario and authenticity recreate those narratives that we have described in the previous chapter as general (Hess, 2007; Cooke and Hubbell, 2015). The present paper continues the general trend and seeks to answer how the same historical game narratives are realized and recognized (including those in different sociocultural contexts).

In the previous chapter, the role of videogames as agents of memory has been briefly mentioned. Power reinforces itself partly through collective [official] memory, memory to some extend is a product of discource, therefore, video games could be seen as discource (Foucault, 1977). Through the dominant discource of the character, games provide the player the knowledge and experience that s/he experiences and that eventually become his/her personal experience.

When users play a game which setting is devoted to WWII, their knowledge and experience are created by the game's dominant discource. After returning into real life, this experience remains with a player and may change his/her attituted towards particular historical events or affect the general interpretation of the history (Atkin and Block, 1983). Gaming narrative could influence player's memory outside the game as it establishes gamer's emotional connection with game's characters and storylines, which in their turn are connected with a real life due to their historicity and thus may claim to authenticity.

Computer game is dialogical by its nature. It means that the form of communication here depends on not only game makers' efforts, but on player as well. It is gamer who allows the original space-time story to emerge. Game authors may propose only an algorithm of creating reality, but the true 'text', or narrative of this reality is created by gamer. This in its turn means that the game's scenario does not exist in a single form, there are as many storylines as many times gamer played the game (Maslenkova, 2014). Certainly, the linear principle of gaming space's deployment restricts these opportunities by offering, for instance, a single version of the game's walkthrough. However, even in this case different versions will probably vary by the time spent or the number of attemts to pass a certain level.

Nevertheless, given paper focuses more on the nonlinear game scenarios when game creators are moving away from the principle of 'right and wrong' and provide the gamer with an opportunity to create a plurality of routs within a game world. A distinctive feature of such games is their online modus - they operate primarily on the Internet. This leads to the simultaneous participation of a large number of gamers, not necessarily having similar social and cultural experience. It means that there could not be two identical states of the game: a different number of participants and various combinations of their actions and decisions are the conditions that ensure an uniquness of the game space.

The focus of this research are so-called role-playing games, commonly known as RPG. In RPG, a gamer plays a role of a computer character, and the one of the player's main tasks is the development of this character through completing various missions (Rollings and Adams, 2003).

This condition contributes to player's identification with his/her character and let the gamer to gain some valuable experience. A role within a game is one of the social skills acquired by a player. Moreover, sometimes the game allows to change the social status of the player (primarily within its space but not limited to it). These are the games that have a very strong effect of immersion (Maslenkova, 2014). As Kim (2011) wrotes, "in the first person games a person literally dissolves in the computer character, identifying him/herself with this hero" (p. 168). The virtual world that surrounds the character looks exactly as it is seen by the character itself. In the third person games a player is identified with a certain third party, an observer that oversees the character from the side. The virtual environment, hence, appears as it is seen by this observer.

Often enough, RPG has some features that are typical for another popular computer genre, simulators. Simulators could be defined as any software and hardware features that construct the impression of reality by displaying a part of real phenomena and their properties in a virtual environment (Jones, 1995). Their main feature is as accurate reproduction of the physical characteristics of different machines (for instance, the equipment that was used in WWII) as possible. Simulations allow to reconstruct specific documentary details and models of the past within the game space. Gamer immerses in this models and transforms the virtual environment by virtue of his/her game character (Maslenkova, 2014).

One should stress that video games do not only provide an opportunity to reconstruct past event visually but also offer some alternatives of history development. In such case, the reality that took place in the past is thought as the implementation of the only one of the possible historical scenarios. Furthermore, as it has been repeatedly noticed, computer games enable the player participate in the process of changing of the past and create the story that has never happened in reality. A gamer indeed gets a *personal* albeit virtual experience, *goes through* historical events that are simulated by the game. This brings forth the problem of comprehension and division of two types of experience, real and virtual ones. It is necessary to find out how does the gamer link the historical scenarios produced by him/her, on the one hand, with the collective, socially valuable and widespread version of historical events, on the other hand.

History and military are among the most popular game topics for the past decades (apart from it, one may note fantasy, steam- and cyberpunk and space themes). WWII[10] that remains one of the most dissaminated images in the post-war world space, nowadays to a certain extent is exploited not only by the filmmaking, but the gaming industry as well. The construction of this image begins in the second half of the 20th century and continues up to this day. Museums and

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10 In Russia, for obvious reasons more attention is paid to the Great Patriotic War.

memorials, parades and eternal flames, literature and movies still shape those images and act as important traditional carriers of them. And yet, more and more rapidly they give way to the new memory places such as computer games and Internet. It should not be surprising – I have already mentioned in the previous chapter that individual memories are increasingly replaced by collective memory constructs. Taking into account that in the digital era processes of information transfer undergo considerable changes, one may assume that the image of WWII (as well as the image of the GRW, if to be more specific about the post-Soviet space) will necessary acquire some new propeties and shapes (Maslenkova, 2014).

Modern games, including *MoH* and *CoH*, indeed exploit the image of WWII (see Cooke and Hubbell, 2015). However, they reproduce this construct slightly different in comparison with cultural phenomena named above and conditionally related to Web 1.0 culture (see Maslenkova, 2014). As I will emphasize over and over, a history book reader or a person watching TV show are passive consumers of proposed interpretation, they assimilate the scenario offered by the authors as the unique way of historical progress (although some people with critical thinking may argue about 'historical truth'). Meanwhile, an user sitting in front of the PC monitor have a truly unique opportunity to play the same events in historical entourage for several times and in different contexts.

Since the outline of such games is constituted by real events that took place during WWII, a special attention should be given to historical accuracy and neatness. As it will be showcased in the empirical part, both gamers and game developers use documentary sources[11] as a basis for memorial atmosphere of the gaming space. Attention is paid to both mental and physical sides: for example, one of the most valuable game aspects for its players is the most accurate replication of real military equipment's characteristics in the virtual space. For this purpose, game developers consult with military historians and experts in the field of military technology (see 'World of Tanks' game forum). Nevertheless, occasionally game designers deliberately add some historical inaccuracies in order to make a game more alternative, to allow the game to realize storylines that did not exist in reality, to offer a player to think «what if…» (for details, see chapter 2). As a result, user creates a number of historical trajectories that would eventually become his/her personal experience as well as gamers' collective experience (Maslenkova, 2014).

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11 It should be noted, however, that not always such documentary sources could be considered as truly documentary. Many of them are referred to the school course of history, lay literature and popular movies (see Ch. 2).

Evidently, having accurate authentic details is a prerequisite for creating historical ambience as it forces the user to accept the simulated space as the real one. Similar to precedent phenomena, these components are the signs that make the player create a certain chain of associations with the collective experience that s/he learned as a part of society. (This is the one of the reasons for constant game updates – game creators are trying to satiate the gaming space with historical features and thus tie this space to historical events).

Another feature of computer games that makes them similar to media rather than art is a communication. Most modern games have chat rooms which are active during the game (for games where chat rooms are not provided for some reasons, gamers came up with their own solution – for example, many teams use Skype to coordinate their actions). Such communication spaces, be they chat rooms, forums, or other means of group communication are especially valuable for researchers as they enable them to trace the emergence and development of collective gaming experience, collective representations and their influence on individual ones and construction of alternative historical images.

The game creates an open communicative field, a kind of platform for users interaction. There a number of games (an apparent example could be 'World of Tanks'), which are pointless to play in isolation from the gaming community. *MoH* and *CoH,* considered in given paper, are less demanding to this issue; however, even they require a certain 'socialization' within the community. It is only when a gamer becomes a part of the clan, guild, or fraction[12] (i.e. social group), when s/he finds like-minded friends and enemies, when s/he feels able to make adjustments and create new game narratives, s/he becomes a full participant of the game.

It is particularly important to note that no one can predict the outcome of the modern game (this statement is again largely holds true for MMOGs[13] such as 'World of Tanks' and 'Call of Duty' which do not have a strict storyline. Notwistanding, nonlinear *MoH* and *CoH* as well as many other RPGs give the player a considerable freedom of action and often have several alternative endings. A vivid example - few people would be suprized today by the success of German troops in the Battle of Kursk[14] as in virtual space German army claims on victory on a par with the Allied forces, and in some battles it wins indeed[15] (Maslenkova, 2014). The last fact

12 Terms 'clan', 'guild', and 'fraction' are eqiual and refer to an organized group of players that regularly play together in one or more multiplayer games (see Microsoft, 2006).
13 A massively multiplayer online game (MMOG, or MMO) is an online game which is capable of supporting large numerous of players simultaneously in the same instance, or world (see Ryan, 2007).
14 In fact, as we know, one of the most important battles of WWII and GPW ended with the victory of the Soviet forces.
15 Moreover, the very fact of playing for the Germans is not considered by the game community as absurd and is almost not condemned by the players.

to some extent shows that the space of video game is arranged in a special way. The history is created time and again, and each time its outcome is unclear.

In other words, game creators simulate a particular historical event using historical figures, identical models of equipment, maps, and weather conditions (these efforts are intended to bring the gamer to a real image of the episode), yet at the same time they leave open the possibility of variation. The ability to manage processes (choosing tactics considering the current game situation, interactivity) allows gamers to immerse fully in a virtual space. This feature distinguishes video games from other historical sources. When immersed in the game, a player loses the distance between the real and artificial world, between the present and the past. Users create history "on the run", constructing its alternative options (Kim, 2011).

Due to the large authonomy and freedom of movement within the spartial model of the game, its participant has a feeling of relative authonomy within the game in general. Each gamer has an unique path through the game (a nonlinear storyline contributes to it). Therefore, each player acquires an unique cultural experience, a personal experience of participation in WWII. As a result, the user constructs a personal image of WWII (Maslenkova, 2014).

However, it would be leastwise incorrect to say that the image is shaped only through the gaming process (especially considering its volatility and mismatches between historical records and game interpretations, which are nonetheless understood by the majority of players – see ch. 2). A game, despite its unique features remains to be a part of virtual world that cannot compete with the real world. Nevertheless, it is capable to go beyond virtuality and provoke events in the offline world.

Although the present paper is primarily focused on the virtual dimension, I cannot help but pay attention to the perspectives of video games in real world. Many game studios worldwide take the initiate to support really existing memorials and museums. Among other projects that deserve attention, the project of Wargaming studio ('World of Tanks' developer and publisher) is particularly notable. The company partly sponsored the opening of the interactive museum "Prokhorovka field" in the Belgorod region[16]. The uniqueness of this memorial complex is that it allows not only to see tanks as a part of exhibition but also test them in the cyberspace. In a specially equipped computer labs, there are special gaming tournaments held between teams from different cities (World of Tanks, 2016). This is a vivid example of the connection between the virtual game space and real world, a transition of alternative history from the game space to

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16 The choice of location is especially interesting considering the fact that Wargaming studio is not a Russian company.

reality. A virtual history is supplemented by a 'living' history (Maslenkova, 2014), what makes the game more exciting. A real image of the past is not finally fixed, it is constantly created both through reality and virtuality. A player thus is offered the possibility to establish a 'new history' that did not but could happened.

Hereby, the space of modern computer games is open for changes and transformation. It operates in accordance with game scenario, variability algorithms and interaction between gamers and objects. While game creators use special attributes in order to create the most realistic environment and contribute to the immersion, game users construct its value and content within the specific game contexts. A consumer thus adopts the role of producer, and there are as many versions of final product [game] as many users play it – each time they play, they create an image of WWII which never acquires its final form (Maslenkova, 2014).

2.4. Historical reconstruction and narratives in computer games

In Russian, a word 'reconstruction' is primarily associated with rigorous museum halls that deminstrate reconstructed objects of everyday life and the arhitecture of the lost civilizations. The second association adresses dressed in authentic clothing (commonly military) men and women, enthusiastically performing the scenes of battles of bygone eras or simply imitating the life of their ancestors or fictional characters. Until recently, these two types of reconstruction virtually were the only types of the activities of this kind. Only in the end of 2000s, the attention of researchers and practitioners has been drawn to the fact that modern technologies provide an effective tool for the past reconstruction (Prokhorenko, 2005). Given part focues on reconstruction of historical events in computer games.

To start with, it is necessary to define the game reconstruction. In outline, it could be understood as a re-creation of historical event or a chain of happenings which are presented to the final user in the form of video game (Prokhorenko, 2005). Any reconstruction project, including computer games, has a basis that is formed by several preconditions, which are examined below.

First and foremost, reconstructive game is not just a variation of military historical game but rather a new vision of video games in general. Gameplay[17] per se occupies a secondary position in relation to the main goal to reconstruct a particular event (Prokhorenko, 2005).

Secondly, reconstructive games have a demand among modern users. However, such kind of games requires a certain preparation for a proper understanding, a king of historical and 'game literacy' (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015), and only a part of the general game audience has it initially. It makes these area and genre relatively elit and non-massive. This is related to the fact that a gamer has to have at least minimal understanding of the subject or to be fully confident in the game developer for a full immersion into historical context. Nevertheless, in reality the general public is illiterate and distrustful, and therefore many players will be unable to understand and accept all the aspects that constitutes a reconstructive project (Patziorkovskiy *et al.*, 2007).

Such historical context is what Gee (2008) calls 'projective stance'. Assuming a particular game role, or game character, player assumes its goals, motifs and surroundings. For a successful game, a player has to "attribute certain mental states" -- values, feelings, attitudes, -- that serve as reference points within a game and may move to a real world (Gee, 2008). This

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17 Gameplay is "a process of interaction with a game design in the performance of cognitive tasks, with a variety of emotions arising from or associated with different elements of motivation, task performance and completion" (Lindley *et al.*, 2008).

projective stance is especially important when it comes to historical games. Rogers (2016) gives a good example of the game that reconstruct the civil right movement in the USA in the second half of the 20th century. A player is free to select one among many real historical personalities, and his/her choice (namely, the differences in characters' goals and methodds of their achieving) would affect how the player is experiencing history that is reconstructed in the gaming form.

Further, in terms of technical realization, a reconstructive game is an easier task for game developers and game designers as compared with the game project that is detached from the historical context. Indeed, for the game that takes place in the fictional world its authors should put a significant efforts to make the player empathize the game characters, to create a realistic game universe, and fill the events of this universe with drama. In reconstructive games, the empathy is achieved through the very fact of extreme realness of game events. The player knows that s/he is experiencing situations which have actually happened, and this knowledge imparts the greater degree of realism to the game structure (Prokhorenko, 2005).

