# “The Plague swept through here”: The Negotiation of Victorian Anxieties about Contagion and Class in *The Order: 1886* (2015) and *Dishonored* (2012)

*Sarah E. Beyvers*
(University of Passau, Germany)

**Abstract:**
This article explores the depiction of contagious diseases in two neo-Victorian video games. In both Ready at Dawn’s *The Order: 1886* (2015) and Arkane Studios’ *Dishonored* (2012), disease is used to comment on Victorian anxieties about class. The antagonist of *Dishonored* lets loose plague-carrying rats in the working-class districts of the capital as part of his “Poverty Eradication Plan”, which then affects the entire population. In *The Order: 1886*, the aristocratic player-character Grayson is tasked with ridding London of so-called Half-Breeds, creatures like werewolves or vampires, which seem to have taken over Whitechapel. At first glance, both games establish a rather clear-cut and decidedly classist distinction between ‘good/rich/healthy’ and ‘evil/poor/diseased’. Yet, in both cases, this illusion soon vanishes as the player uncovers a conspiracy of social control and engineering originating from the aristocracy. Both video games represent a metropolis in crisis and renegotiate Victorian anxieties about urban public space, and thus about poverty, contagion, and middle-class desire for spatial and ideological separation from the poor.

**Keywords:**
class anxieties, classism, contagion, disease, *Dishonored*, immersion, presence, spatial explorability, *The Order: 1886*, video games.

*****

Narratives of disease are legion across centuries, cultures, and media. They permeate all modes of cultural production because they represent and rework the “fear of collapse” (Gilman 1988: 1), which is an inevitable concern of the human condition. As expounded by Sander Gilman, the omnipresent reworking of disease accomplishes a localisation and domestication of this very anxiety: “For once we locate it, the fear of our own dissolution is removed. Then it is not we who totter on the brink of collapse, but rather the Other” (Gilman 1988: 1). Disease, which has long served as a cultural signifier, is intertwined with discourses of oppression as well as identity and

***Neo-Victorian Studies***
**15:2 (2024/2025)**
**pp. 94-120**

**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396

must therefore be seen within the context of intersecting questions of race, gender, and class.

The aesthetic tradition of portraying disease is not only ubiquitous; it is also characterised by a certain solidity and constancy. As Gilman suggests, the projection of the horrors of the undoing of our body, mind, and self – and thus the fear of the ultimate loss of control – onto external and fixed images of disease offers solace in the illusion that we can remain in control of our own bodies (see Gilman 1988: 2). Through forging these stable “artificial structures […] for our fear” outside of ourselves, we “exorcise the fear that we may lose control – indeed, that we are not really in control at all” (Gilman 1988: 2). Gilman’s argument in favour of the inherent stability of the cultural images of disease becomes even more significant with regard to depictions of illness in media that are no longer considered ‘stable’ since they contain branching narratives. Video games feature, as Christoph Bode and Rainer Dietrich have termed it, “future narratives”: “*staging* the fact that the future is a space of yet unrealized potentiality” (Bode and Dietrich 2013: 1, original emphasis). Future narratives abandon events as their minimal units. Instead, they are defined by ‘nodes’ or ‘nodal situations’; i.e., they must contain “at least one situation that allows for more than one continuation” (Bode and Dietrich 2013: 1). In contrast to already decided and therefore actualised ‘past narratives’, future narratives are therefore multilinear and branching by definition (see Bode and Dietrich 2013: vii). Their focus on multilinearity as well as virtual embodiment make video game worlds an intriguing ‘place’ to explore discourses of disease – a notion examined more closely below.

In what follows, I investigate the employment of images of contagious disease as a means of negotiating Victorian class anxieties in Ready at Dawn’s *The Order: 1886* (2015; hereafter abbreviated to *Order*) and Arkane Studios’ *Dishonored* (2012). Consideration of how neo-Victorian video games allow for players’ critical engagement with and re-examination of both past and present issues explains the interconnectedness of Victorian middle-class anxieties about the urban poor and infectious disease.[1] My analysis of *Order* and *Dishonored* demonstrates the ways in which both games use the backdrop of the Victorian age and contagion to engage in criticising decidedly contemporary issues of class.[2]


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

## 1. Immersion, Agency, and Embodiment in Video Games

The variability of video games makes them intriguing loci for reworking images of disease. Through their multilinearity (see Domsch 2013: 3), which means that the stories performed by players always differ between playthroughs, video games put a spotlight on the context of instability – especially if the multilinear narratives in question negotiate disease. In video games, the collapse of mind and body that narratives of disease represent (see Gilman 1988: 2) becomes externalised in a way that hinges on player agency and virtual embodiment. By moving through these spaces, which become infused with – one might even say infected by – the discourses of disease they negotiate, the player becomes a complicit agent in the context of contagion. This urges them to reflect on disease in two ways. First, they must confront the consequences of their own embodiment in this space. In the player-character's shoes, they are confronted with the ways in which they are embedded in the power structures of the gameworld. The player must engage with their virtual representation and thereby with the privilege of immunity or threat of catching the disease that comes with this specific form of embodiment. Second, the multilinear structure of video games allows for endowing the player with agency over the story and the state of the gameworld. This can give them the power of fighting the contagious disease ravaging the gameworld, and thus transform it towards more stability. However, games can also withhold this form of agency from the player, who, despite the seemingly empowering activity of playing must face their inability to change the world they are thrown into. Both *Dishonored* and *Order* rely fully on these interactive modes specific to their medium to comment on discourses of contagion.

Playthroughs can vary greatly because of branching narrative paths. However, even when playthroughs differ 'only' in relatively small details like the discovery of an item, the trajectory of the player-character's gaze, or the time it takes players to find their way ensure that no two playthroughs are identical.[3] This circumstance has caused game scholars to distinguish between the "virtual designer-story" (Thon 2011: 16), i.e., the "possible chain of actions determined by the program", and the "player story", which describes the concrete sequence of actions carried out by the player (see Neitzel 2014: 613). Video game players fulfil two roles: on the one hand, they are necessarily active participants in the production, or perhaps more accurately, the "crystalliz[ation] […] into actuality" (Bode and Dietrich 2013:


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

1), of the (future) narrative. On the other hand, they are spectators who are watching themselves and their actions through the player-character or avatar (see Neitzel 2014: 618-619). As Britta Neitzel argues, story and discourse cannot be successfully compartmentalised in video games, just as there is a constant interchange between the levels of (intratextual) fiction and (extratextual) physicality in the player's awareness when playing: "Like performative speech acts, which cause changes outside the linguistic realm, the actions of a player on the interfaces of the computer […] cause changes in the fictional game world" (Neitzel 2014: 618). In addition to a point of view, video games feature a point of action, "the position from which the player can interact with the game space" (Thon 2009: 280), determining the 'actional' perspective.

