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'GAMING THE SYSTEM?' THE MERITS, MYTHS AND REALITIES IN UNDERSTANDING PRISON ARCHITECT: SECURITY, REHABILITATION AND VIOLENCE AS REPRESENTED IN THE WORLD'S BESTSELLING CARCERAL VIDEO GAME

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to explore how a prison-themed video game may have come to shape some understandings of the nature, character and function of the carceral realm. It

considers the case of the leading prison simulation game, *Prison Architect* (Paradox Interactive, 2019), and considers how that game's portrayal of prison, specifically both its function and management, polarises and contrasts between themes of punishment and rehabilitation, in turn reflecting what are often broader societal debates about incarceration. The primary intent and purpose of this piece then is to consider how this extant prison-themed video game reflects dominant (and often quite binary) norms and ideas concerning imprisonments competing function (juxtaposing security and rehabilitation as binaries that can never be fully reconciled). However, having considered this aspect of the prison video game, the chapter broadens its focus to consider how 'gaming' in prison aptly illustrates these tensions in praxis. It considers the importance of the tension between security and rehabilitation as an unsolvable reality at the centre of western, late modern, neoliberal and post-industrial mass imprisonment, specifically in the US and England and Wales. In such countries as the United States and the United Kingdom alike, the playful premise of *Prison Architect* (Paradox Interactive, 2019) profitable incarceration is enacted every day in the stark realities of prison warehousing, which are far from a game, for the real players has seemingly become the dominant and unquestioned solution to the crime problem. Furthermore, it considers how in reality, a security dominant ideology limits the ability to conceive of the role of digital technologies within the prison system in any manner other than to see them as threat, and hence fails to recognise the potential rehabilitative potential of the digital and games. Overall, this chapter aims to provide a new consideration of digital games as their relation to prison settings might promote an alternative consideration of the potential rehabilitative utility and value from digital technologies in, around and after prison.

SIM CITY AND PUNISHMENT

Max Rutherford is the Head of Policy at the Association of Charitable Foundation, an organisation which aids other UK-based foundations and grant-making charities. On 11 August 2019, Rutherford tweeted a short thread about '*why Boris Johnson is wrong about prisons, isn't tough on crime, and why Sim* City *2000 has all the answers*'. In the brief post, he reflected on his youth, and the playing of a computer game. He noted that as a child, he would occasionally play SimCity 2000 (Maxis, 1993). A feature of the game was that,

> *City Hall advisors, ambitious officials who would try to steer you, as Mayor, towards certain priorities and decisions. One of these was a crime advisor. He was always calling for more cops and more jails. Sometimes I'd follow his advice, only to find crime still went up. The jails got filled. The more I built; the more crime went up.*

He recounted how on one occasion, his father, the noted criminologist Andrew Rutherford (Chair of The Howard League for Penal Reform at the time) glanced at the screen and saw him building a prison. Max recounted how his father had told him constructing more prisons was a waste of money and resources, posing to him that the most effective approach to crime reduction would be the construction of schools, hospitals and libraries. He also cited adequate housing, open green space, museums and (perhaps) more police officers. The young Rutherford explained to his father what the computer programmed advisors directed him to do (build more prisons), but he was urged by his father to try it. In the tweets Rutherford stated that he reluctantly followed that advice and '*I did It worked. Crime fell, tax income grew, people moved to town*'. Ending his indictment of Johnson, Rutherford noted

> *SimCity 2000 was grounded in evidence of what*
> *worked. It's a tragedy both for victims and people in*
> *the revolving door of crisis and crime that the*
> *Johnson government isn't.*

Rutherford's chain of tweets drew upon the example of a simulation game that not often recognised within the crime computer games nexus, but essentially SimCity 2000 (Maxis, 1993) was already using a 2D world building platform that would come to be the template for the most successful of digital prison video games, Prison Architect (Paradox Interactive, 2019). Prisons have become regular fixtures in late modern media. However, despite their ubiquity as a setting in the media entertainment industry, their place in video games is more limited. Those who have considered prison use broader themes of representation (Fawcett & Kohm, 2019; Levan, Cesaroni, & Downing, 2019). Far less research has been conducted examining representations of prisons and punishment within one of the most popular forms of contemporary entertainment media (Marsh, 2009). Video games as a medium are often neglected in texts on crime and media. David Kushner's *Jacked*, the story of the growth and success of Rockstar Games, which was built on the controversial content of Grand Theft Auto (Kushner, 2012), stands as a notable contribution given that the series has been both critically acclaimed and massively commercially successful, now being one of the most successful video game of all time. Rutherford's views are perhaps a useful departure from the usual parameters of debate over the connection between playing video games and real-world criminal behaviour that has subsided little in recent years in the West.