Fourthly, not all lines of present military historical games are reconstructive. Popular nowadays Wargeming series is only a simulation of the military structure's mechanisms (divisions, corps, and armies) and military equipment that participated in hostilities (Maslenkova, 2014). Real-time strategies (RTS) such as *Hearts of Iron III*, *Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts,* and *Blitzkrieg 2* is the attempt to bind the rules of traditiona real-time strategy to the historical setting. Military historical tactics is again a simulation, this time it models tactical situations during combat operations taking into account different parametres sets. None of the games belonging to those genres is devoted to event itself, none of them reconstruct the sequence of the facts, decisions, and actions that constitute historical process (Prokhorenko, 2005).

Fifthly, any reconstruction pursues one main purpose to reconstruct (re-create) historical events. To a certain extent it is a theater, a kind of animated museum and memorial, an interactive encyclopedia. An ideal type of reconstruction is realistic enough to make the player feels like a direct participant of historical chronics. A more common type of reconstruction that has a chance to be sold as computer game is realistic enough not to cease to be a game (Patziorkovskiy *et al.*, 2007). Gameplay as an aggregate of certain repetitive task here remains on the background of emotional palette of the gamer. The first violin is played by the things that relate minimally to the gameplay but attract player's attention and provoke a rapid emotional response: tanks that got stuck on the streets, villages' population, road signs, etc. None of these points are the key game features, none of them could be placed on the game cover, and non of

them would work without the set of other details. A thousand of such 'trifles', starting from the frightened dogs and pigs in the countryside and ending with the sound of distant battle on the edge of the map and carefully *reconstructed* department store are able to win the battle for the player's attention.

The next point concerns psychological and emotional aspects. Over time, the psycho-emotional image of the happening that has been constructed by the collective memory starts to engender certain associations related to the game. Kursk Bulge, El Alamein, Stalingrad, Waterloo, Normandy – all of these names have long been turned into exceedingly intensive myth images that every person assosiates with a number of secondary 'pictures'. A reconstructive game that captures and conveys the atmosphere of the historical event to which it is dedicated, has the potential to become a part of such a queue of images and thus reach a long life through player's memories. With the mention of the event (the Battle of Stalingrad, for example), the user's mind will recollect the historical information that s/he already knows along with the most memorable gaming moments. Ideally, the player is able to claim that s/he *knows how it was* because s/he *has participated in the reconstruction* of the event (Prokhorenko, 2005).

Finally, any historical reconstruction (even the most detailed) is extremely far from being its real prototype. In any case, it is nothing more than an impression and interpretation of the events. However, this is the only way to 'throw' the player from present day to historical (albeit forgery) context and give him/her an unique experience. You cannot step into the same river twice, but you can restore the coastline and small objects down to the last water lily with the help of the eyewitnesses' descriptions and photos and 'let the player frolic on the beach' (Prokhorenko, 2005). Historical games are filled with details such as weather patterns, people's faces, paintings on the walls and signs that create a *living history* (Magelssen, 2008) and provide unique in its richness experience.

As it has been mentioned above, a developer creating a reconstructional game has powerful tools that let enhance the harmony and internal coherence of the game world. Copied from reality and reconstituted according to avaliable sources entourage will be much more realistic as compared with the content that has been created and embodied 'from scratch'. Interestingly, the majority of modern military historical games comply with the principle of making exact copy when it concerns equipment and weapons, but depart from it when it comes to buildings and organization of space (Prokhorenko, 2005). A careful analysis of modern games which scenarios operates in the WWII setting demonstrates that their settlements look similar to cardboard scenery for conditional hostilities and some logically caused landscape elements do

not exist (Cooke and Hubbell, 2015). Such an environment is percieved as artificial and lacks credibility. Meanwhile, the logic of objects location in the gaming space is one of the key elements that shapes the gameplay. It defines the player's strategy. The more similar to reality the design is, the more logical tactics the gamer uses; consequently, the more realistic image will be created and the more correct the reconstruction will be.

A reconstructive game initially presupposes the highest possible level of reliability. A proper reconstruction consists of three main elements: the unity of time, the unity of space, and the unity of meaning. Therefore, the reability of the time of each particular episode, the environment and decorations where this episode occurs, and the action itself has to be ensure. In MoH and CoH (although none of them could be called fully reconstructed), investigated in present paper, it is performed as follows.

Each game mission is strictly tied to the general game scenario with a certain calendar day, and the time flow is constant during the whole campaign (with the exception of bonus missions). For a better immersion in the historical context, missions' briefings are conventionally divided into two parts.

Figure 1. Company of Heroes 2 screenshots (encyclopedic style)

The first one gives a general historical overview presented in the encyclopedic style. This snipped of text presents the detached view on the occasion (what happenned on this day, what place in the history of WWII took this event, what result it had).
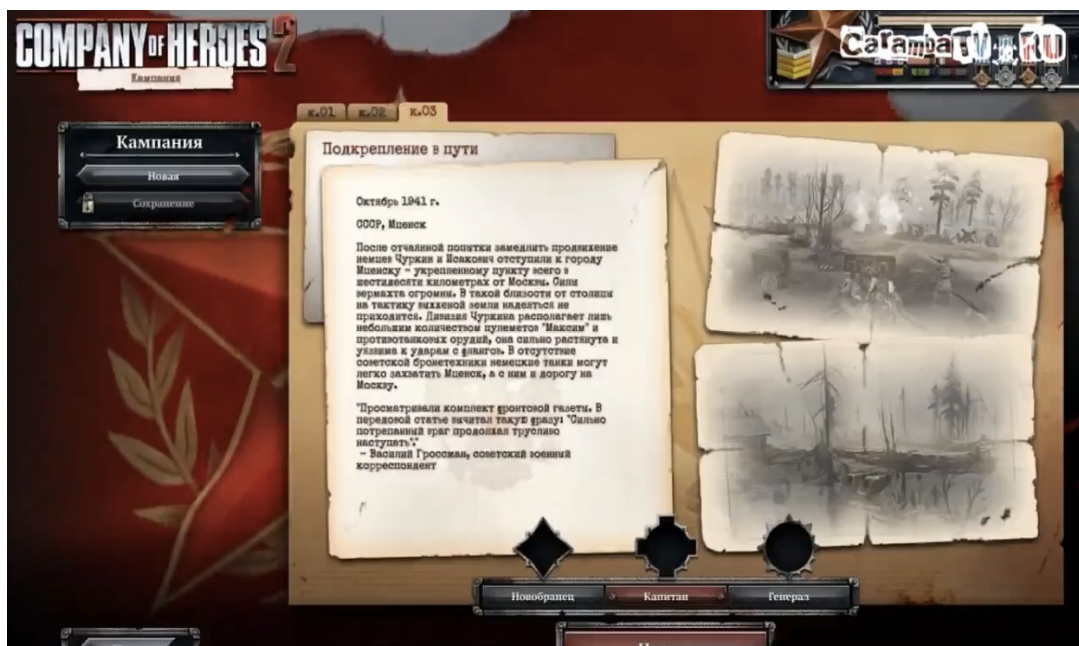
Figure 2. Company of Heroes 2 screenshots (encyclopedic style)

The second text box carries the story on behalf of the direct participant of the events, either player's character or indepedent advisor. This text is written according to the style of the orders and instructions of the war time. In order to achieve a greater reliability, clichés phrases are accompanied by spoken language that was used in the middle of 20th century. In *CoH,* it also includes quotes of veterans and politicians.
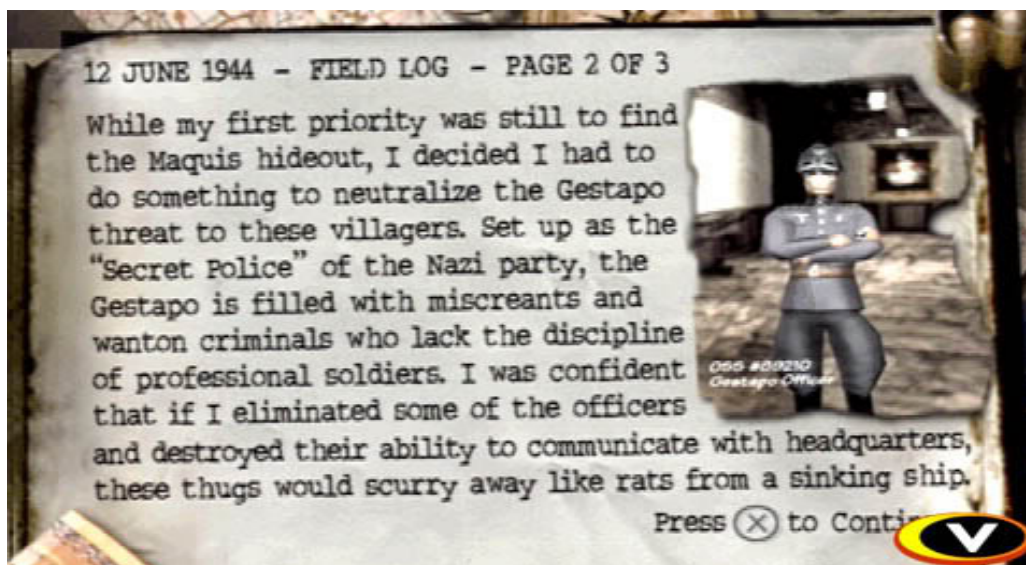
Figure 3. Medal of Honor: Underground (Playstation) screenshot (personification)
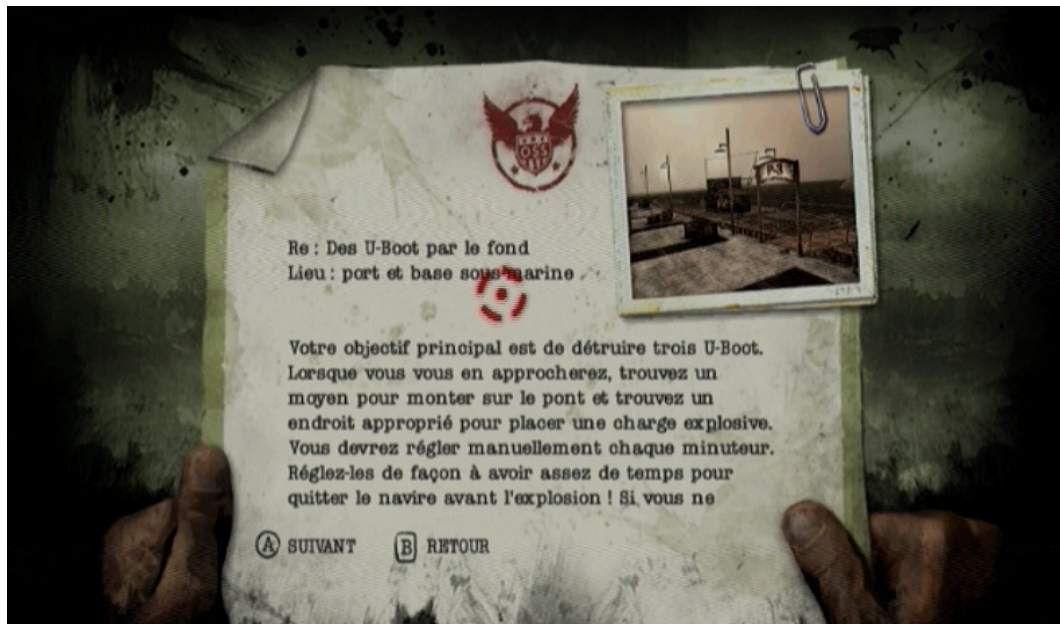
Figure 4. Medal of Honor: Frontline screenshot (real document style)

Thus, the first part introduces the player in the historical context, whilst the second one immerses in the reconstruction, simultaneously providing information that is necessary for successful mission completion. *MoH* and (to a less degree) *CoH* could be considered as 'documentary games' (Fullerton, 2008) as they use a documentary style. They pay attention to historical accuracy as they are aimed to *re*present a certain event in a most authentic way, so they have to be as reliable as it is possible.

Figure 5. Medal of Honor: Airborne screenshot (objects location)

Figure 6. Company of Heroes 2 screenshot (objects location)

Another question, however, is that such accuracy and authenticity is determined by game creators, who are able to emphaize what *they* consider to be historically accurate. Although the most game designers share a responsible approach to their work and position themselves as impartial and unbiased creators, one cannot ignore the fact that game developers may use some means of manipulation with gamers' historical experience in order to construct a meaningful experience for the user (Rogers, 2016).

Figure 7. Company of Heroes 2 screenshot (area positioning)

Compliance with the site of action is achieved, firstly, by presice positioning of the area that hosts the next game episode on the game map, and secondly, by the reconstruction of the map itself. Certainly, game maps' scales are somewhat incorrect as compared with real ones. However, the general logic of objects' location is accurately maintained.
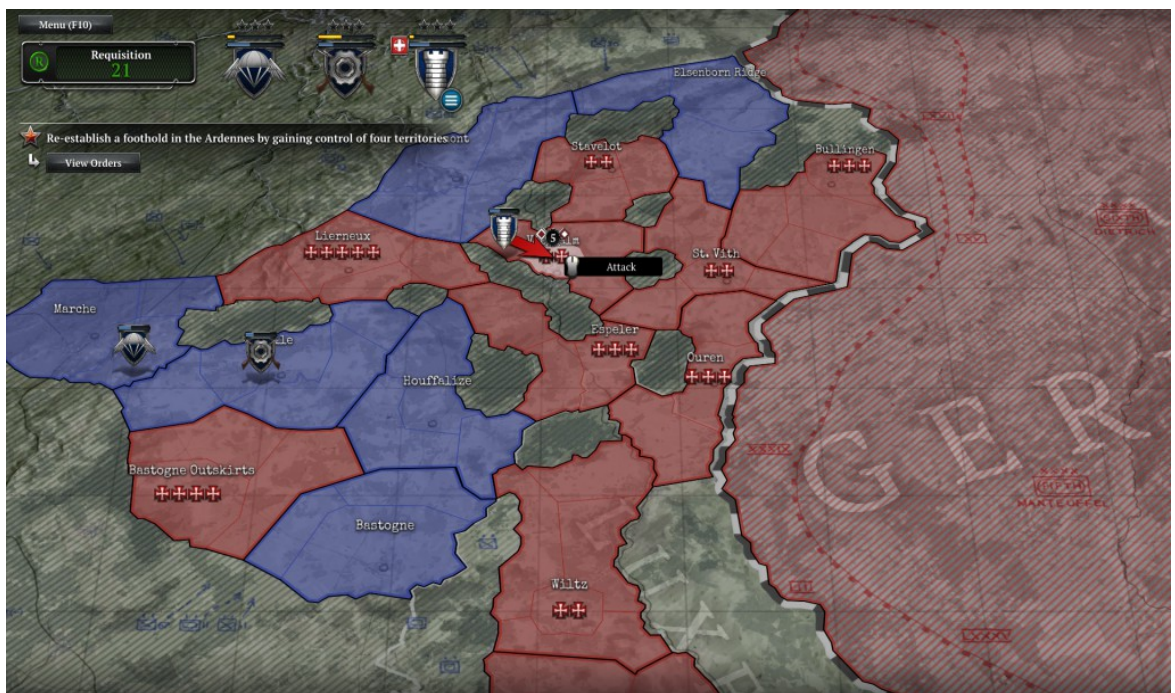
According to game creators (McGee, 2014), they use a set of tactical military maps that were created before the war as well as after it. Using photographs and other sources, they correct these maps and thereby achieved the desired level of confidence. However, one should understand that such an approach should force the game developers to be more attentive to issues of the imaginary in games. White (1999) points out that the majority of texts (in a broad sense) authored as a fiction are nevertheless percieved by the audience as historically accurate and filled with facts. It rises the issues of influence of fictional historizied forms (and some of 'historical' games can be classified as those) on the process of social recollection.