Regarding players' position as direct manipulators of the gameworld, the notions of immersion and presence are crucial. Whereas 'immersion' is also discussed in relation to noninteractive media, the interactivity of video games adds another dimension. A still highly-debated topic in video game studies, immersion was famously defined by Janet Murray in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* in 1997 as the sensation of "being transported to an elaborately simulated place" and of "being surrounded by a completely other reality […] that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus" (Murray 1997: 98). According to Murray, players perpetuate this feeling themselves because, not 'merely' practicing a Coleridgean willing suspension of disbelief, they "actively *create belief*" (Murray 2017: 107, original emphasis). For the sake of immersion, players employ their "intelligence to reinforce rather than to question the reality of the experience" (Murray 2017:107). Metaphorically, then, a game's alternative virtual reality 'infects' or 'contaminates' the player's consciousness for the duration of the game.

In 2005, Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä proposed their 'Sensory, Challenge-based and Imaginative' (SCI) immersion model, distinguishing between the three titular types of gameplay immersion. Whereas the latter kind of immersion is also encouraged by noninteractive texts, which give the consumer of a text the "chance to use her imagination, empathise with the characters, or just enjoy the fantasy of the game" (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005: 8), the first two types of immersion are tied to game-specific aspects. Sensory immersion comes into play when players' sensory systems are taken over and when they are submerged in "audiovisually impressive, three-dimensional and stereophonic worlds" (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005: 7). This is undoubtedly


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

helped by the status of video games as a "meta-medium" whose technological set-up facilitates the "non-reductive incorporation of all other major presentational media" (Domsch 2013: 4). Film can offer sensory immersion as well, but the three-dimensional sound shifting with the player's movements within a game environment enhances this experience. Lastly, challenge-based immersion can be compared to Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi's notion of "flow" or "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (Csíkszentmihályi 1990: 4); in gaming, it refers to the pleasant sensation brought on by just the right balance between skills and challenges (see Ermi and Mäyrä 2005: 7-8).

In addition to immersion, the term 'presence' has been used to describe the sensations brought on by player involvement. The "perceptual illusion of nonmediation" (Lombard and Ditton 1997: n.p.) is often used within the context of immersive experience to argue that players in this situation are no longer consciously aware of the fact that the gamespace they explore is created by technology (see Madigan 2016: 120). Spatial presence, the "sense of 'being there' inside the game world" (Tamborini and Skalski 2006: 225) can even be enhanced by truly *tangible* experiences provided by technological aspects like haptic controller feedback, e.g., simulated vibrations in the gameworld, or the adaptive triggers of the PlayStation 5 gamepad.[4]

Within this context of presence and sensory, challenge-based as well as imaginative immersion, agency becomes relevant as well: video games promise that the player's choices matter – and this is a major part of the allure of the medium (see Domsch 2013: 3). As defined by Murray, agency is the "satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices" (Murray 2017: 123). Our desire to interact with a digital environment is directly linked to how immersive it is and how we can navigate it (see Murray 2017: 123-125). Murray also speaks of how immersion and interactivity reinforce each other: "*When we are immersed in a consistent environment we are motivated to initiate actions that lead to the feeling of agency, which in turn deepens our sense of immersion*" (Murray 2017: 91, original emphasis). Crucially, however, the medium-specific aspects of video games are not merely employed as tools to entertain. Immersive experience, presence, and agency can also be used for social critique.


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

## 2. Playing with Class: Video Games and Social Criticism

Even though digital video games have been an integral part of contemporary media culture for decades, their cultural impact has long been underestimated, with attention mainly focused on barely constructive discussions of the effects of violence in the medium. Some of the more recent publications in the field of video game studies, however, like Souvik Mukherjee's *Videogames and Postcolonialism* (2017), Nicholas Taylor's and Gerald Voorhees's edited collection *Masculinities in Play* (2018), or Bo Ruberg's *Video Games Have Always Been Queer* (2019), herald a turn towards an acknowledgement of video games' status as both representing cultural topics worthy of investigation and constituting "important sources of social critique" (Schulzke 2014: 316). In another example of this turn towards games' cultural impact, *Marx at the Arcade* (2019), Jamie Woodcock argues that video games constitute a "terrain of cultural struggle, shaped by work, capitalism, and ideas about society" (Woodcock 2019: 8). Furthermore, Woodcock notes that games cannot be dismissed as mere "diversion, or opium of the people" because they are a "complex cultural commodity" (Woodcock 2019: 159) – in some ways comparable to neo-Victorianism itself. Not least, even popular neo-Victorian works often exhibit the promotion of progressive agendas, seemingly unsatisfied with simply amusing their audiences.

*Marx at the Arcade* goes into the intricacies of video game production, distribution, and consumption, but it also focuses specifically on the depiction of class struggles in video game narratives. In this context, Woodcock acknowledges that many video games exhibit "problematic themes and have oppression written into them from the start" (Woodcock 2019: 162), like many texts from other areas of media culture; nonetheless, he notes, video games can be spaces for exploring alternate societal structures (see Woodcock 2019: 162). Despite the video game industry, its agents as well as its stories being "primarily white, primarily male, and primarily profit driven", games continue to be used to "take on social and cultural issues" (Flanagan 2009: 224, 223-224) – even if this happens more often in form rather than in content. As summarised by Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greid de Peuter in *Games of Empire* (2009):

> while games tend to a reactionary imperial *content*, as militarized, marketized, entertainment commodities, they also tend to a radical, multitudinous *form*, as collaborative,


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

> constructive, experimental digital productions. (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009: 228, original emphasis)

Hence, the medium-specific aspect of interactivity, which makes the user into a collaborator, brings the possibility of revolutionary *form* to the table. Under the cover of apparently hegemonic content, form thus becomes the potential 'carrier' of subversive sociopolitical critique that may 'infect' players' consciousness. In his analysis of virtual dystopias, Marcus Schulzke explains that the dynamic nature of gameworlds allows players to "become active participants in creating or perpetuating the problems that make game worlds dystopian" (Schulzke 2014: 316), making players more aware of these very issues. The interrelation between the problems of the gameworld and player agency will play an important role in the analyses of *Order* and *Dishonored* to follow.

Video games' capacity for critical engagement with social problems is inextricably tied to the specific properties of the medium – and this becomes especially crucial when video games offer critical reworkings of the Victorian age. Both *Dishonored* and *Order* are neo-Victorian video games, by both broad and narrow definitions. They are "*more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century" because they are "*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and revision concerning the Victorians*" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, original emphasis). However, the games are not only engaged in "postmodern revisionary critique" (Carroll 2010: 173); their immersive and interactive qualities also make them neo-Victorian in yet another way. "Fully subscribing" to Heilmann and Llewellyn's definition, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss also include immersive strategies in the idea of the neo-Victorian being 'more than', stressing that "immersive, affective or nostalgic" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 5, 3) engagements with the Victorians must not be disregarded. Neo-Victorian video games can thus offer self-conscious engagement as well as immersion.