The question most frequently (and largely pointlessly re-debated) concerning console and computer video games is of course, that of their ability to cause or generate violence, and

many will be all too familiar with the 'do video games generate violence' as the stuff of simple introductory psychology. As the introduction to this collection suggests, this line of psychological and criminological inquiry has usurped a disproportionate amount of time and consideration. The rather tried, tired and tested concerns about the desensitisation effect have done little to stall the growing popularity of video games. How might video games be considered in criminology in a more considered and thoughtful manner?

This is a consideration which the cultural strand of criminology has arguably come to begin to grapple of late (Fawcett & Kohm, 2019). Such cultural criminology has begun to deal with the complexity of how games frame of reference wider knowledge about crime and its realities. For example, content framed around crime and criminality, and questions of choice and morality are now endemic in many successful video games such as Heavy Rain (Quantic Dream, 2010) and Red Dead Redemption (Rockstar, 2010), whereas countless games place players in the role of heroic vigilante, crime fighter or bringer of law and order. Indeed, what is interesting is that even given this is how prison features very little. It is found as a setting in Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost and Damned (Rockstar, 2009), where the central protagonist faces down a treacherous member of his Motorcycle Club by breaking into the fictional Alderney State Correctional Facility to execute him. We see it again within the Rockstar catalogue during a 'jailbreak' using a hot air balloon in Red Dead Redemption 2 (Rockstar, 2018). It also features in the backdrop of the Batman Arkham games (Rocksteady Studios, 2019) and in the Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay (Starbreeze Studios, 2004), where the player takes the role of Riddick, a notorious convict who is being transported to a seemingly inescapable maximum-security prison. It is given a minor role in the opening mission within Unchartered 4 (Naughty Dog, 2016), in which

the main protagonist has bribed his way into a foreign facility in a bid to uncover a rare treasure. But almost every representation of prison in video games is highly fictionalised, and hence in some ways, the idea that the coverage of prison in video games is so abstract that it could not possibly frame understandings of crime and criminality or prison realities. This is juxtaposed to other forms of media. For example, it has been extensively argued that 'prison film' and 'TV prison drama' may have a significant influence on popular culture and attitudes towards penal reform (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004).

As the setting of a contemporary game, the prison may not actually offer that much beyond inactivity, boredom and frustration. In England and Wales since 2010, HM Inspectorate of Prisons reports have continually charted a decline in meaningful activity and out of cell time, a result of an array of interconnected pressures that in many see prisoners turn to illegal drugs, feelings of being unsafe and significant deterioration in any measure of positive outcome. Only recently have criminologists attempted to turn their attention to how the conditions inside, often in and of themselves resulted in multifaceted forms of escapism, pleasure and leisure in prison space (Gooch & Sheldon, 2019). Of course, in the void created by falling staff numbers, high resources and austerity-driven budget cuts, violent crime, disorder and drug dealing have come to somewhat fill the void (Gooch & Treadwell, 2020; Treadwell, Gooch, & Barkam-Parry, 2019).

That insecurity, violence and crime have intensified against the framing of what official inspectors have suggested are ever deteriorating prison conditions (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018) including increasingly impoverished regimes; austerity measures; and, the development of an increasingly lean staffing model within public sector prisons (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2015) resultant in staff shortages, low staff morale, declining staff confidence, recruited staff

leaving rapidly, a recruitment crisis and, certainly in some prisons, a decline in the legitimacy of staff–prisoner relationships and staff authority, permitting the emergence of forms of 'extra-legal governance' (Skarbek, 2016) – or simple 'illegitimate governance' – where prisoners were increasingly occupying roles of power and authority, previously the preserve of prison officers (also see Gooch & Treadwell, 2019). In light of this, prisons are not simply spaces of leisure (Gooch & Sheldon, 2019) but rather may be locking in harms. Ever fewer prisoners were (and are) being unlocked and fewer still accessed meaningful activities. For example, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons suggested in 2019 that 25% of prisoners were spending less than 2 hours out of their cell during the week; in Category B Local Prisons, this number increased to 37% as an average, and as much as 47% in the worst examples (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2019). Moreover, the prison 'regime' became increasingly unpredictable and inconsistent, fuelling frustration amongst prisoners (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2019, p. 34). In addition, when confined to their cells, too many prisoners were (and are) detained in squalid and unsanitary conditions, exposed to the elements, vermin and pests and with little or no clothing or bedding (National Audit Office, 2020). It is not all pizza and PlayStation, although, there are select examples of that in some of the organised crime cultures that proliferate tied to a drug economy in Britain's prisons (Gooch & Treadwell, 2020; Treadwell et al., 2019).