Further, each reconstruction must have a plot. For military historical reconstructions, the historic event itself appears as a plot. It is necessary to interpret selected events and trash it out in order to build the game structure. For example, a considerable part of key battles in *CoH* and *MoH* are divided into two stages, defensive and offensive ones, and hence have several culminating points (each) that have to be reflected in the reconstruction. The question is - how to fit these events in a computer game without creating an imbalance on sides, how to reflect all the events in game missions and avoid the impression of the fragmentation of what is happening. It is a challenge for game developers, but if they meet it they produce complex and fanciful story with moments of dynamic's easing and tension, with certain culmination points and impressive denouement.

A timeframe also has a crutial importance for such kind of games. In the case of reconstruction, the limited temporal and spartial scope of the matter is, the higher the quality of reconstruction of the events should be. In this regard, *MoH* and *CoH,* covering all or the majority of events of WWII lose the games concentrating on a single subject – for instance, *Stalingrad.* The latter can afford to be more scrupulous and continually immerse the player fully in *those* time and space. Nevertheless, former are successful enough in creation of an unique action, which is located at the intersection of game, cinema, and theater. It is a kind of art synthesis that gives the user the opportunity to attend different poles of the same event and evaluate its scale and drama (Prokhorenko, 2005). As for the time flow within a reconstructive game, it could differ. However, the most preferable is a real time scale as it is fully matches the reality.

One more interesting feature of reconstructive game is a limitation of the freedom of player's action. If the game is aimed to reconstruct the battle of El Alamein and accurately recreate the combat situation, landscape, the correlation of forces that was in summer, 1943, the ability of the user to change the course of history by his/her actions destroys the very idea of reconstruction. Such games presuppose another approach – they give the player a relative freedom of tactical decisions while throwing the user from one front to another. Gamers may change the tactical situation, but they are unable to affect the general course of events (Prokhorenko, 2005).

Almost none of the games avaliable at the market today (probably, except *Stalingrad* and *Faces of War*) are reconstructive in terms of this requirement. The player is given a role, but the game designers do not deprive him/her of the prize and the chance to 'save the world'. It is too risky to take this opportunity away from the player, and game designers (and, mostly, game publishers) do not want to take this risk.

However, the most important thing for a historical game is its symbolizm. A game process may consist of 'units and resourses management, accumulation of experience, and destruction of enemy units' (a standart description of such kind of games). But what makes game really interesting and attracts users is a purely individual thing. A gameplay is a phantom that is born in the player's mind and dies when player leaves the game. Symbolism may prolong the life of this phantom.

Figure 8. Company of Heores 2 screenshot (symbolic objects)

The category of symbolic objects is a rethought category of mnemonic places. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, places of memory have two dimensions, either real (physical) or virtual (mental). They do not have a strong spartial connotations, the most important things concernig mnemonic places are symbolic constructs, which are associated with them.

A game could be considered as a symbolic object that comprises a plurality of other symbolic objects inside itself. Logically built in the game narrative, they play roles of 'anchors' that turn a set of technical, visual, and sound elements into virtual place of memory. Acting now as a mnemonic place, game starts to design and produce new symbols within itself and outside. Created and reconstructed in a virtual space, symbolic objects qualify for the virtual authenticity. Once received a confirmation in the form of players' approval and endorsement, they start to operate in the same way as traditional memory places. In order to understand this process, it makes sense to examine game narratives and understand how those virtual mnemonic spaces are constructed.

Halbwachs (1992) and some of his followers have argued that individual recollections of the past are mediated (if not shaped) by collective representations and constructs that actively circulates around and in the public arenas. Social media and computer games, which are becoming more integrated each day, are indeed one of the best arenas for memorising and commemoration. Social sharing that gradually moves from social networks to video games contributes to engagement and participation in collective commemoration (Harju, 2015). Jarvis (2011) underlines that *actions* aimed at remembering help reconstruct the past in a more efficient way as compared with simple *reflection* of past events (intalis supplied). In other words, action — this is what determines the success of historical recollection. Games, as it has been elucated in previous sections, are based on active actions. Memory is an social process, and those engaged in the dynamic game process simultaneosly are involved in the active remembering (Jarvis, 2011).

Furthermore, recollection could be considered as process of signification (Harju, 2015). Game could be seen as a process of attributing meanings (throughout the game, various objects that did not exist for the player in the beginning of the game are filling with meaning and value and, eventually, acquire symbolism. This can apply to purely personal belongings (for example, a favorite rifle, with which the player passed through the entire campaign) as well as collective and shared objects (a hospital building that has been repulsed from the enemy collectively). Game performance gives bith to a new identity; virtual memorials (in a broad sense) serve as a

connective bridges that provide relations between the game itself and meanings that are borrowed from it (Harju, 2015). Interestingly, it is more difficult in game that in reality to avoid participation in rituals, incl. commemorative ones, as the player is forced by the scenario to go through them in order to complete the game. Thus, within a computer game memorials and remembering support and contribute to historical identity of the player.

An analysis conducted in given section has a purpose to understand the narrative and discoursive construction of collective memoty within a game in order to understand how the history is reconstructed in modern games. It demonstrates how memory discourse operates inside the game space and how it shapes the historical identity of those engaged in the gaming process. Thus, one may conclude that the processes of remembering and recollection that take place within the game have constituitive force.

Chapter 3. Video games as a source of collective memory: An empirical study

Given research could be characterized as rather exploratory and qualitative one. Despite the fact that descriptive studies are often dismissed by some scholars as a 'mere description' which does not bear much scientific value (De Vaus, 2001), a good description is fundamental for investigating issues that are relatively new for social science as it enriches significantly scientific knowledge about the phenomenon under study and its place in the social structure. Furthermore, descriptive research provokes questions for explanatory research.

Since this thesis is descriptive, it does not require developing of causal explanation (which is an essential part of explanatory research). However, I designed a causal model of the investigated phenomenon in order to demonstrate its complexity and ambiguity. A relatively complex model that demonstrates a number of interrelated causal chains is posited below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Causal model of the research problem

Giving the intricacy of the research subject, a qulaitative reseach strategy seems to be a well-founded choice. As the topic of the study is largely related to internal perception and personal albeit collective representation of historical events, and the study is intedend to deeply investigate the phenomenon of computer games in terms of collective memory, a semi-structured interview was chosen as a leading research methodology since it allows to uncover various interpretations of real history withing a gaming space and investigate the process of the constitution of historical meanings by memory agents.

Discourse analysis of particular games forums has been selected as supplementary method that allows to investigate meanings and intrepretations that occur in 'natural' conditions and is not provoked from the outside, unlike the interviews. Forums and other platforms related to gaming industry are active participants of agenda-setting process (see McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The importance of certain issues, ideas, and approaches is determined by frequency of their appearance in forums messages and other publications. Those messages and posts shape a set of topics that are admired by the gaming community as important. The question is whether there is a particular focus on the historical specificity of computer games.

2.1. Data collection

In total, fifteen interviews were conducted for the period from December 2015 to May 2016. Nine of them were carried out with the peronal presence of interviewee, four informants were interviewed via Skype because of their [informants] places of residence, and two were taken in written form at the urging of respondents. The majority of informants were able to talk in their familiar environment (usually at home); three people preferred to talk on the neutral ground; finally, two interviewees chosen to answer my questions at their workplace. The last two interviews in the end turned out to be the most challenging because my interlocutors were consistently distracted from the outside, and it was difficult to them to concentrate on the conversation.

Five interviews were held in English, ten in Russian. All the interviews were based on an interview guide developed by me and consisting of three thematic sections (see appendix A):

- interviewee's game experience and expectations;
- content and context of games about WWII;

- possible benefits and problems of games on the subject.

To record the interviews, an MPlayerX for MacOS (ver. 1.0.14) and Dichtaphone O for iOS (ver. 3.1) were used. All records were transferred to computer and converted into high quality m4a-files. Before the interviews, all participants were twice informed about the confidential nature of the information given to me – once at the stage of an agreement on the interview and once at the beginning of the interview itself. A minimum time of the interview was 48 minutes, a maximum reached 2 hours 6 minutes.

2.2. Informants

All informants were divided into three groups according to their relation to the game industry: experts (culturologist and historian), game developers (primarily game designers developing game scenarios), and gamers - amateurs, semi-professionals and professionals[18]. In real game industry, this division is much more complex and consists of more levels. For the sake of simplicity, in present paper I introduce a simplified hierarchy. Amateurs play on occasion and are not particularly picky in games choice. Semi-professionals, or semi-pros play two or three games on the regular basis and have a certain weight in gaming community. Professionals (pros) not only play the game but often make money by participating in game tournaments and championships. The latter are tied to one particular game in which they possess perfection and have a high authority.

Both experts are Russians. Two game creators are citizens of Ukraine, one is Belorussian but currently lives in Canada and works for Canadian game studio. Six gamers are from East Europe (four Russians, one Ukranian, one Belorussian), four are residents of the European Union (three British and one German). An average age is 26, an average game experience is 10 years. Informants were selected using a snowball technique.

2.3. Games

Although interviewees were not placed in a rigid framework regarding the games that were expected to be discussed, independently on each other they focused on three games that seemed to them the most revealing the topic. There are *Medal of Honor* series and *Company of Heroes 2*. A bit aloof from them is *World of Tanks*[19], which were mentioned by informants with some reservations – a game was introduced as an example of stunning technical authenticity, but because of lack of the consistent scenario it has been recognized by respondents as "irrelevant to the subject of study".

Games *Medal of Honor* and *Company of Heroes* that are in focus of present thesis have been selected, on the one hand, because of the ambiguity of interpretations of their narratives, and on the other hand, due to their historical realism which is achieved through combining historical evidence (real documents and real characters operating in the game, personal stories, etc) and realism of specific military terminology, functional technology, and graphical representation.

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18 It was supposed to make a sample consisting of only semi-pros and pros. However, in order to receive as relevant information as possible I included amauters as well.

19 *World of Tanks* is a massively online game in the genre of tank arcade simulation with elements of RPG, shooter, and strategy. A game setting also applies to WWII with focus on player vs. player interaction. Each user owns an armored vehicle (tank, tank destroyer, self-propelled gun, etc) and has to win as many battles as possible in order to improve his/her equipment and get in the top players for benefits and reputation.

Medal of Honor is a long-running series of FPS[20] computer games which events take place during WWII (the first game was released by Electronic Arts in 1999). The game supports both single-player and multiplayer modes. A scenario for the first three parts of the series were written by famous American director and producer Steven Spielberg, that provided the high popularity of the game in the wake of the success of the "Saving Private Ryan" movie (Wikia, 2016). In different games of series, the main character (usually an elite member of OOS[21]) acts on the different fronts of WWII. The geography of game locations is exstensive – a player completes the missions in France, Belgium, the USSR, Italy, the Netherlands, Japan and even North Africa. The series's historical realism and authencity along with nonlinear plot has received a recognition by both critics and players and simultaneously attracted the attention of scholars.

Company of Hero 2 is a real-time strategy computer game, a sequel of *Company of Heroes* that was published in 2008. As *MoH, CoH* is setting in the WWII Theater, but it focuses on the Eastern front. A user plays mainly for the Sovier Red Army and goes through the war from Operation Barbarossa to the Battle of Berlin. *CoH* also supports single-palyer and multiplayer modes and claims to be historically accurate. It has received positive critical reviews; however, the game provoked a great discontent of players (primarily from Russia and CIS) for unfair and abusive portrayal of the Soviet solders. A popular Russian video blogger Evgeny "BadComedian" Bazhenov published a revelatory video (2013) where stressed multiple in-game examples of Red Army soldiers' brutality, inhumane tactics and national clichés (which are particularly noticeable when compared to the relatively positive image of the Nazis in the game). Bazhenov's post gave rise to a huge scandal that involved players, media, and officials. Game sales in Russia were formally halted, although there still remained a legal opportunity to purchase *CoH* through the Steam service[22]. It was the first time when official sources started to talk about the games' opportunities for propaganda and manipulation of historical consciousness.

As sites of collective memory, both games are based on events of WWII. Both could be characterized as a set of individual missions/campaigns bound in a single entity by the logic of the war development. Such an approach, probably, does not depicts WWII in all its entirety (what is almost impossible in principle because of the incredible scale of the theater of war operations), yet it creates a coherent picture of different frontlines (East, West, Pacific, etc).

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20 First-person shooter.

21 Office of Strategic Services, a wartime intelligence agency in the USA, a predecessor of the CIA.

22 A digital distribution platform that provides digital rights management, multiplayer gaming and social network services.

Each game has two separate but interrelated storylines: a meta-narrative and a personal narrative. The former establishes a basis for the latter and embeds a fiction story into a general historical chronics, providing interaction between real and fictional elements of the scenario. A sense of authenticity and historical reliability are achieved through cutscenes[23] which are interspersed by inserts with documentary photo and video. Each mission brings a player at the new historical location with unique features. However, those stories are rather selectively chosen and offer only a single perspective of the hostilities, as it will be shown further.

Meta-narrative and personal narrative are intersected in missions' goals. For instance, the mission 7 'The Land Bridge to Leningrad' (*CoH*) starts with a newsreel that shows a main character in the hospital, where he is treated after being wounded in a previous mission. There he meets a soldier who was in the besieged Leningrad and listens his story about the horrors of the blockade. The next newsreel brings a hero on the ice of Ladoga lake. The mission starts unexpectedly right in thy middle of the video, and the character gets a goal to break the siege of Leningrad. Thus, gamers are invited to make a kind of "personal historical rebution" (Hess, 2007).