Within this context of the medium-specific features of neo-Victorian video games, spatial explorability and embodied mobility assume particular relevance. Historicised space becomes more than mere backdrop, mise-en-scène, or setting. The interactivity and 'walkability' of the gameworld promote a uniquely spatial negotiation of and critical engagement with the past, making the mode of interactive playing inherently neo-Victorian due to its inclusion of embodied mobility. *Order* and *Dishonored* both offer players


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

an immersive engagement with gameworlds that reimagine the Victorian age as a period of rapid socioeconomic change and associated intense class conflict, with upper and middle classes fearing the ‘contagion’ of the body politic by the new industrial proletariat. The two games self-consciously engage with reworking the era by critically employing spatialised Victorian tropes of class anxiety in order to point out the mechanisms of social control and oppression at work then and now.

The role of players in the actualisation of a video game also leads to an emphasis on the “bi-directionality” (Hadley 2010: 15) of the neo-Victorian mode, which consists in a simultaneous encounter of past *and* present. Players are, as Michael Fuchs calls it – as per the title of one of the few existing articles on the neo-Victorian in interactive texts – “Performing the Past in the Present” (Fuchs 2020: 43) when playing a neo-Victorian video game. This, in turn, leads to a “convergence of the imagined past and the present of playing” (Fuchs 2020: 46), or, put differently, effects a *contagion* between the two distinct temporalities. In her investigation of hidden object games, Elisavet Ioannidou argues that this temporal merging leads to familiarity rather than alienation on the player’s part, making the Victorian era “tangible, and hence physically comprehensible, for the present” (Ioannidou 2017: 162). Accordingly, players’ presence in, and interaction with, gamespaces that reimagine the Long Nineteenth Century, its class struggles and anxieties, can facilitate a critical engagement with *both* past and present.

## 3. Contagious Fear: Victorian Class Anxieties and Disease

The Victorian period was characterised by a “spatial reordering of society” (Schmiechen 2001: 187), radically transforming urban (and rural) environments. Spurred on by the expansion of the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution, profoundly altered spaces shaped social and public life, and individual identities, on a hitherto unknown scale:

> People were in part defined by the spaces through which they could legitimately and safely move. This was especially apparent when people transgressed spatial boundaries, as when prostitutes mingled at high society gatherings […]. (Steinbach 2012: 15)


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

Britain's status as an industrial society, a fact which had become impossible to deny by 1830, led to the establishment of 'class' as a "fundamental category of Victorian discourse, practice and prejudice" (Hewitt 2013b: 9). Spatial segregation from the working classes became a driving force of identity formation for the middle classes. While part of the bourgeoisie left the city centre for the suburbs and gated communities (see Moran 2009: 45; Steinbach 2012: 12), population density became a tangible problem for the poor as well as a source of anxiety for the middle classes. London's population, for instance, more than tripled during Queen Victoria's reign, which dangerously overwhelmed the city's infrastructure (see Dennis 2013: 242-246). A multitude of contagious diseases like influenza and smallpox, as well as diseases caused by contaminated food and water like cholera or typhoid, spread easily among the malnourished and overworked poor (see Gilbert 2013: 310), making epidemics appear more dangerous than they had for a number of centuries (see Mitchell 2009: 194). Overcrowded and insufficiently drained and ventilated slums were seen as dangerous 'fever nests' that not only possessed ideal conditions for the transmission of fever but were thought to actively breed it (see Gilbert 2013: 314). European epidemics of cholera, the "signal disease of the nineteenth century" (Hamlin 2009: 4), overlapped with a recognition of the economic and social problems caused by the Industrial Revolution (see Schülting 2016: 53). Thus disease also became intimately entwined with an awareness of the effects of global capitalism that also brought an influx of foreign immigrants and workers to Britain, especially through maritime trade.

In the middle-class imagination, the tangibly life-threatening situation of the working classes in industrialised cities induced anxiety on two levels. First, overcrowding and the resulting lack of physical health was equated with moral depravity. The "hordes of poor in the slums were associated with moral evil and danger" (Gilbert 2013: 314), with the crowded conditions allegedly "render[ing] their inhabitants immoral" (Steinbach 2012: 12). Middle-class anxieties saw the slums open "to let forth the thief, the murderer, the prostitute and the germs" (Stallybrass and White 1993: 133), threatening to infect better-off neighbourhoods. Similarly, poor districts, the lairs of perceived "social contamination" (Moran 2009: 42), were held to breed civil unrest and contagious ideas about overthrowing the capitalist status quo, risking "dangerous infections in the body politic" (Gilbert 1997: 3) that might fester as rampantly as physical disease.


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

The second source of middle-class anxiety about the poor was the proximity of the classes in an urban environment. Contagion posed a threat to all, despite the strict class-based segregation of living arrangements. As Richard Dennis explains, "the social geography of many cities, whereby rich and poor lived apart, but near one another[,] […] meant that disease could spread into middle-class areas" (Dennis 2013: 247). Therefore, Victorian urban space was characterised by the simultaneous establishment and transgression of boundaries between the classes (see Stallybrass and White 1993: 126-128). In the city centre, everyone walked the same streets, leading to the "'promiscuous' intercourse between the classes" (Gilbert 1997: 2):

> the fear of that promiscuity was encoded above all in terms of the fear of being touched. 'Contagion' and 'contamination' became the tropes through which city life was apprehended. It was impossible for the bourgeoisie to free themselves from the taint of 'the Great Unwashed' […]. (Stallybrass and White 1993: 135)

Accordingly, the different classes' unavoidable contact in the city became inextricably tied to contagion in the middle-class mind (see Gilbert 1997: 3).

It is important to stress the role that textual reworkings of the slums through the middle-class gaze, ranging from sensation fiction to essays on sanitation reform, played for the formation of a bourgeois identity (see Stallybrass and White 1993: 148). Texts about the slums could be "consumed within the safe confines of the home" and "made the grotesque *visible* whilst keeping it at an *untouchable* distance" (Stallybrass and White 1993: 139, original emphasis), thus protecting the reader from literal contagion. These efforts to domesticate and tame the anxiety-inducing 'masses' often worked by substituting mere metonymic relationships (i.e., contiguous frameworks linking the poor, filth, and disease) with a "metaphoric language in which filth stands in for the slum-dwellers: the poor *are* pigs" (Stallybrass and White 1993: 131, original emphasis). Hence, in the middle-class imagination, the poor themselves *become* a contagious disease. The compulsive revisitation of the slum in writing and its omnipresence in the bourgeois imaginary has been connected to the 'sanitisation' of body, mind, and home in middle-class identity:


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

> whilst the 'low' of the bourgeois body becomes unmentionable, we hear an ever increasing garrulity about the *city*'s 'low' – the slum, the rag-picker, the prostitute, the sewer – the 'dirt' which is 'down there'. […] [W]hilst the bodily low is 'forgotten', the city's low becomes a site of obsessive preoccupation, […] which is itself intimately conceptualized in terms of discourses of the body. (Stallybrass and White 1993: 145, original emphasis)

Victorian middle-class anxieties, then, were closely entwined with contagion and disease, and both *Order* and *Dishonored* employ these discourses explicitly in order to expose and condemn structures of class oppression.