Of course, that is not how criminology usually connects to video games. More common is thinking of games in terms of their potential to craft aggressive behaviours. Indeed, the tendency in social sciences to consider games in terms of effect on player certainly overrides any consideration of the way in which games, as a medium, impact upon crafting public attitudes, understandings and perceptions.

Indeed, the ways video games and the virtual worlds they sometimes represent have become very real and meaningful parts of everyday life for many people clearly suggest at the potential for representation coded into them to be a significant and useful consideration for those involved when considering attitudes to crime. Indeed, while traditionally criminology has given a great deal of attention to how images or film might shape public understandings (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004), little has considered the prison video games with the same vigour. Yet because the carceral realm and its nature are not a part of most people's lives, common understanding of what prison is, or is like, likely relies on mediated representation significantly.

Increasingly, video games can be viewed as both a part of the media complex, yet divergent from other forms of media with respect to their production, consumption and the level and degree of interaction they require. As Rutter and Bryce (2006) point out, game studies as a distinct field or discipline arise out of a perceived need to apply new and emerging theoretical and epistemological perspectives to the study of games. They make the argument that, as with forms of media, games are an important element of culture and suggest that comparisons are warranted even if disciplinarily approaches differ. Video games operate as a medium for a dialogue about society, not as an alternative world necessarily but as a social ecosystem that reproduces norms, attitudes and behaviours (Moran & Etchegoyen, 2017). For instance, simulation games, often referred to as 'sim' games, may both reflect and reproduce cultural and political meaning (Moran & Etchegoyen, 2017). They may wield power in that games are useful vehicles in which to model reality, but may also offer the potential of critiquing existing institutions and offering alternative solutions (Moran & Etchegoyen, 2017). If this is the case, what can we learn about the way in which the games industry has sought to utilise and understand the prison?

Ought it matter that overwhelmingly where the prison features in successful games, it is increasingly in the form of app simulation games that are either focused on prison building or management or prison escape?

SIMULATING IMPRISONMENT – PRISON GAMING AND THE SYSTEM

In one respect, one video game stands aside from all others in terms of its critical and commercial success. The now multi-platform building and simulation game, *Prison Architect* (Paradox Interactive, 2019), is undeniably the most successful of all prison-themed digital games, existing across a range of formats from mobile devices to the latest generational consoles. Prison Architect (Paradox Interactive, 2019) tasks the player with the construction and management of various private prisons. The game developed by Introversion Software was initially made available as a crowdfunded paid alpha pre-order on 25 September 2012. The game, now near on a decade later was acquired by Paradox Interactive for an undisclosed sum. As of 2015, Prison Architect had grossed over $19 million in sales, and over 1.25 million units of the game had been sold. By the end of August 2016, when the final '2.0' of Prison Architect (Paradox Interactive, 2019) was released, the number of individual players was stated to be 2 million. A review, written upon the game's original release, noted that:

> *Prison Architect chills me to the bone. If played haphazardly it can be a wonderful farce rich with hilarious anecdotes, but played patiently and carefully it's a horror game, a top-down voyage into the heart of darkness, an eternal raging fire I forever try but can only fail to douse.*
>
> (Tycoon, 2012)

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Prison Architect in many ways is a little fun and a lot of fiction. It was certainly not conceived as a mechanism for framing debates about the function of the prison in society, though as Voorhees (2009) suggests, it is not useful to discuss the representational power of games through the binary distinction of reality against fiction, indeed, games are ever, 'limited, partial, and subjective simulations' (Voorhees, 2009; see also Levan et al., 2019, p. 13). Prison Architect is a complex blend of play, simulation and fiction, and perhaps, some aspects of reality. The 2 million players of Prison Architect as a raw number is almost as high as the population cast into the vast Neoliberal US Penal Archipelago, where according to a 2018 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), some over 2.2 million adults were locked in America's prisons and jails at the end of 2016. Arguably therefore Prison Architect (Paradox Interactive, 2019) has much power to shape perceptions, attitudes and narratives about what prisons are, or perhaps should be.