Both games provide authentic WWII weapons, reconstruct participatory scenes, and supply the player with documentary materials. Taken together, these elements contribute to the higher possible immersion in the reconstruction of the war. Game creators make users believe that *MoH* and *CoH,* in their drive for authencity, accurately reflect and replicate the epoch. Both games, thus, could be seen as a kind of interactive collective memory, where the user not only observes events, but takes active part in its recreation.

2.4. Data analysis

All the interviews were transcribed (see appendix B). The transcribed text of all fifteen interviews stretches over one hundred and sixty single-line spaced pages. The next stage comprised coding interviews and discovering "themes" – abstract, often fuzzy constructs on the subject matter expressed by informants (see Ryan and Bernard, 2003).

An open coding within a present thesis was performed on the basis of three techniques: analysing of words (word repetitions, key terms, key-world-in-context); comparing and contrasting large blocks of text; analysing of linguistic features (metaphors, allegories) and implications.

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23 A cutscene, or event scene is a sequence in videogame that breaks up the gameplay by showing communication between game characters, bringing exposition to the player, introducing new game elements, demonstrating the effects of player's actions and creating emotional connections (see Aaron, 2014).

2.5. Findings

Interviews that have been conducted as a part of givern research, provide interesting albeit sometimes controversial results. This again proves the complexity of the research problem and outlines directions for the future research.

First of all, one should note that almost every informant has an idea of collective, or historical memory. People stress the subjectivity of this phenomenon:

"Well, it's very subjective, isn't it? I mean, family, media (well, government through media) and other things influence it, so… I don't even know if my own ideas of the past really are mine, not someone else's (laugh)".[24]

At the same time, they notice that history itself is a subjective thing, and therefore it is hard to distinguish between objective and subjective:

"Err… History, it's kinda a subjective thing. History itself is a preudoscience, because it's very subjective. Even historical records are subjective, because many of them are written by people who want to eat and protect their families, it is obvious that they wrote what their patron wanted. It has always been so, at all times, not only now".[25]

"Just try to find a normal historican. Really impartial. You won't. All of them.. Karamzin, Soloviev, even Nestor… Even they are considered as opportunitst, that they did everything as ordered. And you're talking about collective memory, that's even more complex".[26]

Games regardless of genre are percieved by gamers as a way to entertain, to kill time, or to communicate

"A game is a game. It's a story and my chance to participate in or just witness this story. In some cases it's to entertain, in other cases it's a simple time waste".

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[24] *Ну, это ж очень субъективная вещь, на самом деле… В смысле, семья, СМИ (точнее, власть через них) и другие вещи на это влияют, так что… Я даже не уверен, на самом деле, что мое видение прошлого действительно мое, а не чье-то там еще (смеется)*

[25] *Эм… История сама по себе довольно субъективная штука. Это вообще псевдонаука, потому что очень субъективна. Да те же документы исторические – полно таких, которые написаны людьми, которые хотели есть и прокормить свои семьи, понятно, что они писали то, что их патрон хочет. Всегда так было, во все времена, не только сейчас.*

[26] *А ты попробуй найти нормального историка. Реально беспристрастного. Не найдешь. Все они… Карамзин, Соловьев, даже Нестор тот же… Всех их конъюнктурщиками считают, что они делали все на заказ. А ты про коллективную память, это ж еще сложнее.*

Interestingly, that even for professional gamers two out of those three game functions hold true:

"Why? Well, there are my people, my clan, I like being there, I feel comfortable with them. I don't perceive it as a job, although I'm paid for it, it's just a part of my life. People go to the clubs, travel to other countries, and I play. You know, the game isn't just a game, it's… Aah, don't know how to describe it to you, you have to be a gamer to understand it… it's a depth, and you immerse in it, and that's all, you're in, and real world exists somewhere far if exists at all".[27]

However, game designers see the game somehow differently - as a Pierian spring:

"I see the game primarily as a result of someone else's work. I like to investigate gaming universes, and sometimes it fascinates so much that I forget about everything. But quite often when I play, I draw attention to interesting game solutions that I may use in my own work. Can't say it's really distracting, but I can stop in the middle of the mission and write down the idea that came into my mind while I was playing".

At the same time, many players admire the fact that, despite initially they have played 'just for fun', at some point it acquired new meanings:

"For me, those games have purely entertaining nature, but afterwards I became interested in equipment and weapons used on the battlefields of the WWII".[28]

"I started with oldschool strategies - it is now they are oldschool, and back in ninetees they were an achievement of progress – and found out that it's really interesting. I never was good at history, I have C for Russian history in my diploma, but that time I realized that I do wonder how it happens that Napoleon was able to capture the half ot Europe and North Africa. When you read it in books, it's really boring, it tells you nothing, but when you play as Napoleon, or against him, you want to understand what motivated him and how was his mind organized".[29]

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27 *Почему? Ну, это мои люди, мой клан, мне нравится быть с ними, мне с ними комфортно. Я не воспринимаю это как работу, хоть мне за это и платят, это часть моей жизни. Люди в клубы ходят, путешествуют куда-то, ну, а я играю. Понимаешь, игра, она не просто игра, это… Аа, не знаю, как тебе объяснить, это геймером быть надо, чтоб понять… Это глубина, в общем, ты в нее погружаешься, ты в ней – и все, реальный мир существует где-то далеко, если вообще существует.*

28 *Для меня эти игры носили чисто развлекательный характер, но впоследствии я стал интересоваться техникой и оружем, применяемым на полях сражений Второй мировой.*

29 *Я начинал с олдскульных стратегий – это сейчас они олдскульные, а тогда были достижением прогресса – и внезапно обнаружил, что это интересно. Я никогда не был хорош в истории, у меня тройка в дипломе по истории России стоит, но тогда мне реально стало интересно, как так вышло, что Наполеон смог захватить пол-Европы, да еще и Северную Африку впридачу. Когда читаешь книжки, учебники, это реально скучно, это тебе ни о чем не говорит, но когда ты играешь за Наполеона – или против него – тебе интересно, что им двигало и как у него мозги устроены.*

Thus, games can be seen as a source of initial information that captivates the player through the colorful and peronified gameplay and gives a rise to an interest to history that has more conscious and profound nature:

"I speak for myself, I didn't conduct any research and didn't ask another people how they feel about what they see in the game, but I know from communication with people who play -- they were looking for the information everywhere but not in the game. In Wikipedia, for example… So, Wikipedia is somehow more trustful informational resource, although I wouldn't be so optimistic… but anyway, you may find some basic information there, and some are really fond of it, they start to read the sources, buy encyclopedias, even engage in modeling – I mean, they buy those models, made them and so on".[30]

Q: But after, after the game, did you try to find some new information, in other sources? Like, did you have Internet that time, probably books, library?
A: I.. I only went to my granddad, just cause he fought in WWII. And then he told me about it... And I just went, my dad has just... Well, we had museums and books really. We had, like, encyclopedias of, like, WWII, and, like, tanks and clothes they carried and everything like that really. So, I'd say that.. It definitely spot my interest in it, I definitely say. Probably, if I didn't play, I wouldn't care about it.

Some people even has a practice when a historical game constructed a certain image of the past in the child's (13 years old) mind that was rather difficult to influence on:

Q: Is it possible to say that game on historical subject may awake a certain interest to studying history?

A: Of course! Well, "Tanks" ["World of Tanks"] provoked a great interest to the tanks. How many resourses have appeared, in Wikipedia, there are a lot of articles… How many people began to understand what's the difference between T-34 and T-60 and so on and so forth. It did, it's beyond doubt. When I worked as a teacher, I had one schoolboy… Well, I worked at village school, there were few children… So, there was a guy, inshort, so, he… he was inerested in history only in the context of computer games. And you know, we're studying, for example,

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30 *Я говорю за себя, я не проводил исследования и не спрашивал других людей, как они относятся к тому, что они видят, но зная по общению – с теми, кто играл – все информацию искали не в игре, а на той же, например, Википедии. То есть Википедии почему-то больше доверяют как источнику, хотя я бы не был столь оптимистичен… но какую-то первичную информацию там можно поймать, а некоторых затягивает и дальше, то есть они начинают источники уже читать, они начинают энциклопедии покупать, моделированием даже заниматься – то есть вот эти модели покупать, модельки из пластмассы делать и так далее.*

ancient Rome – and there is a game, Rome: Total War, and he starts: «It wasn't like this in the game! And this was like this». So, there was some element that he believed that games show the historical reality in a more correct way as compared with what his teacher said. But! But, but – after our conversations, he understood, that… I mean, I explained him that not all things were as they presented in the game. And why… Well, it's a child, an open system, he accepts all the information that is avaliable for him, he doesn't filter it.[31]

Taking into account the previous extract from one of the interview, one should note that despite the fact that there are certain expectation towards potential game player such as correct age and emotional maturity, there is a serious problem with underage gamers who play games that are unappropriate for their age because of their violence, profanity or materials of erotic nature. There is a concern, that such content may influence young gamers' moral and action characteristics negatively in a long-term perspective. This seems reasonable, as such ground is acquired either from personal experience, or bases on significant other's actions. However, there are almost no restrictions for games in historical setting, although all the mentioned above is fully applicable thereto. As it has been demonstrated, children indeed tend to trust a bright picture, their analytical skills are not yet developed enough to critically examine the incoming information, so such situations are not extraordinary. More mature gamers have their own collective memory that has been formed prior to the game. As a result, there is a a tacit agreement within a gaming community to perceive game's actions and events (even provocative ones) merely as an enterntainment rather than intentional insult and attempt to distort history. However, appearance of players who do not yet posses a historical knowledge in any form (because of age or other factors) could be critical for their collective memory.

When it comes to the perception of information from the game, expecially on historical matter, all informants are unaimmous: in general, it hardly could be trusted.

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31 *В: Можно ли сказать, что игра на историческую тему может пробудить интерес к изучению истории?*

О: Конечно. О, ну «Танки» вот очень большой интерес пробудили к танкам. Сколько появилось ресурсов, в Википедии сколько сразу появилось статей, сколько людей стали разбираться, чем Т-34 отличается от Т-60 и так далее и тому подобное. Это пробудили, это несомненно. Я когда учителем работал, у меня был один парень.. Ну, я в сельской школе работал, там мало детей было. Был один парень, короче – ну, он так вот… то есть его история интересовала только в контексте компьютерных игр. Причем, знаешь, проходили там, например, Древний Рим – а есть игра "Rome: Total War", ну и начиналось: "А в игре было не так, а вот это то-то". То есть был какой-то элемент того, что он считал, что в играх показывают все-таки правильнее, нежели ему говорит преподаватель. Но! Но, но – после того, как мы с ним разговаривали, он понимал, что… то есть я ему показывал, что не так все было. А почему – а потому, что… Ну, откуда.. то есть он… ребенок – это некая открытая система, которая воспринимает всю информацию, которая ему доступна, он же не фильтрует ее.

"A: I wouldn't trust information coming from the game. Maybe if it's a story game that specifies in displaying certain aspects in a history. Like, mmm, there are some grand strategy games that focus on different aspects of the history like «Civilization», do you know it?

Q.: Of course.

A: «Civilization» is not accurate but it tries to be as accurate as it can to still make it a playable game. But you have to know that, of course, if there is a decision to be made: to be either accurate or to be a good game it always could be in favor of game experience and not of being accurate".

"Some are informational, some are not. There are few games with solid story, even fewer stories are actually engaging and most certainly only a handful of them about WWII. And in a FPS genre there is little to none requirements in historical accuracy, mostly because of genre itself".

"Q: Do you perceive the game as some kind of information source…

A: No, it's an entertainment. No, I'd like it to be informative, but I understand that consider it as a source of knowledge is weird enough… It's much easier to watch a movie. I mean a good, documentary one. I mean, you've played, you've got an interest, and then you look for information in a, like, more reliable ground".

However, some players named several games that they perceive as historicaly reliable:

"I would most certainly not consider any WWII FPS as source of information, but I do gather information about WWII from Hearts of Iron game series. Information in this series for me is trustworthy".

"With few exceptions of Paradox Studio games – I do not perceive information in games as reliable. Paradox games, on the other hand, are very accurate in historical details and do have my trust".

"Well… I'd say, Medal of Honor series is quite authentic, these guys indeed do a great job. Yeah, it worth to be trusted".

Both gamers and game developers point out the visual component of historical games and stress the importance of details that are crutial for creating an authentic atmosphere:

"You know, what attracts? There's visualization -- to see which models there were, how they looked, how shooted… This historical detailed elaboration, that's what interesting".[32]

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32 *Знаешь, за чем тянет? Там визуальное – посмотреть модели, какие, да, как выглядело это, как стреляло… Вот эта историческая детализация, это интересно.*

"The game is primarily selected for its visual part, not for its scenario. If you shoot tanks, they have to fly apart after the final shot, there should be the fire in all directions, and you, like, "Hoo!". And if you shot the tank, and nothing happens, the shell just gets there and doesn't detonate… Although, in Company of Heroes [2] they made such a feature, when you may shoot the tank, it lost a half of its 'life', and then you may repair it and continue to use".

"If we are talking about FPS – most important of all will be visualization, game engine. Everything else is just gift-wrappings".

Games posses several unique features that help them to create an authentic and realistic space:

"Computer game is a unique blend of cinematic experience, storytelling and engaging process. In movie or book consumer have no impact on story, we are only watching story unfold, whereas player in computer games almost always a centerpiece of whole story".

"A good game creates an effect of presence and let experience some important historical moments. But there're not so much such scenarios, and many of them are repeated. Anyway, a historical component is the main element of the gameplay. I plan my game through the prism of historical effects and my own ideas about this epoch. The game in this sense may create this prism and deform it. In a sense, you may read about the Blitzkrieg 1940 for many times, and you may once try to bypass the Maginot Line from the North, through Holland, and to take Paris".[33]

Surprisingly, against expectations, opinions on the historical accuracy and reliability of videogames are split up. While gamers (mostly pros and semi-pros) argues that meticulous realism in the game is not required and even may be harmful:

Q: But, should there be any historical realism, historical accuracy at all? I mean, it's a game…yeah, so, ok, it can be based on real events, but still it seems that game developers and gamers do not have to follow like a chronicles of the WWII, do they?