## 4. Capitalist Bloodsuckers: Class and Disease in *The Order: 1886*

*Order* is set in 1886 in an alternate version of Victorian London, torn apart by civil unrest and the age-old war between humans and monsters like the Half-Breeds, turned shapeshifters, or the ancient pure-blooded vampires and werewolves. The player enters the gameworld as Grayson, or Sir Galahad, who is a member of the Order of Her Majesty's Royal Knights. The Knights' mission is to fight the Half-Breeds with the aid of the Blackwater, an elixir obtained from the Holy Grail that possesses healing qualities and extends human life. Half-Breeds terrorise the city and, while investigating the threat, Grayson meets Lakshmi Bai, the leader of the Rebellion, who is based on the Rani of Jhansi, one of the historical leaders of the real-world Indian Rebellion of 1857, now also known as India's First War of Independence. Lakshmi facilitates Grayson's discovery that the Half-Breed plague's source is not to be found among the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial Rebels headquartered in Whitechapel. Instead, at the very heart of the conspiracy lies the United India Company (the game's version of the East India Company) that, in a fitting metaphor for colonialism, ships its bloodsuckers worldwide so as to infect the global population and bring about a new world order. *Order*'s connection to the Victorian age goes beyond its setting, its steampunk aesthetics, and its nod towards Victorian neo-medievalism. The game reworks Victorian anxieties about class and contagion interactively in order to comment on the present-day widening economic gulf not just between rich and poor but also between ultra-rich and ordinary citizens.


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

The game's first actual mission, after the prologue foreshadowing Grayson's eventual fall from grace with the Order, is set in London's affluent West End district of Mayfair. Tasked with capturing a number of patients who escaped from Bethlem Royal Hospital to wreak havoc in United India House, Grayson's route to this location takes him through a residential building. Even though the occupants are absent, the décor, family photographs and paintings as well as the multiple servants working in the house reveal their high status. When Grayson enters the street, the police are busy with calming down many well-to-do pedestrians who are upset because the area is closed off – a futile endeavour, it seems, as one woman's agitated question "Do you have any idea who my husband is?!" reveals (*Order* 2015). The escapees Grayson has to fight pose a stark contrast to the other non-player characters in the area because of their Cockney accents and predilection for violence, with one of them gleefully wondering, "Do you think we get to shoot a few of them rich folk?" (*Order* 2015). Pursuing some of the escaped patients into Mayfair underground station, Grayson realises that they are Half-Breeds threatening the social order and public health through their noxious presence.

The beginning of *Order* suggests a very classist viewpoint: it establishes the clear-cut distinction between Grayson as well as the wealthy residents of Mayfair, who are endowed with the attributes rich/good/healthy, and the escapees from the mental hospital, who are depicted within the Victorian middle classes' discursive framework of poor/evil/diseased. Furthermore, *Order* makes use of another facet of the framing of disease in the Victorian age by introducing monstrous creatures. As Schülting explains using John Leech's 1858 *Punch* cartoon, 'Father Thames Introducing his Offspring to the Fair City of London',[5] texts of this period often portray personified diseases as a "phantasmagoria of monstrous life emerging from the dirt of the slum", de-individualising and dehumanising the poor population (Schülting 2016: 61). At first, *Order* seems to suggest that the monstrous Half-Breed disease, raging in working-class bodies and spilling over from poor districts, threatens middle-class 'purity'. As Grayson is sent by the Order to Whitechapel to investigate the danger, this notion appears to be reinforced – only to be utterly shattered later in the game.

*Order*'s Whitechapel is a dreadful and miserable place. Even before entering the district, players can find a newspaper article referencing recent disappearances and murders taking place there. According to the article, the killings, in a nod towards the Jack the Ripper case, are only one example of


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

the “violence towards the poor unfortunates of Whitechapel [that] has become a regrettable commonplace” (*Order* 2015). The ubiquitous sounds of breaking glass and buzzing flies accompany Grayson in the waste-filled streets. Fellow Knights characterise Whitechapel as a “nest of cutpurses, collaborators, and whoremongers” that you can “smell […] before you see it” (*Order* 2015). The district’s dreadful state is explicitly linked to disease in the following exchange between two Knights:

> Lafayette: Ah, the smell of pestilence.
> Grayson: Your Parisian slums are more fragrant, I suppose.
> Lafayette: Merde smells like merde, monsieur. Anywhere in the world. (*Order* 2015)

As Fuchs explains, the game renders visible the East End’s position in the construction of London as a neo-Victorian signifier of gross inequality: it “functions as the binary opposite to the (not only) wealthy, (not necessarily) beautiful and (not always) bright centre of London” (Fuchs 2020: 49).

The beginning of *Order* depicts Whitechapel not only as the filthy breeding ground of disease, but also as the place where inflammatory ideas emerge and from which they spread. Whitechapel serves as the new base of operations for the Rebellion, whose Marxist stance becomes clear when Grayson witnesses one of their rallies. Under a banner proclaiming “NO SLAVES NO TYRANTS” (*Order* 2015), a Queen Victoria doll dangles from an improvised gallows and a Rebel gives the following speech:

> Rebel: What’s all that progress brought you? Hideous slums, […] obscure misery, long hours in factories, only to be paid a pittance, told by your masters to be grateful. […] Children worked to the bone […], while the captains of industry feast from silver bowls. Is this the England we want?
> Audience: NO!
> Rebel: What must we do?
> Audience: FIGHT!
> Rebel: Join our cause! Down with the Queen! Down with Empire! (*Order* 2015)


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

This suggested convergence of poverty and insurgence, contagious diseases *and* ideas in the East End relate to Victorian middle-class anxiety about this very topic.

This confluence only becomes more explicit as the game progresses. Employing a proliferation of disease-related tropes, the Lord Chancellor of the Order of Royal Knights laments that the balance between humankind and the Half-Breeds is

> threatened with grave upset by *a new contagion*: The Rebellion. As long as its campaign of anarchy and terror is allowed to continue, the *plague* of Lycan *infestation* that has *infected* our city will only grow more intolerable. […] We must stand vigilant together, lest our ranks be *poisoned* by those who seek the destruction of all we hold sacred. No one is *immune* from the Rebels’ influence. (*Order* 2015, added emphasis)

At first, *Order* employs tropes of Victorian classism and puts the player in the position of an enforcer of aristocratic rule: Half-Breeds and working-class Rebels transgress the border between the classes and endanger middle- and upper-class lives – and the player must put a stop to it. Wreaking havoc in rich areas of the city, the poor prove carriers of disease, both physical and ideological, acting on the mutinous, germ-like ideas festering in the East End. Rebels and Half-Breeds are put on the same level in terms of their immorality, contagion, and danger for the (middle- and upper-class) public.