The game itself is a top-down cartoonish style of 2D (with a partially 3D mode) colourful construction and management simulation play, not dissimilar to games such as Lemmings (DMA Design, 1991) or the Sims (Electronic Arts, 2000) where the player takes control of building and running a successful (read profitable) prison which limits the potential for disorder and unforeseen events such as riots either by looking to secure prisoners' compliance via rehabilitation (family visits and access to psychologists) or through use of repressive security (searching, armed riot officers and guard towers) with brutal violence and firearms deployed to quell murderous prison riots. The player is responsible for managing various aspects of their prison including building cells and facilities; planning and connecting utilities; hiring and assigning staff, including a warden, guards, workers and

more. The player needs to recruit staff to unlock more aspects of the game. The gamer is also responsible for the finances of their prison, and for keeping their inmates content. Hence the role becomes one of architect and manager with sandbox micromanagement themes such as choosing where to put lights, drains and how they connect.

If slanted more toward rehabilitation, players are able to add workshops to the prison as well as reform programs that reduce the specific prisoner's recidivism rate. However, they can also make profit by warehousing prisoners and taking an extreme, brutal and repressive security function. Such an approach, due to the embedded coding, will more likely create non-conformist, difficult and rebellious prisoners prone to disorder and riot. However, both options come with draw-backs, and hence in many ways the most effective approach is to strive for something more balanced, the game, as it were setting security and rehabilitation as vital competing and oppositional aims to be balanced.

The player tells the prisoners what to do indirectly by setting their schedule, with the game then challenging and tasking the player with confronting the supposed simulated realities of managing a large and volatile population; each with their own needs, desires and triggers. Layers are also provided with individual prisoner profiles including offence, age and biographical details of their family members. This detailed knowledge allows players to make individualised decisions on the best routes to take for prisoner incarceration, yet a lack of predefined character persona facilitates the importation of player- and community-derived pre-conceptions about the role and function of prison manage-ment. Players elect whether they want to focus primarily on incapacitation and warehousing or rehabilitation. For instance, players may choose to restrict movement with lockdowns, administrative segregation or solitary

confinement, thus opting for a more punitive approach to their prison management system. In contrast, they could primarily implement counselling, family visits and rehabilitative programs, allowing inmates opportunities for successful rehabilitation and reintegration into society upon release. Players may also select the institutional warden avatar. Such avatar personas present a range of extremes and much between. With players offered 'Rita', a zealous adherent of rules and discipline and security, in contrast to the pacifier governor who placates prisoners or the corrupt warden who benefits from the finding and resale of prison contraband.

Yet while in many ways the fictional gamification of building and managing prisons as either highly secure and repressive or more rehabilitative in some ways mimics debates in criminological and prison studies. For example, Jewkes' work has considered the transformative function and potential 'healing' or rehabilitative role of penal aesthetics. As many countries modernise their prison estates, replacing older facilities that are no longer fit-for-purpose with new, more 'efficient' establishments, this chapter discusses examples of international best (and less good) practice in penal and hospital settings. It reflects on what those who commission and design new prisons might learn from pioneering design initiatives in healthcare environments and asks whether the philosophies underpinning the 'architecture of hope' in health settings could be incorporated into prisons of the future. In contrast, much of the debate about contemporary imprisonment also recognises that increasingly, a focus on rehabilitation at the expense of security and safety may be naïve, and prisoners will take advantage of naivety where security is concerned. In *Prison Architect* (Paradox Interactive, 2019), the player gets their budget according to how many inmates they have, and narrowly where rehabilitation contrasted against profitable incarceration is key. This tension at the

heart of the game means that there is no perfect carceral setting, and for the player, crafting a perfect prison is impossible. Yet the contrast is ever between punitive or rehabilitative, and where the best solution is a balancing of both. However, in recent years, prison architect players have uploaded and shared thousands of their prisons for other players to download. Some of them are monstrously inhumane yet exorbitantly profitable. One user made a prison that has 12,000 solitary confinement cells for the entire prison population (https://steamcommunity.com/sharedfiles/filedetails/?id=424763027). In contrast, even where players might attempt to craft a jail that is overwhelmingly reformist in its approach, the game is crafted to create problems where a small percentage of very violent prisoners will take advantage of lax security and cause issues. In many ways then, while striving for fictional simulation, Prison Architect (Paradox Interactive, 2019) seemingly gets very close to capturing some of the realities of contemporary prison policy in observing that the balancing of security and rehabilitation is incredibly complex and difficult.