A: I tend to ignore that because it makes it more interesting to rewrite history… than to experience the same results over and over again. It takes an approach to say, ok, we have this

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33 *Хорошие игры создают эффект присутствия и позволяют переживать какие-то важные исторические моменты. Но таких сценариев не так много и они повторяются. В любом случае, здесь историческая составляющая – главный элемент геймплея. Я планирую свою игру через призму исторических событий и моих представлений об эпохе. Игра в этом смысле может создавать эту призму и деформировать её. В некотором смысле можно много раз читать про блицкриг весной 1940 года, а можно один раз попробовать обойти линию Мажино с севера, через Голландию и взять Париж.*

historic situation and now it's up to you what would happen. And that's much more interesting than following through what already had happened.

Q: So, is it a kind of… alternative history?

A: Yes, I think, that it is more interesting than play actual history.

"You see, what's interesting -- the reality isn't so interesting. I mean, if you make everything real, when the unit dies after the one shot, it won't be interesting. Everywhere… Therefore, one cannot espect historical accuracy, historical truth in games, that's unreal"[34].

game developers and amateur players stand for as accurate representation of historical events as possible:

"I believe that developers should be responsible for what they produce, and especially for the accuracy of the information about real events, especially when it comes to the WWII or Great Patriotic war. Well, they may turn to alternative history, it's their right, but then they should warn the user that game is based on someone's fantasy".[35]

"Of course, I believe, we are responsible for the product we create! It's not only about the history, it's about general things… <…> We use documentary, video chronics, authentic maps… Several times, we've organized trips to museums for our artists and level-designers, they've told with guides… It's ok when our enviromental designers travel to battle places to work with real environment".

However, game developers point out that such kind of responsibility has ethical aspect rather than legislative. It is regulated mostly by moral characteristics of game creators, therefore, it also depends on their cultural and social background.

"Well, WE DO care about our story, we want to make people feel like they've been there… But it doesn't necessary mean that other studios are so attentive as well, look at games produced by, say, Electronic Arts… Or SEGA, yeah, SEGA published Company of Heroes… I don't remember who was their developer… Anyway, they're [games] cool in terms of gameplay and graphics, but I'd never make a game where Russians are portrayed like this… just because

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34 *Понимаешь, что интересно – реальность, она не такая интересная. То есть если сделать все реально, когда после одного попадания умирает юнит, это будет неинтересно. Везде.. поэтому ждать от игр исторической точности, исторической правды нереально.*

35 *Я думаю, что разработчики ответственны за то, что производят, особенно за точность информации о реальных событиях, особенно когда это касается Второй мировой или Великой Отечественной. Ну да, они могут обращаться к альтернативной истории, это их право, но тогда они должны предупреждать пользователей о том, что игра основана на чьей-то фантазии*

I'm Russian (laugh). Maybe for them it's ok, although for me it looks strange… I mean, I don't really believe that there are some governmental order or something like this, game industry doesn't work in that way, but … but I'd never produce such kind of stuff, because I don't think so. I don't really know what motivates them, they can create cool games, but not when it comes to games about WWII, more precisely about GPW. Maybe it's cultural differences – a foreign cannot understand misterious Russian soul (laugh), but anyway – they operate somehow differently. But people…. People all around the world, for them it's ok, so who's there to bother how'd Russia react".[36]

Social background of game creators as well as gamers themselves indeed plays one of the most significant roles in the gaming process. It affects the possible interpretations that are provided by both sides, and not neccessarily they coinside. In that case, incorrect interpretation and, as a consequence, misunderstanding may provoke negative response from users' side. Nevertheless, game designers tend to underline their independent and impartial approach to game development:

"Because game developers know how game developers think and gamers don't know that much about game developers because they haven't developed games. That's why, I think. And to further explain it, game developers are, of course, are human beings, of course they have certain ideals, ideological background and kind of all that staff. And they can put that into the game as long as it doesn't interfere with the main point that is to make the game; it works and fits to profile. So, they have a certain job to do but if they do their job with their background whatever they want to put in, it doesn't have to be ideological. I think that much ideological background is there. Let's say they have an interesting story point that they hours wanted to see or they wanted to see special…they want to do just character design in a certain way as I have always witnessed to be lacking in the game honestly. Then they can put it into the game if it doesn't interfere with the game designing process. And of course, game developers tend to stretch the freedom, the

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36 *Ну, нам не все равно на нашу историю, мы хотим заставить людей почувствовать себя так, как будто они прошли сами через это все… Но это не значит, что другие студии также внимательно к этому относятся, взять те же игры EA… или Сеги, да, Сега была издателем Company of Heroes… я не помню, кто был разработчиком у них… Короче, они делают крутые игры в плане геймплея и графики, но я б никогда не сделал такую игру, где русских показывают так… ну, просто потому, что я русский (смеется). Может, для них это нормально… В смысле, я не к тому, что есть там какие-то заказы правительственные или подобная фигня, игровая индустрия так не работает, но.. я б никогда не сделал такое, потому что я так не думаю. Я правда не знаю, что ими движет, они умеют создавать крутые игры, но не про ВМВ, точнее, ВОВ. Может, это какие-то культурные особенности – иностранцу не понять загадочную русскую душу (смеется), но энивей, они воспринимают все по-другому. А люди… Люди во всем мире, для них это нормально, так что кто там парится, как Россия отреагирует.*

point of freedom that they have, just to create the image of course. Yes, I have all the freedom I want, like, do whatever I want".

The cited interview extracts raise another important issue that addresses the question of histotical stereotypisation and translation of myths and historical clichés. Games indeed insipire and provoke such things – there are a variety of studies that prove it, -- and historical games are not the exception. Even those (mostly semi-professionals and professionals) who deny any impact of games on user's mind, admit that game stereotypes pass into real life and affect the perceprtion of people and events:

"When I was 7 or 8, playing Medal of Honor for the first time, it's like when you thought about Germany then, you thought about Hitler, you thought about the Nzais, you don't think about, you know, they have a lovely outfit, you don't think that... I've been to Germany, I went to like forest, and it's like the whole lovely thing and everyone is friendly, but it's like, before you go there in person, you still think that the war. But it's like how, the stereotypes gonna always be again. It is easier to understand what the stereotype, cause everyone knows this stereotype. It's like stereotypical English is porsh and smart. And everyone thinks that when you think English, like the first thing is gonna be posh. I also think that traditional. And it's like when you think, because of the when I think, when I was younf I thought 'German', I thought whooaa, and I thought 'nazis' and I thought 'bad'. And that was a really awful stereotype, but, when I was younger this is how it portrayed them and this is what I thought. So, I definitely think that they definitely helped them against. I know why they have them against. I wish they didn't have them against, but it's what everyone, everyone can relate to it. Cause everyone knows the stereotype".

"I definitely could tell you that if you ever played for... video-games have this stereotypes now, especially in WWII. So, it always gonna be. It depends what the game publisher as well, so that's a game done by an american company Russians are gonna to be extremely stereotyped. Like, I remember playing one game… Company of Heroes [2]. You know well, you feel they have a really thick accents, big heavy coats, drinking vodka.. That's it, I'm afraid. Like, I don't want to be mean, but Russians, actually, stereotyped in WWII games, especially, the american ones. Cause it goes, the English, have stereotypes Russians, they.. almost like the base upfront of the... of the, you know, they are the hardest, the greatiest, they've been through the worst. The Americans are the most patriotic, so. You know, if you have ever played the american any commrads, obviously, gonna die. And then it's gonna be like, everything that. When you're the

British, you're the most sneaky and intellegent of the ones. If you're playing the Russians ... all out battle, if you're playing americans, it would be more.. Like this stereotype missions around the player as well. So, that you can always mention russians always be a snow, it always be a snowy area, and also be all-out battle. And it will be in harsh conditions, like incredible harsh war. I believe, one game actually send you in, I can't know how the battles called now, but they send you in without a weapon. Cause they just wanted troops to their, they just… they want people to run inside the troops with the weapons when it get shut up. So, it's like. They like the harshest environment, the British are more.. the more intelligent missions, so we would go more intellegent ones and you would go in hard, sneak missions, and the americans would be the more, more like the D Day Normandy landing rather heroic, patriotic. I've only actually played one game, when I played as a german forces, and it wasn't... like it didn't. Like it wasn't about lie as it didn't portray them as what doing is wrong. I didn't portray them as what doing is right. It's just kind of portray them as another troop, like a blank slay on the battlefield, really".

However, stereotypes and clichés in historical games have both drawbacks and advantages. On the other hand, they support nations' stereotype images (not only Russian, one should mention, but British, Germans, Americans as well). At the same time, they contribute to the construction of images of Nazis, for example, which are widely negatively recognized:

*"Honestly, I'd quite enjoyed that just cause the fact that.. like when you're a young, like when I was young playing the game, like due to stereotype in your mind, the nazis were bad, you know, they did terrible things, but as you kinda grow older, as you [*unclear*] into this, you realize that some people actually were forced to join the german ranks, otherwise they would be killed. And, you know, if we pull smth like that into perspective I'd really enjoyed it. You know, if they were the more humane, you know. You know, everyday it's smth like a Schindler's list type thing. You know what is the german citizen saving the jewish people, I don't think that would be. If they ever encleared in german mission, where the mission was to do smth bad, then the germans will never be portrayed as humane. They have to be portrayed in light way, they were saving the jews, like a Schindler's list style. Or that have to be... You know like standing up to Hitler, or smth like that. I never think that the game-developer would include... a mission, where you fought for the nazis against allies, where germans were not portrayed by the way. Just because of the whole stereotype and.. it sells, as awful as it sounds. It's like when you have a set enemy, it's like people look for enemies in video-games, it's like 'whom does everyone hate? -The Nazis.' It's like. You can't say it, like 95% of this world would prefer if the nazis didn't exist. It's like, it's*

just fact. And I feel like game-developers gonna use that fact and keep portraying them in stereotypical bad manner even if not all of them were...”.

The problem lies in the fact that, theoretically, the Nazis may be depicted in a positive way. It may be resulted in their more positive general representation. However, it is hardly possible since there are many other active actors that struggle for the possibility to influence user's perception of history -- family, educational system, media in all its manifestations. In such an environment, a game cannot oppose itself to more powerful memory agents, it simply does not have resources enough for it.

“How it has been before? Fairytales, proverbs, sayings, stories from grandparents… and now we have a great media that shapes a certain perception in people. And games… they are kinda a media now, but… their influence's so insignificant that they can do nothing. Well, there's a child that sees a Nazi who's a kind of nice – so what, there are films about the same, he may watch a film as well … and still everyone consider Nazis bastards. And even if after the game he [child] come out and say that Nazis were good, everyone would just give a screw-loose sign and explain quickly all that stuff. Environment's still there, children do not live in vacuum”.[37]

At the same time, such stereotypes could possess pedagogical effect:

“I would think a bit, ammm, and the most games I know are displaying nazis as the evil guys but it was every, every setting get boring after repetitive number of times. And it doesn't put any more value on playing the same story over and over again. Because the game characteristics and if you are doing the first-person shooter, for example, the game characteristics, what you can change is not much. You still are a guy that has to shoot at other guys. You don't want to do that all over again, so you try to invent new approaches. What I think, I don't know what game it exactly was - is where you start as a nazi but switch sides. Doing game so that you have first the experience as a nazi and then you witness a cruelty and then you switch sides. That kind of twists. I think twists are now more cooperate into games stories to make you more interesting. Where there is some kind of vitriol and then you switch side and then your former allies are no longer your allies and you have to fight them”.

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37 *Раньше это как было – сказки, какие-то там пословицы, поговорки, а сейчас у нас есть большое СМИ, которое как раз и формирует некое у людей представление. А игры… они типа тоже как медиа сейчас стали, но они так мало влияют пока, что ничего сделать-то не могут. Ну, есть вот ребенок, который видит [в игре] типа хороших нацистов – ну и что, про это и фильмы есть, он и фильм посмотреть может… и все равно все считаю нацистов ублюдками. Да даже если он после игры какой-то выйдет и скажет, что нацисты хорошие, на него ж все пальцем у виска покрутят и быстро объяснят, что да как. Внешняя-то среда все равно есть, дети ж не в вакууме живут.*

In general, a stereotypical nature of any media form is widely emphasized. However, the abundance of stereotypes may lead to the fact that game is perceived as boring and becomes 'one of the many":

"Yes, of course, games are…are producing stereotypes, of course, every media produce stereotypes, because that's how our thinking works. We think in stereotypes. But, ammm…if we want to tell different story, then, of course, we have to do, put different characters in endless (?) stories and make them work. I think what you can criticize is not the ideological background of game developers but more their boring and lazy approaches to game stories. That they are lazy and therefore there is a female character and female character is a victim and male character has to rescue the female character. And then the story ends. This is what I would call typical lazy approach on development story. This is something that I have witnessed in other games, so, they read the same story over and over again. That's not because they are ideological about it but because they are lazy. That is something you immediately think of because they have experienced it in other games, in other media".

Interestingly, game designers who mostly admit the games' certain potential in terms of both stereotypisation and more complex ideological component, deny nevertheless that they resort to it, at least intentionally. Game developers have completely different goals and objetives, and therefore do not need to pay attention to this issue:

"It has never been a game developers' goal [an end in itself] to implement specific ideological or propagandistic orientation, to impose some sort of historical interpretation".[38]

"Of course it's possible that there is some kind of goals exist but I think where game developers differ most it is not the ideological approach what they take but what kind of aspect they put in the foreground, what are they focusing on. They can put the focus on storytelling of a person, they could put the focus on the level design or the design of what your…what the main character get influenced by. And by changing the focus the whole experience changes. So, it can be a heroic experience, or it can be a dramatic experience. I think this is the main difference that you have".

Furthermore, game designes see propaganda in the game as a potential risk that should be avoided if possible:

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[38] *Да нет, никогда это не было самоцелью геймдевов, впихнуть какую-то идеологическую или пропагандисткую установку, как-то интерпретировать историю.*

"You know, we might try to, but no game developer will ever install an image of something to make someone gets false to do something. Because then… Like, cause everyone trying to debate the fact that games don't calls violence. If we gonna do a propaganda in games -- to cause violence, or ideology, or gender inequality,, that's the big risk. It is very risky, believe me".

The only one player defines the structure of the game, its content, plot, and other elements, and it is market, not the government or any other institution. So, if consumers have a request for such kind of content, the game may contain it:

Q: May they [game developers] translate… almost any message they want and… compel the general audience. Will it…, will it work?

A.: That depends on a market. If there is a market forge, yes, they can do this. If somebody buys the game that's the only…if there is no censorship, let's say, you are a game developer in a North Korea than you have to obey certain censorship laws. But if there is no censorship and you can find someone willing to pay for your game than of course you are free to <???> whatever massage you want in that kind of game. There has to be market for it, so, that it gets…intention".