However, as the game progresses, *Order* puts a neo-Victorian twist on this problematic Victorian reading of disease and class. Grayson’s investigation of the Half-Breed threat ultimately leads him back to Whitechapel, where he meets Lakshmi, the leader of the Rebellion, for the first time. Lakshmi throws light on the true source of the disease:

> Lakshmi: You have all been betrayed.
> Grayson: Betrayed. By whom?
> Lakshmi: The men you call masters.
> Grayson: The Order of Knights calls no one master. Not even the Queen.


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

> Lakshmi: You are an empire of bootlickers, grovelling at the feet of the mighty United India Company. (*Order* 2015)

Lakshmi explains that the Chairman of the United India Company, Lord Hastings, is a vampire and responsible for the Ripper killings in Whitechapel, "roaming the streets late at night, preying on downtrodden women" (*Order* 2015). What is more, the Half-Breeds are conspiring to expand their reign of terror. Hundreds of crates intended for shipping to the Americas, containing sleeping vampires and bearing the Company's mark, serve as proof that, as Lakshmi tells Grayson, "your honourable corporation spreads the very scourge you have so valiantly sworn to fight" (*Order* 2015). The Company's ships thus transform the metaphorical vampirism of colonial rule into actuality. In *Order*, the colonisers not only loot resources, capital, workforce, and liberty, but literally suck dry the colonised population's lifeblood as well.

Fuchs observes how the video game draws on a longstanding tradition of discussing capitalism and colonialism within the context of vampirism. Vampires serve as "representatives of the capitalist order […]: they feed on others in order to survive (or, rather, remain undead), exploiting them for personal gain" (Fuchs 2020: 51). Karl Marx speaks of capital as "dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor" (Marx 2008: 149). In this understanding, capitalism will not "lose its hold [....] so long as there is a muscle, nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited" (Marx 2008: 181). By using Victorian tropes of disease to comment on the exploitation of poor citizens, at home and abroad, *Order* renders visible the true origin of this suffering: "London may not necessarily be the monster itself, but its lair, providing shelter to the monstrous excesses of imperialism and capitalism" (Fuchs 2020: 52), operating in unison.[6]

While *Order*'s criticism of Victorian mentalities primarily transpires on the level of content, the game's comments on contemporary issues works on the level of form, namely through the gameworld's (lack of) interactivity. *Order* is a third-person shooter and all of its cutscenes are presented from this perspective as well – apart from the prologue: set after Grayson tries and fails to expose the Half-Breed conspiracy and after he is arrested and expelled from the Order, the first mission shows Grayson being tortured by being held underwater. The scene is brutal and leaves players no choice but to adopt the former Knight's position. Only playable in first person, this introductory part


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

of the mission exacts empathy and immersion from players who are “effectively reborn as Galahad” in this scenario (Fuchs 2020: 45). When Grayson struggles for air or is beaten by his torturers, the protagonist’s ordeal is relayed to the player’s sphere through the vibrations of the PlayStation 4 controller. Furthermore, when Grayson kills his persecutors, players must rely on their own reflexes because his escape is carried out with so-called quick time events, a gameplay feature demanding that players press indicated buttons before the time limit is reached. *Order* thus forcefully induces a convergence of the player’s body and that of the player-character on screen.

However, the resulting immersion poses a stark contrast to the distinct lack of agency represented by the game’s linear story. Players cannot change the outcome of the narrative, as their only choices in the game concern the weapons they use or whether or not they read the notes in the gameworld. *Order* does not put the player in the position of the hero who saves the world. Instead, there is nothing Grayson can do about the Half-Breed threat, and the game therefore makes him, and the player, a witness to inequality rather than the sole agent repealing it. Through its denial of player agency, the game acknowledges that the problems depicted in the capitalist gameworld and, by extension, in our equally capitalist world, are systemic (see Fuchs 2020: 53) and cannot be changed by any individual acting alone. The game foregrounds that “every one of us participates in the capitalist processes characteristic of the neoliberal empire we not only inhabit […] but are complicit in sustaining” (Fuchs 2020: 54). *Order* does not absolve players of their personal responsibility, however, even as it shows that they cannot change the status quo by themselves. Instead, players are reminded of their role as a cog in the engine of exploitative capitalism.

## 5. Rats Everywhere: *Dishonored*’s Depiction of Class Oppression

While *Order* makes use of linearity and limited interactivity to comment on historical and contemporary issues of class, *Dishonored* gives players more leeway. The game is set in Dunwall, the capital of the Empire of the Isles, a city which closely resembles London in both its architecture and its appearance on a map.[7] In 1837, the year in which the events of the game take place, the city has been struggling with the Rat Plague for two years, and between one third and half of its population has been decimated by the mysterious disease – or turned into zombie-esque Weepers. Players take on the role of the Royal Protector to Empress Jessamine Kaldwin, Corvo Attano,


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

who is framed for the Empress's assassination and the abduction of her daughter Emily. With the help of a few Loyalists, Corvo works towards establishing Emily as Empress. He uncovers that the Royal Spymaster Hiram Burrows, now Lord Regent, brought the Rat Plague to Dunwall as part of his plan to annihilate the poor and take control of the Empire. *Dishonored* features three different endings which depend on the extent to which players choose to adopt a stealthy, nonlethal approach. If players wreak havoc on the city but manage to save Emily, she will rule an Empire descending into chaos, ravaged by the plague. If she dies, Corvo will flee and the Empire will fall in a similar fashion. Only if players chose to spare most lives in the game will Emily become a just and honourable Empress under Corvo's guidance. Since the publication of *Dishonored 2* in 2016, the 'good' third ending has become canonical, because it is used as a backdrop to the sequel's plot.

At first glance, *Dishonored*'s connection to the Victorian age is not as obvious as that of *Order*, which explicitly positions itself in this context. Nonetheless, *Dishonored* features a number of nods to Victorian Britain like the use of the exact year of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, Dunwall's architecture, its young Empress, the appearance of the Empire of the Isles as well as the city's history of imperialism and slavery, to name just a few. However, the game's engagement with the Victorian goes beyond the superficial: like *Order*, *Dishonored* too employs established Victorian tropes of the entanglement of disease and class in order to comment on mechanisms of class oppression and social injustice.