GAMING IN PRISON: PLAYING IN THE SYSTEM

In contrast to the prison as represented in prison-based sim games such as *Prison Architect* (Paradox Interactive, 2019), which offers a particular understanding of the penal estate, the use and playing of video games in prison might give a quite alternate understanding of the realities of prison management and control. Video games have been a part of British prison life for several years now – not that they've slipped into the system without their share of critics. In August 2008, *MailOnline* bemoaned the £221,726 of government money spent on 'Nintendo's and the like'. The piece quoted the go to voice

of dissatisfaction with any sort of liberal penal regime, Conservative MP Nigel Evans: 'Does being sent down for five years of hard PlayStation serve as rehabilitation or punishment? People will be outraged by this revelation'. The fact that prisoners can get their hands-on video games bubbles back to the surface of tabloid acknowledgement, there's always someone on hand with an indignant sound bite. In 2014, The *Daily Express* website under the header 'Prisoners win fight to play latest games after becoming "bored" with old consoles' (Dassanayake, 2014). Essentially the piece was heavy criticism of the Xbox 360 being permitted by prisons to replace older console machines in some prisons. The piece also featured the dissatisfaction of the Taxpayers' Alliance alongside the eponymous and anonymous prison worker, who was quoted as saying: 'If letting prisoners play the latest video games is cracking down, I'd hate to see what's next – widescreen TVs, sofas, and takeaways in their cells?' (Dassanayake, 2014). Of course, the emotional struggles experienced by male prisoners as they attempt to cope with the extreme demands of their environment invariably featured little. Rather, it pushed a well-worn line of prisons being places of luxury and comfort.

The stereotype of 'country club' or 'holiday camp' prisons are an established trope both in the United States and the United Kingdom. According to this rather simplistic and one-dimensional narrative, rather than prisons being places of cruelty and abuse, they are presented as coddling prisoners. Accordingly, prisons are depicted as easy, relaxed, leisurely and filled with undeserved privileges for a difficult and dangerous population likely to feign crocodile tears to gain advantages and usurp gains from naïve but well-intended prison administrators (Jewkes, 2002; Marsh, 2009). In the United States, Jefferey Ross (2012) traces this prevalent correctional myth back to a 1994 article published in *Reader's Digest* by Robert James Bidinotto, 'Must our Prisons be

Resorts?' which questioned why inmates are given prime rib and conjugal visits; a query that has now been repeated often in various forms (Ross, 2012) and still constitutes many of the dominant media representations of prison and imprisonment.

It is well documented that the prison regime has always sought to control and restrict forms of communication and that enforced isolation and loneliness is a major experience of imprisonment (Forsythe, 2004). Today in prisons in the United Kingdom, the Incentive and Earned Privileges scheme (the IEP system) formalises, facilitates and orchestrates access to communications, including in some cases video game consoles for enhanced and compliant prisoners. The system being an underlying mechanism for controlling prisoners and maintaining prison discipline. In April 2016, the author of a *Daily Mail* article entitled 'The Cushiest Jail in Britain' vehemently criticised plans to allow prisoners living at HMP Berwyn to access telephones in their cells, suggesting that this was 'fresh evidence that Britain's jails were becoming 'Holiday Camps' (Drury, 2016). This was of course not the first time that prisons have been accused of being too 'soft' and 'cushy'. As Gooch and Sheldon (2019) note, availability of televisions, subscription paid for channels, computer games, laptops; indeed any technology in prisons has long been controversial, frequently attracting negative media attention (see, for example, Barrett, 2015; Dixon, 2017; Drury, 2016; Gooch & Sheldon, 2019). Although generally held out as rewards for good behaviour and tied to a strict policing by officers and Governors (Crewe, 2009, 2011; Liebling, 2008), the available items are often described as 'luxuries'. Of course, a reality that contraband phones, drugs, weapons and narcotics similarly render the prison far from luxury, but rather a spartan setting in which rates of violence, crime, self-injury and suicide run high, as do social inequalities of poor education, poor employment, poor attainment, trauma, poverty. But this