However, such a request for an ideological component from users' side practically does not exist. It is important to note that there are some state orders for patriotic games, but it does not make sense to consider them due to their neligible amount and the lack of successful precedents. The only game that achieved its goals is *America's Army* series that has been created for U.S. government in order to popularize the American military service and provide a plattform for virtual training of potential recruits.

Some players point out, that the possible effect of games on users' mind strongly depends on game's genre. First-person role games are more influental as compared with third-person and strategies, for example:

"The most games WW2 that I've played were either single player, no…either first-person shooters, or a strategy games. And in strategy games, strategy games they…they take an approach that put you out of the action, so you don't really care much about a special unit, you don't feel…you don't feel lost if your unit is just destroyed and that approach is…cuts you off from…putting yours…your view in units. You don't do this, you are strategic, you are

strategically making your decisions and not basing your decisions on emotions. So, that's why those games are pretty much the same because they, there is no emotional point. At least the most of the games it's more about the approach and how difficult it is and how you can…. And how can you manage to win when both sides have equal value. So, that's about strategies and not about emotions. This is the most important thing, I think on strategy games".

"That's [game effect] depending on the game, some games always will be very restrictive, but some games so free now that you can do whatever you want".

However, the main goal of commercial games (and both games considered in the present paper belong to this category) is profit. Both gamers and game developers recognize it:

"Their task is a commercial gain, a maximum profit. Even if they [game developers] understand that something is wrong, they have investors, and investors want to return their money, they want bucks. They understand that they have to make a game that will be bouth by many people".[39]

At the same time, some players (mostly from East Europe and mostly amateurs) insist that games pursuase propaganda pusposes and are directed against Russia:

"In my opinion, the main goal of any game is a profit along with the distortion of history, as Company of Heroes [2] developers have done. There, Russian soldiers are portrayed as horrible montsters that unwilingly, under compulsion protect their motherland and burn houses with the local population".[40]

"I wouldn't trust the information from games, because people creating games on this [WWII] subject are from the West, and there is propaganda aimed at distortion of historical data".[41]

Q: So, you think, that there's someone 'in the West' who deliberately tries to affect…

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39 *Их задача – коммерческая прибыль, максимальная прибыль. Даже если они и, может, понимают, что-то не так, у них есть инвесторы, инвесторы хотят отдачи, инвесторы хотят бабок. Они понимают, что надо сделать так, чтобы эту игру купило большинство людей.*

40 *На мой взгляд основная цель - получение прибыли и вместе с тем искажение истории, как делают разработчики игры "Company of Heroes", где советские солдаты выглядят жуткими монстрами, которые нехотя, из-под палки защищают свою родину, сжигают дома с местным населением.*
41 *Сильно доверять информации из игр не приходиться, ведь разработчики игр на эту тематику, в своём большинстве, находятся на западе. А сейчас идёт пропаганда направленная на искажение исторических данных.*

A: Of course. All the intelligences agencies that exist, they… Why do you think they exist, just to play with children? Their aim is to fight with the opposing site… And we're such a side for them.[42]

Europeans do not share such views:

"… they [game designers] have a certain job to do but if they do their job with their background whatever they want to put in, it doesn't have to be ideological. I think that much ideological background is there. Let's say they have an interesting story point that they hours wanted to see or they wanted to see special…they want to do just character design in a certain way as I have always witnessed to be lacking in the game honestly. Then they can put it into the game if it doesn't interfere with the game designing process".

"You know, game-developers can't, like… How the game is going to be made, they cannot make you feel bad. Cause that's like… You know, you don't wanna just a game, you want game to make me feel excited, I want game to make you continue playing it. You know, if you're playing as a nazi, and you're actually doing smth terrible, you gonna wanna put game down, you think 'I don't want to play this anymore".

One may conclude that gamers from East Europe, especially from Russia, are more prejudiced and sensitive to distorted image of Russian (soviet) troops and representation of history that does not correspond to their expectations and their collective memories. Perhaps, it is strongly connected with their socio-cultural background – both Soviet and Russian official memory policy offer unambiguous and undoubted interpretation of WWII. West Europeans (all interviwees are citizens of the EU) are more tolerant to any form of history representation (probably, it is a manifestation of traditional european values such as liberalism, pluralism, etc). They are not particularly concerned about their own portrayal in historical games as well as about others' images. They suppose that everyone has a right to his/her own version of history, and the plurality of those versions is a natural fact. Additionally, they admit that computer games may but it is hardly possible to use them for providing and imposing of ideological component, while our compatriots are absolutely confident in the power of the game as a tool of (anti)propaganda. Interestingly, that there are no evidences (in this study nor in any other) that games indeed establish any ideological construct:

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42 *В: То есть, ты думаешь, что кто-то на Западе сознательно пытается…*

О: Конечно! Все спецслужбы, которые есть, они… Они для чего, по-твоему, существуют, просто так, что ли, с детьми играть? Они существуют для того, чтобы бороться с противоборствующей стороной, и такая сторона для них – мы [Россия].

Q: Well, you've played CoH, and you didn't like its misinterpretation of the history of the WWII, as you've just said… Did it influence somehow you personally? Or you know some people who changed their attitude towards our history after playing such games?

A: Well, no, I know my history very well, such games cannot confuse me or change something, I know how it really was... And my friends, they're like me, so it can't overpersuade them…

Q: Why then are you so sure that such games may affect someone? I mean, if you've never faced such situations?

A: Well, I know it because people usually believe what they are showed. I myself know the history, but there are a lot of people who don't, and they will believe what's on the screen. It's obvious, it's the same like with the violence – everyone knows game provoke aggression, it's the same with the history.[43]

"Well, I'm a critical thinking person, when I was playing this game [CoH], I laughed at this. But well, somebody may really learn and believe this".[44]

Q: So, different interpretations of the same story. How would it affect the gamer, his perception of history?

A: I don't think he is just going to believe it. If I had one battle in one game, while played as an English person, and then it portrayed out in this manner, and then like, like because it will still lead to the same ending, if you know what I mean, as you said, you know allies will win at the end of the battle. And then in the next game I played as a russian in the same battle, like in the different part of the battle, but you know, still join in a whole, I think they would more believe everything, if you know, what I mean, with the fact that they think that this is 'oh, how all russians did it, and this is how they interacted, and this is how, you know, what they experienced at the battleside'. And you know, the English were here, and this is how the English did it, this is

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[43] *В: Ну, вот ты играл в CoH, которая тебе не понравилась, потому что неправильно представляет историю, как ты сейчас сказал… А она как-то на тебя лично повлияла? Или, может, ты знаешь людей, которые изменили отношение к нашей истории после таких игр?*

О: Ну, я свою историю очень хорошо знаю, такие игры меня с толку не собъют или не поменяют что-то – я знаю, как это реально было… И мои друзья тоже как я, то есть их не переубедить таким..

В: Почему тогда ты так уверен, что они [игры] могут повлиять на кого-то? Я к тому, если ты сам с такими ситуациями не сталкивался?

О: Ну, я это знаю, потому что люди обычно верят тому, что им показывают… я лично знаю историю, но есть куча людей, которые не знают, и они будут верить тому, что на экране. Это ж очевидно, это как с насилием – все знают, что игры провоцируют агрессию, то же самое и с историей.

[44] *Ну, вот я, критически мыслящий человек, я когда играл в эту игру, я только ржал над этим всем. Но кто-то ж может реально это усвоить.*

how the English fought, and this is how everything happened. Like.. They won't have them together. I've yet to play a single WWII game, where a russian person has fought alongside with an american or an englishman in an batalia. As in like they wouldn't have the same. You've never play as a russian person in the same area as where the english fought. You play in the same area where the russians fought. And, I think that people would think that when I was growing up I also used to think 'oh, you know the russians fought here, we fought there, the americans fought here'. You know, you didn't think that 'no, we were just one massive army with all the forces'. Which we were essentially.

Game developers explain such unequivocal statements about games' partiality and "ideological disloyalty" by consumers' background and sociocultural context. Curiously enough, we may observe a situation of passing the buck to others – from gamers to game developers and vice versa:

Q: From this point of view it seems that game actually may provide different interpretations of the same historical facts and events.

A: Interpretations?.. It's up to the consumer. You can always interpret certain messages in a different way. I would say, I would stress the point of freedom the consumer has.

Q: So, it depends mostly on the consumer? Not on the game developer?

A: I would say yeah. Of course you can choose different games; it's also up to the consumer. If you want to play certain games and you can choose them; if you don't want to play them and you can, may choose not to play them. And you could also abstrasize yourself from what is happening at all, you don't look at what historic background is and just look at the numbers. They are kind of...people let really concentrate on that. To be the best gamers they can on a certain aspect. They playing it like chess it doesn't really matter what it is. It is ok, this is the mate and this is just a king. And they don't refer with mate, the historic mate and king, historic king, but they just see it like as aspect of a game. If you play a multiplayer games a lot, I think this is what happens there. You abstrasize much from what have actually happened.
what media is like. This is very important to have some kind of experience and guidance, maybe, maybe by parents to show how media works. If you know how media works and you don't trust it that much as you were if you just didn't have any clue that it is produced with the certain background.

However, when it comes to the possible accusations towards historical games as agents of 'wrong' (or inconvenient for someone) point of view, it provokes misapprehension and sometimes resentment, especially from gamers' side:

"I think it's a cheap, cheap approach to blame computer games when you have that much actual bullying going, going on in school. Because, ok, everybody can blame the computer games that he played and I know this happened before, in the nineteenth, it was «Death metal». In the US. In the US there was also some massacres and they blamed…they blamed the «Death metal»".

Finally, considering games as a sourse of collective memory, both gamers and game designers stress the relationships between games and social environments. Games, unlike other media are seen as secondary in relation to the society. At the present stage of development of the gaming industry, it is society that determines the content of games, and not vice versa:

"I think, games are rather the product of social consciousness, I mean, they just reflect the social consciousness that exists. Maybe even world consciousness".[45]

"I would say… I would stress the…that social reality is being reflected in games. That's a part I would stress most, because it's more sociality than there are in games. And there… there are other agents… Umm… I would, I would, I would say it's a circle, you can't escape it. It's always a circle".

It is important to understand that games nowadays operate as media; therefore, it is hard to separate games from other media forms:

"Know, you have to know what media is like. This is very important to have some kind of experience and guidance, maybe, maybe by parents to show how media works. If you know how media works and you don't trust it that much as you were if you just didn't have any clue that it is produced with the certain background".

"You see, game is like any other media – theoretically, it may influence people's minds. But now… I can't really tell to what extent they influence… I mean, there're still TV, Internet, other media, and they're, in my opinion, more powerful in this respect. Maybe in the future, games will also become a powerful tool… and you know, it's possible if it is commercially profitable. If in two-three years we see that games indeed may change someone's mind – then, yes, they become such tools, but now… I don't think so".[46]

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45 *Мне кажется, игры, это все-таки продукт общественного сознания, то есть вот они как раз отражают то общественное сознание, которое есть. Может быть, даже мировое.*

46 *Понимаешь, игры, как любые другие СМИ – теоретически, они могут влиять на сознание людей. Но сейчас.. Я правда не могу сказать, в какой степени они влияют… В смысле, есть еще телевидение, Интернет, еще там, другие СМИ, и они, по-моему, более мощные инструменты в этом отношении. Может, в будущем игры станут таким же*

Summing up the results of the research that have been conducted, the following conclusions can be made. Firstly, there are five possible modes of computer game which may contribute to the collective memory shaping:

- game as a source of information that evokes a primary interest in history;
- game as a means of historical clichés and stereotypes dissemination;
- game as an educational tool;
- game as a reflection of social reality;
- game as a tool of propaganda.

While the existance of the first four game roles is recognized unanimously, the last one provokes controversy, debates, and ambiguous (and often opposing) views. This indicates that the following studies should be focused on the investigation of this particular side of computer games phenomenon.

It is important to notice, that gamers chose the games "based on what they are interested in and find relevant". The gamers' choice is deliberate in most cases, and therefore the risk of 'being affected' is significantly reduced.

Furthermore, computer games constitue just one medium among many in the process of collective memory shaping. Hence, it is hardly possible to say -- at least, at the present time – that games may be seen as *independent* actors agents of collective memory since they are deeply integrated in the general media structure of the society.

Nevertheless, the findings of the present research allow to consider video games as one of the sourses of collective memory. Moreover, they may be seen as platforms for building, not simple consuming historical knowledge. However, they should not be considered without the context and sociocultural background and environment.

инструментом… и знаешь, это возможно, если это станет коммерчески выгодно. Если через пару-тройку лет мы увидим, что игры в самом деле могут влиять на людей – тогда, да, они станут такими инструментами, но сейчас… не думаю.

Conclusion

Modern fast-changing societies foreground the problem of accumulation and use of social experience. A constructing role of social knowledge inevitably raises the issues of its formation, transfer, and assimilation. Also, it puts the questions of the opportunities and limits of using social knowledge in the process of management of social reality. Nowadays it is clear that process of accumulation of knowledge about social reality simultaneously constructs this reality, including its past, present, and future. Fragile, agile and continuous processes of signification and re-signification both past and present is a relatively new phenomenon. We live not only in the era of unpredictable present and future, but oddy enough, in the era of unpredictable past.

The growing interest in the problems and the role of social, including collective, memory is thus associated with the peculiarities of contemporary societies, their projective, dynamic, pluralized and individualized nature. The fact that collective memory is a stabilizing, integrating, and innovative factor requires a profound analysis of its structure, mechanisms of its dynamic and social functioning.

As the present study demonstrates, games have become the most realistic form of modern media, not only in terms of entertainment but also education, information, and shaping collective consciousness. In fact, games nowadays have all the characteristics that are inherent for new media, and simultaneously possess the effect of immersion, which makes them extremely effective means for the purposes mentioned above.

The present study attempts to reveal the role of video games in the process of collective memory formation. It should be emphasized separately that the present study *do not* raises the issue of the degree of influence on actors involved in the prosses of collective memory shaping. The main purpose of this research is not to determine the place of video games in a totality of all sources of collective memory but rather find out whether they have an impact generally and whether this impact is recognized by the players and game creators. The question could be formulated as following: Do computer games construct the image of the past that carries a certain ideology of their representation.

Summarizing the findings of the given paper, one may say that games could be seen as a source of collective memory. Moreover, they may be seen as platforms for building, not simple consuming historical knowledge. However, they should not be considered without the context and sociocultural background and environment.

Games could be used as a powerful educational means and initial position for encouraging interest in history. It is of crutial importance when it comes to children: their outstanding ability to absorb a huge amount of information along with low critical thinking skills requires special attention that has to be drawn to the content of video games children play in. At the same time, the usage of computer games could make sense to stimulate their cognitive interest since the implementation of such games reinforces general computer's teaching opportunities.