Contagion is omnipresent in *Dishonored* – even more so than in *Order*. Dunwall is near breaking point, torn apart by corruption and physical as well as moral decay: "There is nothing good about this city" (Chambers 2012: n.p.). The Rat Plague functions as the most obvious symptom of this corruption. From the very beginning of the game, players cannot escape the plague's impact. There is not a single street without signs warning of the "Pestilence" (*Dishonored* 2012) terrorising the city. Other signs caution that "[h]iding the Plague is punishable by death" (*Dishonored* 2012). Heaps of bloody corpses line the pavement, the sound of rats scuffling along is pervasive, and countless graffiti admonish players that in these very streets "rats are eating […] babies" and that experiencing "BLOOD FROM THE EYES!" (*Dishonored* 2012) is a common fate here. The city's public announcement system can be heard from every corner of the map, and the messages make clear that in Dunwall no one is safe from the plague:


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

> Attention! Your first responsibility is to the city's health. A spouse, parent, or child showing Plague symptoms must be reported. No exceptions.
>
> Inspect your neighbor's faces closely. If there is any sign of blood on the eyelids or cheeks, you must notify one of the City Watch. […] All suspicions of Plague, regardless of severity, must be reported. (*Dishonored* 2012)

In its depiction of disease, *Dishonored* employs decidedly Victorian tropes and middle-class anxieties. In the same vein as *Order*, the game initially depicts contagion as intrinsically tied to poverty in a superficially classist fashion, only to breach such assumptions later. The connection between the disease raging in Dunwall and the urban rat population proves an important part of these correlations. Even though rats had been regarded as threatening before (most notably, perhaps, in the Middle Ages as the cause of the Black Death), they received a new meaning in the nineteenth century. As a signifier of Victorian anxieties about the permeability of the classes, the rat, which could move freely between the sewers, the streets, and the home, became the emblematic transgressor of social boundaries, a "threat to civilized life[,] [...] the demonized Other" (Stallybrass and White 1993: 143). *Dishonored* redeploys this status of the rat in the Victorian imagination to forcibly demonstrate the ubiquity of disease. The plague-carrying rats can be found in every corner of Dunwall, sometimes in large swarms that can devour a living person, regardless of social class, in a matter of seconds. One of Corvo's magical abilities allows him to possess rats, which the player can then guide into the finest of houses, thus positioning Corvo as a potential subversive threat.

*Dishonored* also plays with the prostitute as a signifier of disease and Victorian class. The "quintessential female figure of the urban scene" (Walkowitz 1992: 21) in the nineteenth century stands for transgression and contagion in a comparable way to period conceptions of the rat:

> [S]anitary reformers and writers on 'moral statistics' [...] identified the prostitute literally and figuratively as the conduit of infection to respectable society [...]. As the permeable and transgressed border between classes and sexes, as the carrier


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

> of physical and moral pollution, the prostitute was the object of considerable public inquiry as well as the object of individual preoccupation for respectable Victorians. (Walkowitz 1992: 22)

*Dishonored* explicitly reworks Victorian middle-class ideas about immorality spreading from the poor and the equation of moral and physical contagion. The Golden Cat, a brothel Corvo visits during the mission 'House of Pleasure', is frequented by Dunwall's aristocracy. A sign on the exterior wall of the brothel warns to "REPORT ANY SICKNESS", and if the player points at the building with the Heart item, the organ harbouring the late empress's trapped soul which can whisper secrets to Corvo, one is informed that the "Plague swept through here. There are rooms they have yet to clean" (*Dishonored* 2012). When directed at one of the many sex workers in and around the Golden Cat, the Heart states that "[o]nly the rats spread the Plague faster" (*Dishonored* 2012). Another prostitute is described by the Heart as a "Plague carrier, infectious, but not ill. And she knows it" (*Dishonored* 2012).

In a similar fashion to *Order*, *Dishonored* seems to merely employ Victorian anxieties about class and contagion on the surface. However, this does not happen uncritically. The nineteenth-century conception of disease, as originating from the slums and posing a potent threat to the bourgeoisie and the wealthy, neglected to admit that poverty and destitution were direct results of capitalist exploitation, caused by overcrowding, malnourishment, and overwork. While reimagining disease as the commingling of the classes, a process functioning as carrier of dangerous immorality and transgression, Victorian middle-class minds disregarded their own ethical shortfalls in profiteering from others' misfortune. However, *Dishonored* does more than represent disease as the consequence of the exploitative nature of capitalism, instead figuring disease as a vital mechanism of class oppression itself. In his recorded confession, the Royal Spymaster Hiram Burrows details why he brought the Rat Plague to Dunwall:

> My Poverty Eradication Plan was meant to bring prosperity to the City, to rid us of those scoundrels who waste their days in filth and drink, without homes or occupations other than to beg for the coin for which the rest of us toil. And it was a simple plan – bring the disease bearing rats from the Pandyssian


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

> Continent, and let them take care of the poor for us. (*Dishonored* 2012)

Not stopping at the Victorian approach of barring working-class people from voting, holding public office, and insisting on the strict class-based segregation of urban space, the ruling classes of *Dishonored* conspire to literally dispose of the poor. The compulsory expropriation of suspected plague carriers has developed into a business model, as one of Corvo's allies explains: "Let's just say that not every family evicted and quarantined for having the Plague actually has the Plague" (*Dishonored* 2012). *Dishonored* exposes the decidedly physical effects of class oppression, because its negotiation of disease and class hinges on displaying the bodily signs of exploitation. Bleeding plague victims in the streets, Weepers, corpses devoured by rat swarms, and the ubiquity of gutted whales (whale oil being an integral part of the Empire's economy) – all of these maimed bodies show the direct and physical effects of being exploited by the ruling classes. By depicting disease as the very mechanism of oppression, *Dishonored* makes these connections much more obvious to players.

Interactivity plays a major part in how *Dishonored* comments on Victorian and contemporary matters of class. While *Order* reveals the systemic nature of class oppression by depriving players of meaningful choices, *Dishonored*'s criticism of Victorian classism hinges on agency. The game can only be played from a first-person perspective, and all cutscenes feature this 'camera angle' as well. This aspect puts players directly into Corvo's shoes, and shows the gameworld through his eyes, arguably bringing about more immersion and presence than *Order*'s third-person perspective. Combined with the variability of *Dishonored*'s story, this leads to players being more intensely confronted with the consequences of their own choices. *Dishonored* can be an exceedingly violent game: the assassin Corvo is equipped with all sorts of deadly weapons, and almost every single character he encounters can die at his hand. Yet, the game seems to dictate a certain way of playing, as the first gameplay hint reveals: "Using stealth and the nonlethal approach has benefits: Fewer rats and weepers, some people react favourably, and the final outcome is not as dark" (*Dishonored* 2012). From very early on, players are made aware that they hold the power to decide the game's ending and, thus, that they are solely responsible if the gameworld descends into chaos. The practice of alerting players to this risk is rather


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

unusual and evokes a sense of total responsibility if they create a "dark" world.

*Dishonored* is one of the few games that offer ample opportunity to kill but can also be completed without taking a single life. Even the 'assassination' targets can be taken out of the picture without directly shedding blood, for instance by selling perpetrators into their own human trafficking ring. *Dishonored* tries to educate players to use the non-lethal path because a high death count, receiving a high 'chaos rating' at the end of the mission, will result in a more chaotic world, more obstacles to overcome and, ultimately, in a pessimistic ending. From previous gaming experiences, players may be used to a tendency for games to frame some deaths as justifiable, with players only punished for killing innocents or allies. In *Dishonored*, however, every virtual life has the same value, cruel City Watch commander or amicable maid, and truly every death contributes to the city's descent into hell.

Players must decide consciously against using the vast array of clever but lethal gear, from grenades to incendiary crossbow bolts, if they want to keep the gameworld from deteriorating further. *Dishonored* also offers a rich variety of non-lethal weapons and magical powers to players, which they can use to stealthily infiltrate mission areas and incapacitate enemies. This also contributes to the agency players experience, and that agency encourages a greater sense of responsibility for what happens to Dunwall. As explained by Schulzke, players contribute to a gameworld's abysmal state in virtual dystopias. Through their active role in perpetuating the very problems that make the world dystopian, players are made aware of these problems to a higher degree than in non-interactive texts (see Schulzke 2014: 316). In *Dishonored*, if players choose to further disseminate chaos, suffering, and violence, then they also spread the plague, as seen by the rapid increase in Weepers and rat swarms.

The three possible endings are shown in different cutscenes, and they once again leave no doubt as to who is responsible for each specific outcome. If players let Emily die, the ending caused by a high 'chaos rating' not only makes players culpable but also emphasises the connection between disease, the capitalist exploitation of bodies, and class oppression: "And you were an avenging spirit, spreading chaos at every turn. The city's feeding on itself now, liars and merchants and nobles like maggots on a carcass. Soon there'll be nothing left for the rats" (*Dishonored* 2012). However, as the ending


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

awarded to players with a low 'chaos rating' makes abundantly clear, players can prevent this by refusing to contribute to the exploitation of bodies and the perpetuation of systemic class oppression – in this case, the Rat Plague:

> You watched and listened when other men would have shouted in rage. You held back instead of striking. So it is, with the passing of the Plague and Emily's ascension, comes a golden age, brought about by your hand. (*Dishonored* 2012)

Therefore, both *Order* and *Dishonored* employ ludic aspects to point out the inner workings of structural social inequality. Where *Order* works by disempowering players to highlight the systemic nature of capitalist and class oppression, *Dishonored* places individual responsibility upon the players, making them complicit in the perpetuation of social injustices.

## 6. Conclusion: Neo-Victorian Contagion and Interactivity

Both video games use disease to comment on classism: *Order*'s Half-Breed disease and *Dishonored*'s Rat Plague are transmitted by bite and literally consume the poor. This consumption originates from the upper classes and is spread by them as a method of class oppression. In line with Marx's earlier cited prediction that the vampiric capital will not relinquish its depleting hold so long as there is a "drop of blood to be exploited" (Marx 2008: 181), the rich of both games *literally* feed on the poor – vampirically in *Order* and by rat proxy in *Dishonored*. *Order* and *Dishonored* employ Victorian anxieties about class transgression and disease as well as ludic aspects to spell out processes of class oppression, and, by interacting with these historicised gamespaces, players are confronted with how these mechanisms are at work, then and now.

The contemporary significance of this depiction of Victorian classism is incorporated implicitly, because players interact with the neo-Victorian gameworld rather than just passively witnessing exploitation within it. Whereas *Order* puts players in the shoes of someone failing to single-handedly change these issues, *Dishonored* demands more personal responsibility. Both games render possible a convergence of past and present by forcing players to face a pointed depiction of Victorian class oppression as well as their own role in perpetuating exploitation – in the game and in real life. Ultimately, *Order* and *Dishonored* convey the same message: class


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

oppression must be made a thing of the past. But do not eat the rich; they might be contagious.

## Notes

1. I want to acknowledge the heterogeneity and amorphousness of the Victorian classes. Given that my article deals with ideological class discourse and identity formation, terms like middle-class imagination, middle-class anxieties, or middle-class mind refer to a generalised kind of self-perception and the resulting fears relating to the poor. By no means, however, do I mean to suggest that the Victorian middle classes were indeed a homogenous social entity.
2. This article is part of a more comprehensive endeavour to research neo-Victorianism in video games. Acknowledging that the neo-Victorian has often been discussed within the contexts of 'play' and 'playfulness', or as a game (see, e.g., Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 175; Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2011: 16), my project *Walk Like a Victorian: Spatial Engagement and Embodied Mobility in Neo-Victorian Video Games* argues that the explorable spatiality of video games allows for an interaction with a reimagined past that engages with Victorian legacies through embodiment, mobility, and agency.
3. In video game research, the discussions revolving around linearity and a-/ non-/ multi-linearity are highly complex and diverse. A useful distinction to be made is that between the alinearity of the gameworld, and the possibilities it contains, and the linearity of a story, i.e. an individual playthrough. Torben Grodal argues that "a given story world or game world may afford one or several story experiences. The experience of the way in which a game/story world affords one or several story experiences is however not an a-linear experience, but an insight into the difference between an 'experiential route' and a game world as a 'map,' that is, a system of multiple linear routes" (Grodal 2003: 147).
4. It is important to point out that the notion of 'being there' needs to be taken with a grain of salt as it does not mean that players lose themselves entirely in the gameworld and accept it as their reality. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman introduce this problem as the 'immersive fallacy' of video game research and refute the idea that the "pleasure of a media experience lies in its ability to sensually transport the participant into an illusory, simulated reality" (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 450). Instead of becoming immersed completely, players must also employ their physical body and rational thinking skills to interact with the game. This dual role of the player ties in well with the "bi-


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

directionality" (Hadley 2010: 15) of the neo-Victorian mode and enables the player to adopt a simultaneously critical *and* nostalgically immersed stance.

5. The cartoon by John Leech can be viewed via the online Punch Archives; see https://magazine.punch.co.uk/image/I0000sNjL8e0I2Ms. The image anthropomorphises the diseases of diphtheria, scrofula, and cholera.
6. These nineteenth-century contexts become entwined with the crises at the time of the production of both games. For example, the year preceding the release of *Order* witnessed a serious outbreak of Ebola, a virus associated with external bleeding in its terminal stages, in three African states, leading "to fear and sometimes hysteria in other parts of the world" (Vanham 2014: n.p.). Simultaneously, the world saw corruption scandals as well as an exacerbation of armed conflicts linked to neo-imperialist ambitions, with Russia annexing Ukraine and Israel staging a major destructive offensive in Gaza (see Vanham 2014: n.p.). These topical concerns seem to insinuate themselves into *Order*'s gameworld and frame the player's mode of interaction. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, these contexts of crisis and inequality have been increasingly superimposed by a new frame of contagion. Players therefore navigate three temporal planes in their encounter with disease in *Order* and *Dishonored*: the Victorian era, the game's time of production, and a post-pandemic world.
7. A map of Dunwall can be found on the *Dishonored* Wiki (https://dishonored.fandom.com/wiki/Dunwall).