Games may be also considered as transators of historical mythes and clichés. Additionally, as many studies that have been conducted before, this one demonstrates that video games contribute to stereotypes dissemination. However, the specificity of the historical games audience do not always encourage their maintainance.

Nevertheless, yet one cannot unequivocally say that games may enforce ideology and propaganda. Data obtained during the empirical research do not allows to make an unambiguous

conclusion - more research are needed in order to clarify whether computer games are capable to serve as a means of soft power, for example. At the same time, an interesting tendency has been traced: people from East Europe, including Russia, are more confident about games' capacity to influence users' mind as compared with their West Europe fellows. Apparently, this is one of the examples that demonstrates the necessity to take into account socio-cultural background of players and game designers.

It is important to note that nowadays games require an analysis that privileges the form over the contents. Future researchers have to keep in mind that understanding of historical video games needs to move beyond simple surface-level content analysis. Furthermore, study of historical computer games requires a interdisciplinary approach that would establish a thougthful and constructive framework for their investigating.

Thus, the way that computer games present and represent history depends on the confluence of several factors. Among them one may name classical ludologic points: player's historical identification and self-representation that has evolved under the influence of other factors, both external and internal; player's orientation in history and interativity and, finally, player's concentration on the rules of the game. The effect of historical games nowadays may not be probably as apparent as the effect of violent games. However, it is hard to argue that the way that history is presented and experienced may change the general perception of history, and this is especially important for events that have significant social implications.

The study has exploratory nature, so it raises more questions than gives answers. It outlines the possible directions for future research. Thus, due to the limitations of the present work it was difficult to highlight the process of interaction and clashes between official and vernacular memory and nostalgia in the gaming space, to investigate specific kind of memories that are debated and demonstrate how these debates shape the historical identity of those involved, to pay enough attention to the reproduction of historical clichés in different socio-cultural contexts. However, given research answers the key research question and therefore could be considered as one of the first cautious steps to the investigation of this complex phenomenon, especially in Russian social science.

Complexity and ambiguity of the computer games attract much research interest that growths every year, and yet there are many questions that are openended and remain to be answered. There are also gaps, biases, and contradictions in generalized 'game theories' and sample sets. Also, at the same time, there are a lot of opportunities and development paths, that we, the children of digital age can subject ourselves to and provide answers in the right direction. We should remember that there we are the ones who would decide whether computer games will become a dangerous weapon or serve humanity in the due course of our lives.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

Interview Guide (gamers)

1. General (biography & game)

1) Tell me please about your game experience. When and how did you start playing computer games? What has attracted you? What was your first game about WWII? Do you remember your impression?

2) What is a game for you? Is it a way to get away from problems, to entertain, to waste time? Do you consider computer games as a kind of information source about history and WWII? Do you trust the information (whether it be technical, historical, etc.) that you get from games?

3) How do you think who is the target audience for WWII games? What is the aim of creating such kind of entertainment? In your opinion, do game developers (in general) pursue

any specific purposes?

4) Some games have localizations. Why do they matter (if so)? Why not every game has specific version for particular audience? What is the difference between gamers in various countries? Does the main topic (WWII, for instance) influence somehow the behavior and reaction of different users?

2. Content & context

1) What is important for game developers – content or nice picture, visualization? Creating a game, do game creators try to convey a certain message to the audience? Why could it be important for them?

2) Does the creation of game devoted to WWII impose any imprint on game makers? Are they responsible for the product they create? Should they explore some documents, chronics (if yes, which ones)? Should games reflect historical events impartially and be free from prejudices, or they do not require historical accuracy? What about 'alternative history' in games?

3) What is the most important thing for you as gamer when you chose the game about WWII (scenario, realism, additional materials, historical accuracy, technical features)?

4) Do you perceive information from games as reliable? Does it have any authority for you?

5) Playing the game, have you an opportunity to chose the party for whom you fight? How do you feel playing for USSR, US, European (not Nazi) forces? Is there a difference for you? How do you feel playing for the party you don't like?

6) Imagine that you play game based on events of WWII, and it seems that allies troops and commanders are presented as narrow-minded, violent and unheroic, while Nazis are depicted as relatively noble, generous and humane. Would you feel indignation, discontent, resentment, indifference, or would you find it funny?

7) Do you think that games 'do memory work'?

8) Do you think that game may provide different interpretations of the same historical facts and events? Do games influence someone's perception of history? If yes, how and why could it be possible? Does the level of such effect depends on age, family, school, cultural background?

3. Game & socialization

1) In your point of view, what are the unique features of computer game? What distinguish it from book or movie?

2) How today's players realize computer games? What is computer game for modern user? Do players perceive game events seriously? Do they divide their game space and real life?

3) Do computer games have other functions besides entertainment (socialization,

education)? Can they be used in education purposes (in particular, teaching history)?

4) Can games instill any ideas? Is it possible to use them as a tool of ideology, propaganda, soft power?Can games be used as a tool of ideology, propaganda, soft power? Why do you think so?

5) Do games influence and form social reality, or it is social reality that is reflected in games?

6) Please imagine that there are book, movie and computer game that have been released simultaneously and dedicated to the same historical event (for instance - Normandy landing). Information from what resource would be the most authoritative for you personally? Why? How do you think, would it be the same for your family? Friends? Younger generation? Why?

Thank you very much for participating in interview!

Appendix B.

Sample of the interview with the gamer (Germany)

Interviewee: gamer (game experience – 15 years), sociologist
Date: 13.03.2016
Location: Skype (Russia, Germany)
Duration: 1 h 3 min

<…>
Q.: So…

A.: So.

Q.: Let us start *(laugh)*. So, the topic of my master thesis is computer games as a resource, a kind of resource of collective memory formation.

A.: Collective memory?...

Q.: Yeap, have you ever heard about collective memory?

A.: Like, like a social component of memory process you mean? Like, I am not totally sure what I remember but will talk about it later on, I, I get to know that I am sure.

Q.: Well, basically, collective memory, you are absolutely right, it's like a social construct and it's a set of memories and interpretations of the past shared by different social groups. So, in fact, different groups will have different collective memory about the same historical event.

A.: Aha, ok.

Q.: So, and I actually, I am trying to figure out how games may influence this perception of the past.

A.: A, ok, I see.

Q.: If it is somehow possible…in general.

A.: That's difficult because, amm, that relies on very settle elements in the game, and such elements I usually not really consciously processed by people playing this games.

Q.: Aha.

A.: So, it can be difficult to to point out what elements exactly you could analyze.

Q.: Yeah, so, that's exactly what I am trying to do. Yeah and my first question: how many time do you have?

A.: I have from now till a little bit past eight, so that would be approximately an hour.

Q.: An hour? That's great; I hope maybe even we will be more quick. As far as I understood, you, yeah, ammm, first, first of all I didn't say at the beginning: thank you very much that you have found the time and the possibility to speak with me. It's really important for me and I am really grateful for this. Am, and as far as I understood, you have some game experience and somehow it is related, this game was related to the WWII or?

A.: Yeah, I've played some games, but I think one of few games that you have mentioned was «Battlefield 1942». This is the one I remember. I may have played more connected to WWII, but I don't have memories on them, so, I can't it really tell. So, this is one that I have actually memories but it is also not that good example for what you are looking for because it is a multiplayer game. People do not pay so much attention to details of storytelling and surroundings. So, ammm, that's it you can of course, yeah, ask me further questions concerning the game but I think they…what are you looking at would be a grasping single player experience, like <???>

Q.: Well, actually I cannot really say that I am looking for a single player experience, because still it's an environment as well that influence somehow. The point is that sometimes as, so, you may see, you may consider, a game as a new form of media.

Q.: Yeah.

A.: And in that case it may influence you and effect you even and you may not even understand that it is. That it has some effect on you. So, basically…sorry I've just, just came home and it was a little bit earlier, I am just trying to concentrate on it.

A.: So, maybe, we will do it like this: you, if I understand you have a kind of a form that you follow or a pattern with questions.

Q.: Yeah, I have, I do, I mean but it is more interesting like you started it in a more free way.

A.: So, we can do both. Maybe you ask you question and I can, you know, I am a sociologist as well, so, I know a little about the research..

Q.: Aha.

A.: And I have game experience, so, maybe I can help you with this. I know exactly I don't have experience on that kind of field that you are studying but as someone with sociological experience I think that the best way is first to see why people play games and differentiate. If you are looking for a more specific set of patterns that make up collective memory then you need to be able to find people that remember these patterns, right? And to be able to find those people then it's, I think it's the best to look at single player games. Not because those patterns wouldn't be existent in a multiplayer game but because people can't remember it because they concentrate on other factors while playing multiplayer games. It is more the competitive approach on multiplayer games, it is much stronger than in single player games where you just float through the story.

Q.: So, you think that single player game will be more, maybe more influential in terms of formation and shaping some images, some perceptions of historical events? Am I right?

A.: Yes, because you get involved deeper, you became part of the story and you identify, or you can, let's say, you can identify with the main person in this game. It depends on how well it's written, of course.

Q.: Yeah, and speaking about how it is written, about game developers probably. Do you think that game developers actually have some aims, some goals when they create the game? I mean basically, the main goal is just to create a product that will be sold and will become popular to get the money. But behind this probably could be there some, I don't know, some ideological messages or something like that? How do you think?

A.: Of course it's possible that there is some kind of goals exist but I think where game developers differ most it is not the ideological approach what they take but what kind of aspect they put in the foreground, what are they focusing on. They can put the focus on storytelling of a person, they could put the focus on the level design or the design of what your…what the main character get influenced by. And by changing the focus the whole experience changes. So, it can be a heroic experience, or it can be a dramatic experience. I think this is the main difference that you have. Politologically speaking, kind of experience that can exist but I don't know any; at least I don't know any games where you really see the influence that much, at least thinking about WW2. Maybe you have something in the current event if you are talking about, let's say, Vietnam War. I think that the American, you have, you have game developers in America who make proud American games, let's say, proud American games and you have more critical American games, so if you focus, again the question of focus. If you focus on the guy killing all

those enemies and it's a good experience, the game can …can…can… And can put *(doubting, thinking)*, I don't know…I don't remember the word now…

Q.: Try to say it in German, probably I'll understand.

A.: Belohnung, reward! The game can reward such behavior like killing everyone on sight. But the game can also make it very existential approach, so, that you, that you realize how vulnerable you are as a person and how dangerous it is. And it can be much more dramatic that way. So, you don't kill everyone on sight but you are rather sneaking around trying to evade the grasp of enemy and that way your whole perception of what situation is like. And this can be true also for games in a WWII but I don't really, I can't really point you to, to games where this approach differs so much, because I think the games concerning WWII are much more like each other. They are all pretty much the same.

Q.: Why? Why are they the same?

A.: Why?.. *(thinking)* At least, ok, the first let me say, I don't… the most games WWII that I've played were either single player, no…either first-person shooters, or a strategy games. And in strategy games, strategy games they…they take an approach that put you out of the action, so you don't really care much about a special unit, you don't feel…you don't feel lost if your unit is just destroyed and that approach is…cuts you off from…putting yours…your view in units. You don't do this, you are strategic, you are strategically making your decisions and not basing your decisions on emotions. So, that's why those games are pretty much the same because they, there is no emotional point. At least the most of the games it's more about the approach and how difficult it is and how you can….And how can you manage to win when both sides have equal value. So, that's about strategies and not about emotions. This is the most important thing, I think on strategy games. Concerning first-person shooters, they are very much emotional, from my point of view, I think. Because they want to tell a story and you have to believe the character… probably you to feel some emotions than to get a grasp of story. So, why do, ok, now let getting back to question why are those games the same. I think because it's easy to choose which side is the good one and which is the bad one concerning WW2. We all know the nazis are the bad ones and that's why we have to fight them. And there is not that much of huntious, conflict, conflict of emotions on whether to choose this side or chose the other side. You could integrate such process in different games but concerning WW2, I think, it is very write on the target medium; ok you know which side is the good, which id the evil one. This is approach of dealing sides; I think it is a common approach in all kinds of media. So, if you watch an action movie you also know this is a good side and this is the bad side. And the same applies to computer games, I guess.

Q.: Ok, I have two possible question ways, I would like to ask you both. Ok, the first… yeah. Ok, usually we really do know that this side is good, this side is bad, they are our enemies, we have to, I don't know, destroy them and so on. And this is the case when we are speaking about; let's say nazi forces and aliens. So, they are your troopers, I mean not nazis of course, the USSR, the USA and so on and so for. But, what if it's not really so clear what side is bad? I mean there in some games I get an information from gamers who play really a lot of games devoted to WW2 and they said that there are some games when you firstly, when you have to force as a nazi trooper and the second point is that sometimes, for example, Russian forces just Russian I mean because I've spoke with, I spoken with Russian gamers. They said me that Russian forces as well, well USSR forces, are showed as, well, formally they are aliens but they seemed like not really good guys. If you know what I mean.

A.: What game were they referring to?

Q.: Let me think, it was, if I am not mistaken, it was «Medal of Honor», I think. Well, when we are speaking about Russian gamers it's definitely «Company of heroes» the second, «Company of heroes», because there was a huge scandal in Russia about this game and about these images of Russian soldiers that were unhuman, cruel, stupid and something like that. And nazis in comparison with Russian troopers were almost angels. And it was discourse in Russian media but still it takes this and I should somehow pay attention to it.

A.: I wouldn't focus that much on one game. This is…Ok, it is can be true. I would think a bit, ammm, and the most games I know are displaying nazis as the evil guys but it was every, every setting get boring after repetitive number of times. And it doesn't put any more value on playing the same story over and over again. Because the game characteristics and if you are doing the first-person shooter, for example, the game characteristics, what you can change is not much. You still are a guy that has to shoot at other guys. You don't want to do that all over again, so you try to invent new approaches. What I think, I don't know what game it exactly was - is where you start as a nazi but switch sides. Doing game so that you have first the experience as a nazi and then you witness a cruelty and then you switch sides. That kind of twists. I think twists are now more cooperate into games stories to make you more interesting. Where there is some kind of vitriol and then you switch side and then your former allies are no longer your allies and you have to fight them. I can't really pay point to game it was…and I have not played «Medal of Honor» or «Company of heroes» so I can't really tell what kind of those games. But… *(thinking)* it's difficult question if you can, if you take a game tells a certain story and there is a certain character and this character has , ammm, characteristics and then you can…the question is what do you take out of it? If you say this guy is Russian therefore the game tells me that all Russian guys are like this guy. And this is an approach and this is some…what…it doesn't work like this. Of course, I know some, some game developers tell to, tend to do that kind of thing where you have like stereotypes over and over again. But on the other side the criticism of this behavior is also not really getting the point if it because…then you can't… what can you change? You can… you can of course put different characters into the game but everyone will be interpreting the character as a stereotype. It is not up to the game developers. It is just how people tend to view it. And example gets stereoty…

Q.: Stereotypsed?

A.: Stereotypsed and this is. This was much the discussion; I don't know if you know…listen to or walked through the gamer gate topic. Is it come up in any of your interviews?
Q.: Sorry?

A.: Does the topic gamer gate come up in any of your interviews?

Q.: Yes.

A.: Yeah. And this is pretty much about this kind of behavior. If it is acceptable, what is acceptable and how do we approach story telling making, isn't? And if the both sides a little bit over it, over it….that they don't have best argument for it. Yes, of course, games are…are producing stereotypes, of course, every media produce stereotypes, because tht's how our thinking works. We think in stereotypes. But, ammm…if we want to tell different story, then, of course, we have to do, put different characters in endless (?) stories and make them work. I think what you can criticize is not the ideological background of game developers but more their boring and lazy approaches to game stories.

Q.: For example?

A.: That they are lazy and therefor there is a female character and female character is a victim and male character has to rescue the female character. And then the story ends. This is what I would call typical lazy approach on development story. This is something that I have witnessed in other games, so, they read the same story over and over again. That's not because they are ideological about it but because they are lazy. That is something you immediately think of because they have experienced it in other games, in other media.

Q.: Ok, I see. That's an interesting point. I have never thought about it. Like, in this way. Thank you for this idea. Ok, but I… I actually spoke with game developers as well, and I spoke with gamers, and in the end of the interviews I asked a direct question: do game developers really have any intentions to transmit a certain message to the audience? And the curious thing was that gamers told me that it was absolutely wrong but game developers had only one goal just to get money from the game and to create a successful product. But game developers told me that it held absolutely truth; that developers indeed really often had this message and they transmitted it. Why do you think there is so huge difference between the opinions of these two sides?

A.: Haha, because game developers know how game developers think and gamers don't know that much about game developers because they haven't developed games. That's why, I think. And to further explain it, game developers are, of course, are human beings, of course they have certain ideals, ideological background and kind of all that staff. And they can put that into the game as long as it doesn't interfere with the main point that is to make the game; it works and fits to profile. So, they have a certain job to do but if they do their job with their background whatever they want to put in, it doesn't have to be ideological. I think that much ideological background is there. Let's say they have an interesting story point that they hours wanted to see or they wanted to see special…they want to do just character design in a certain way as I have always witnessed to be lacking in the game honestly. Then they can put it into the game if it doesn't interfere with the game designing process. And of course, game developers tend to stretch the freedom, the point of freedom that they have, just to create the image of course. Yes, I have all the freedom I want, like, do whatever I want.

Q.: Ok. But in that case, does it mean that game developers may indeed translate almost any message they want and… how to put it in words… to compel the general audience? Will it… will it work?

A.: That depends on a market. If there is a market forge, yes, they can do this. If somebody buys the game that's the only…if there is no censorship, let's say, you are a game developer in a North Korea than you have to obey certain censorship laws. But if there is no censorship and you can find someone willing to pay for your game than of course you are free to <???> whatever massage you want in that kind of game. There has to be market for it, so, that it gets…intention.

Q.: And how do you think can market be formed? I mean special market for special kind of, don't know, scenario, for example. How is it? What shapes it?

A.: This is more or less like fashion. You have certain games and after certain period it changes. I think we had WWII games were popular around I can't really tell, but there were, in my experience there were like two waves of WWII games. There were a lot of WWII games and then it got a kind of boring and all these game developers shifted focus to other games. Then it was it. And I think now it is a time in, let's say, this year and next year there are the first new WWII games coming out again. And from, I don't know, 2012 to 2016 there wasn't so much. So, I think, it's fashion. Fashion and, of course, personal opinions: what do you like to play. It's like you have movie genres, different - different movie types, as romans, and there are action movies,

and there is thriller and horror and not everybody likes the same. But you get it from thriller to horror you know what is going to work and what you can do.

Q.: Ok, that's clear. Well, then. Let's go from a little bit other side, yeah. Speaking about information that gamer can get from the game. How do you think, is this information, is it reliable, does it has any authority for gamers?

A.: As…I can only speak from me but I wouldn't trust information I really gain because I wouldn't first…

Q.: Wouldn't? You would not?

A.: Yeah, I wouldn't trust information coming from the game. Maybe if it's a story game that specifies in displaying certain aspects in a history. Like, mmm, there are some grand strategy games that focus on different aspects of the history like «Civilization», do you know it?

Q.: Of course.

A.: «Civilization» is not accurate but it tries to be as accurate as it can to still make it a playable game. But you have to know that, of course, if there is a decision to be made: to be either accurate or to be a good game it always could be in favor of game experience and not of being accurate.

Q.: But, should there be any historical realism, historical accuracy at all? I mean, it's a game… yeah, so, ok, it can be based on real events, but still it seems that game developers and gamers do not have to follow like a chronicles of the WWII. Do they?

A.: I tend to ignore that because it makes it more interesting to rewrite history than to experience the same results over and over again.

Q.: So, you said rewrite history. So, actually they do rewrite the history? Did I get your idea right?

A.: It takes an approach to say, ok, we have this historic situation and now it's up to you what would happen. And that's much more interesting than following through what already had happened.

Q.: Aha, so, is it a kind of probably alternative history?

A.: Yes, I think, that it is more interesting than play actual history.

Q.: And in that case we probably the, the end of a battle, for example, would not be the same like it was in real world? Is it?

A.: What? What's the end? A! Yeah.

Q.: Like, yeah, the end of a battle.

A.: It wouldn't have to be. Of course, it can be like it was in reality but it didn't have to be.

Q.: Ok. So, from this point of view it seems that game actually may provide different interpretations of the same historical facts and events.

A.: Interpretations?.. It's up to the consumer. You can always interpret certain messages in a different way. I would say, I would stress the point of freedom the consumer has.

Q.: So, it depends mostly on the consumer? Not from the game developer?

A.: I would say yeah. Of course you can choose different games; it's also up to the consumer. If you want to play certain games and you can choose them; if you don't want to play them and you can, may choose not to play them. And you could also abstrasize yourself from what is happening at all, you don't look at what historic background is and just look at the numbers. They are kind of…people let really concentrate on that. To be the best gamers they can on a certain aspects. They playing it like chess it doesn't really matter what it is. It is ok, this is the mate and this is just a king. And they don't refer with mate, the historic mate and king, historic king, but they just see it like as aspect of a game. If you play a multiplayer games a lot, I think this is what happens there. You abstrasize much from what have actually happened.

Q.: Ok, but you just said that interpretations depends on, depend on the consumer. But, ok, but the background for these interpretations from the side of consumer. It is formed by something else, right? So, what is it? Probably age, family, school, I don't know, this like cultural…

A.: Yes, skills

Q.: …environment

A.: Yeah, and media skills to…

Q.: Media?

A.: Know, to know what media is like. This is very important to have some kind of experience and guidance, maybe, maybe by parents to show how media works. If you know how media works and you don't trust it that much as you were if you just didn't have any clue that it is produced with the certain background.

Q.: Do it means like you just said that it means that you shouldn't trust any media, yeah?

A.: You can say that …you take another approach and you trust the more and form kind of a mixture. So, you have offside. If you have offside then you probably know more that you would know if you didn't read any, if you didn't listen to any or watch any.

Q.: Ok. Going back to a…yeah I would like to go back to the beginning when you said that there is a difference between first, like first face, how it's called? Ok, from shooters from the…like…

A.: First-person shooters.

Q.: First person shooters, yeah. And first side strategies, something like that, yeah. In your point of view: what the unique features computer game has. What probably distinguish it from book or movie or theater, or what else could it be.

A.: It is more interactive, but I wouldn't really stress that as such a distinct feature. It is more interactive but, of course, yeah, .you can also…There was…I remember, there was in… an interactive movie.

Q.: Aha.

A.: So, where you could call and based on what the users by calling, and calling a certain telephone number…then they made it happen like most of the users wanted. But this is only to stress that is…I don't think you should really differentiate that much computer games and other types of media.

Q.: Aha.

A.: It depends on how well people are educated, on that kind of media, so if they know how interaction on computer games work and it is the impact this game has on them is pretty much the same as someone watching television and knowing what television is like.

Q.: Aha. I see. Why I ask this question, because many researchers pointed out, point out that games has…have high degree of subjective immersion. I am not sure if the last word is right…is it clear for you?

A.: Yeah.

Q.: Yeah? Ok.

A.: Immersion…*(thinking)*…We will probably have the same discussion again with which reality it's…this one, next year.

Q.: Yeah *(laughing)*.

A.: They try to create the technologic background to make it more…more feel natural. But the same applies to the distinction between books and television.

Q.: Yes, indeed. But the point about the games was exactly that in the book, for example, reader cannot influence the character in narrative, but gamer not only can, he or she actually has to manage the hero, yeah, otherwise the game will not just happened. And such <???> in events management kind of multiplies the effect of identification and this probably makes computer games extremely effective in terms of manipulation, opinion formation and probably it can be a tool of soft power.

A.: I wouldn't, wouldn't, I wouldn't agree with that because it is not easy. Maybe, maybe of you were putting someone that never been played a computer game and seat him in front of computer game and said: now – play this game! Then maybe you will right. But if you have gamers and people educated on the medium that know how it works, how it can be effective?

Q.: Ok.

A.: If you know how the process works, if you know how…why, why it works. Then how can it be effective in creating…aaam…in recreating…structures in the mind or poli…setting political agendas? No one would believe that.

A.: Ok. Well…it seems that actually, more or less, it's clear, because actually you have a really interesting point of view. Just like, you know, may made a notes that I will have discoed and dis and so on, yeah. And just like probably to sum up that…that you said. I have a question: do games influence and form social reality or it is a social reality that is reflected in games?

Q.: I would say…probably both is true but I would stress the…that social reality is being reflected in games. That's a part I would stress most, because it's more sociality than there are in games.

A.: So, there…there are other agents, yeah? And…just if I get your idea right, yeah…

Q.: Other agents? Ammm…I would, I would, I would say it's a circle, you can't escape it. It's always a circle. This is just my theoretical approach, because in Bielefeld we have this theme.

A.: Yeah *(laughing)*

Q.: Well, I actually agree with you and so…I actually as well was studied…studied in Bielefeld, so… *(laughing)* I know something about it. Ammm, well, then probably you have just some words to add from your side so without the questions, just, maybe think about it, about the topic and…yeah, just think…

A.: Am, well, I can put, I've put some order to this because when I was, let me check, I don't know when, there was a massacre in Germany, am, probably around the time that I was eighteen or seventeen or something, I can google it.

Q.: *(laughing)* Ok.

A.: So, yeah, like 2002. Yeah, 2002 this was one year before I left school, yeah. So, and, and then it was in the aftermath of that massacre. There was much finger pointing and because this guy that did a shooting was playing computer games. The media was pretty much state on blaming computer games as the reason. And there were in the aftermath, there was some, I wouldn't say studies because they went that borrow. But there were some research, it was going in that direction of what kind of effects…can computer games have on people's minds and how does it work. And there was…there was much flows of information going around at that time. And there was also big discussion in the gaming, seeing at that point. At that point I was…I was probably part of the gaming scenes as I would call it.

Q.: Aha.
A.: Now I am just playing some games and I am not that involved anymore. But at this point I was pretty much involved that seems it is a good look what everyone was saying. So, I…and there were, there were, of course, there were denying being responsible for it. And there was a lot of going on and I have read some research afterwards. I think it was greed later on. It isn't one factor that makes you that way. And, of course, if you look at sociality this guy was…being what you call it…<word in German>…lonely wolf? You wasn't, you wasn't respected by the other people.

Q.: Ok. Aha.

A.: Nobody likes him. Yeah, and you was going through <…> and afterwards you was mad. And then he massacre the other.

Q.: Aha.

A.: I think it's a cheap, cheap approach to blame computer games when you have that much actual bullying going, going on in school. Because, ok, everybody can blame the computer games that he played and I know this happened before, in the nineteenth, it was «Death metal».

In the US. In the US there was also some massacres and they blamed…they blamed the «Death metal».

Q.: Yeah.

A.: And it's, ok, yeah, because when you done things pointing everybody can go home and their business…and do what they were always been doing. It isn't, it isn't that, you can't really tell what's going on and…if you take a look at sociality then have to wonder why it does not happened more often? It is quite easy, aaaa!

A.: Yes. I had just one remark for you. Maybe it's…it will be interesting for you. Speaking about game studies, yeah.

Q.: Ok.

Q.: Actually, now they become really popular. I would even call them mainstream now. But the point is that the results of this research are really controversial and ambitious. And that's because game like, I mean, computer game, yes, is relatively new form of media. And here is no appropriate theoretical framework for it and that's exactly, that's my big problem, because it is extremely hard to understand how to work with it, with this phenomenon. And, indeed, it's pretty easy to find number of articles in top scientific journals reporting, for example, that games cause, indeed cause, aggressive behavior, addiction, sexism, stereotypes and so on and so forth. But it's even easier to get papers stating completely the opposite.

A.: Yeah. This is true, was pretty much everything in sociology. You don't… You have to really look at what they are doing and how doing it. To be able to criticize sociological study.

Q.: Yeah. But unfortunately it's a weak, our weak side. I don't know how to call it, but…I think I understand. Well, then I think that's all. It was really informative for me. Thank you again! (laughing). I would say it again and again. And may I just ask you what, like what's your status, current status? Are you a researcher, a teacher?

A.: Ammm. What you would call…I am, officially I am still a student.

Q.: Aha.

A.: And unfortunately I am working.

Q.: Aha, ok, but…I mean you are a student like a master or a bachelor?

A.: Master.

Q.: Yeah, ok. Well, and probably will you, like, yeah, would you have some interest to know the result of this study?

A.: Of course. Yeah.

Q.: Ok, yeah. Then I will of course share it with you. You will be able to read it. It will be completely in English, so…it's challenging but..

A.: Yeah (laughing).

Q.: So yeah, thank you again! And…

A.: No problem.

Q.: How do Germans say this? Ha…Schönen Tag noch.

A.: Ja

Q.: Ja?

A.: Ja und du auch.

Both laughing

Q.: Danke schön! *(laughing)* Well, so… thank you again, bye!

A.: Bye!