## Bibliography

Bode, Christoph and Rainer Dietrich. 2013. *Future Narratives: Theory, Poetics, and Media-Historical Moment*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Boehm-Schnitker, Nadine and Susanne Gruss. 2011. 'Introduction: Spectacles and Things: Visual and Material Culture and/in Neo-Victorianism', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 4;2, Special Issue: *Spectacles and Things: Visual and Material Culture and/in Neo-Victorianism*, 1-23.

—–. 2014. 'Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorians – Neo-Victorian Fashions', in Boehm-Schnitker, Nadine and Susanne Gruss (eds.), *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*. New York & London: Routledge, 1-17.

Carroll, Samantha. 2010. 'Putting the "Neo" Back into Neo-Victorian: The Neo-Victorian Novel as Postmodern Revisionist Fiction', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 3:2, 172-205.


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

Chambers, Becky. 2012. '"But Alas, She Is A Woman": How *Dishonored* Uses Gender Roles To Tell A Story', *The Mary Sue*, 18 October, n.p., https://www.themarysue.com/but-alas-she-is-a-woman-how-dishonored-uses-gender-roles-to-tell-a-story/ (accessed 5 February 2025).
Csíkszentmihályi, Mihaly. 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
Dennis, Richard. 2013. 'Urbanising Experiences'. In Hewitt (2013a): 241-258.
*Dishonored*. 2012. Arkane Studios (developer). Rockville: Bethesda Softworks.
*Dishonored* Wiki. N.d. https://dishonored.fandom.com/wiki/Dunwall (accessed 5 February 2025).
Domsch, Sebastian. 2013. *Storyplaying: Agency and Narrative in Video Games*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Dyer-Witheford, Nick and Greig de Peuter. 2009. *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
Ermi, Laura and Frans Mäyrä. 2005. 'Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion', *DiGRA*, n.p., http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/fundamental-components-of-the-gameplay-experience-analysing-immersion/ (accessed 5 February 2025)
Flanagan, Mary. 2009. *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. Cambridge & London: MIT Press.
Fuchs, Michael. 2020. '"Things Are Not as They Seem": Colonialism, Capitalism and Neo-Victorian London in *The Order: 1886*', in Millette, Holly-Gale and Ruth Heholt (eds.), *The New Urban Gothic: Global Gothic in the Age of the Anthropocene*. Cham: Springer Nature, 41-56.
Gilbert, Pamela. 1997. *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
—–. 2013. 'Disease and the Body'. In Hewitt (2013a): 308-325.
Gilman, Sander. 1988. *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
Grodal, Torben. 2003. 'Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles: Video Games, Media, and Embodied Experiences', in Wolf, Mark J. P. (ed.), *The Video Game Theory Reader*. New York: Routledge, 129-155.
Hadley, Louisa. 2010. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Hamlin, Christopher. 2009. *Cholera: The Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

Heilmann, Ann and Mark Llewellyn. 2010. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hewitt, Martin (ed.). 2013a. *The Victorian World*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Taylor and Francis

––. Hewitt, Martin. 2013b. 'Introduction: Victorian Milestones'. In Hewitt (2013a): 1-53.

Ioannidou, Elisavet. 2017. 'Neo-Victorian Hidden Object Games, Participatory Culture, and the Interaction Between Past and Present', *Adaptation*, 11:2, 159-170.

Leech, John. 1858. 'Father Thames Introducing His Offspring to the Fair City of London. (A Design for a Fresco in the New Houses of Parliament)', John Leech Cartoons from Punch magazine, *PUNCH Magazine Cartoon Archive*, https://magazine.punch.co.uk/image/I0000sNjL8e0I2Ms (accessed 5 February 2025).

Lombard, Matthew and Theresa Ditton. 1997. 'At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3:2, n.p.

Madigan, Jamie. 2016. *Getting Gamers: The Psychology of Video Games and Their Impact on the People Who Play Them*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Marx, Karl. 2008. *Capital* [1867]*: An Abridged Edition* (trans. David McLellan; ed. David McLellan). New York: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, Sally. 2009. *Daily Life in Victorian England* [1996]. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Moran, Maureen. 2009. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. London & New York: Continuum.

Mukherjee, Souvik. 2017. *Videogames and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back*. Cham: Springer International.

Murray, Janet Horowitz. 2017. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* [1997]. New York: Free Press.

Neitzel, Britta. 2014. 'Narrativity of Computer Games', in Hühn, Peter (ed.), *Handbook of Narratology*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 608-622.

*The Order: 1886*. 2015. Ready at Dawn (developer). San Mateo: Sony Computer Entertainment.

Ruberg, Bo. 2019. *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*. New York: New York University Press.

Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman. 2004. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals.* Cambridge & London: MIT Press.

Schmiechen, James. 2001. 'The Nineteenth-Century British Townscape and the Return of the Market Place to Victorian History' [2001], in Shirley, Michael


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**

H. and Todd E. A. Larson (eds.), *Splendidly Victorian: Essays in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British History in Honour of Walter L. Arnstein*, Routledge Revivals. Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 187-201.

Schülting, Sabine. 2016. *Dirt in Victorian Literature and Culture: Writing Materiality*. New York & London: Routledge.

Schulzke, Marcus. 2014. 'The Critical Power of Virtual Dystopias', *Games and Culture*, 9:5, 315-334.

Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. 1993. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Steinbach, Susie. 2012. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Taylor and Francis.

Tamborini, Ron and Paul Skalski. 2006. 'The Role of Presence in the Experience of Electronic Games', in Vorderer, Peter and Jennings Bryant (eds.), *Playing Video Games: Motives, Responses, and Consequences*. New York: Routledge, 225-240.

Taylor, Nicholas, and Gerald Voorhees (eds.). 2018. *Masculinities in Play*. Cham: Springer International.

Thon, Jan-Noël. 2009. 'Perspective in Contemporary Computer Games', in Hühn, Peter, Wolf Schmid and Jörg Schönert (eds.), *Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization: Modeling Mediation in Narrative*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 279-299.

Vanham, Peter. 2014. '9 trends that shaped the economy in 2014', *World Economic Forum*, 18 Dec., n.p., https://www.weforum.org/stories/2014/12/2014-in-review-9-megatrends-that-shaped-the-world-economy/ (accessed 5 February 2025).

Walkowitz, Judith. 1992. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. London: Virago.

—–. 1999. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woodcock, Jamie. 2019. *Marx at the Arcade: Consoles, Controllers, and Class Struggle*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books.


**DOI:** 10.5281/nvs.v15i2.396
**CC BY-NC-ND**