disadvantage and locked-in social exclusion are not at the front and centre of British tabloid newsprint media reporting where prisoners (or cons and lags to use the press argot) routinely game rehabilitation and a soft liberal tendency to gain an easy life of relative luxury. Hence, for a number who position themselves as moral and social superiors of those in custody, prisoner is a group who should not in any way be placated through any form of inducement or reward, and certainly not the rewards of leisure time and a lifestyle (or game console and play time) that secretly mimics the more affluent middle class betters (see Young, 2007). Put simply, there is resentment to the idea that prisoners sat on their bunks playing video games and enjoying the easy life. This has been the focus of some news stories, with such headlines as 'Britain too soft on crime say 80% of public, shock new survey reveals' (Sherwood, 2014) and 'Criminals are getting softer sentences in a bid to save UK's crumbling prison system with NINE out of 10 appeals for extensions rejected' (Jehring, 2018). It would appear that there are those members of the public (and particularly the right-wing tabloid news media) that seemingly want and indeed appear to expect prisons to feel like nineteenth-century institutions of severe and unremitting punishment. Obviously, within such austere regimes, there is no place for PlayStation. In prison architect terms, they do not want the rehabilitative parts, they want guard towers and riot cops.

Yet as an increasingly popular leisure activity, digital games are also permeating all aspects of society, and hence we perhaps ought to ask if such a narrow framing and understanding of the potential in video games is problematic. The question here may be to what extent might the rehabilitative function of video games be recognised and perhaps harnessed? We are beginning to recognise, for example, some of the cognitive and learning benefits that can be gained from video games such as how

influential on children's learning and development they can be. However, despite their pervasiveness and apparent importance within our society and culture, video games and new technologies are still largely ignored as part of our culture; readily dismissed as merely disposable, entertainment products, rather than a mechanism for fostering positive learning and good outcomes. They certainly are not seen as something linked in any way to productive society, and yet, this is spectacularly naïve and potentially neglects a clear rehabilitative potential found both in and amongst video games.

For example, the rise and growth of Esports (also known as electronic sports, e-sports or eSports), a form of competition using video games (which often takes the form of organised, multiplayer video game competitions, particularly between professional players, individually or as teams), is now a massive global business, so much so that competitions structured similar to American professional sports, with salaried players and regular season and play-off series have emerged, such as the *Overwatch* League (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016). Indeed, the 2019 *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017) World Cup featured 100 solo players and 50 duos who qualified for the event by competing in 10 weekly tournaments from April to June for a $30 million prize fund. Esports are becoming ever more significant to the video game industry, with many game developers actively designing toward a professional esports subculture. As the British Esports Association suggests, as 'esports has developed, it has created thousands of new jobs across the world', and this is in many ways supplementary to the fact that the UK industry is the third largest in the world in terms of developer success and sales of hardware and software by country alone but fourth behind Canada in terms of people employed. The sheer size of the UK game industry means that it is comparable to its film or music industries, and yet, video games are still not regarded as akin

in creative and rehabilitative potential to music and arts. Where in prison rehabilitation calls is the recognition that such an industry might be one that offers prisoners different opportunities?

Indeed, even though the United Kingdom is home to some of the world's most successful video game franchises, such as Rockstar games Grand Theft Auto; the video game industry little features in any consideration in terms of literature on prisoner learning or employment. Indeed, the relationship between prisoner and video games is one that almost entirely commences at the point of regarding gaming as a potential technological security problem to be managed. Indeed, that is partly why prisoners who are allowed access to consoles are restricted only to game consoles that cannot connect to the Internet and to video games rated 18 or over by the BBFC. The irony of this is that at exactly this time, prisoners are finding ways to access the Wold Wide Web, and hence, in England and Wales in recent years, the prison has become a more publicly exposed place. The creation of 'HMP TV', a member only Facebook group (Burrows, 2016), and the reproduction of images of men flexing their muscles, partying, and misusing substances periodically appear in the local and national newspapers (Gordon, 2018; Marsh & Waterson, 2018). These images constitute a brazen violation of prison rules and conspicuously display the reproduction of hedonistic and narcissistic behaviours from within the prison walls, with the distribution and very creation of the medium based on the availability of illicit technology (mostly in the form of mobile phones).

In acting in such ways, prisoners can defiantly challenge the power of prison authorities. Videos captured on illicit fourth generation and Internet connected mobile phones recorded and posted from prisons show adult men helplessly squealing and screaming in pain as well as bizarre activities

(Burrows, 2016), such as being compelled to strip naked and pretend to be dogs on a lead (Scheerhout, 2016). The violence, 'fight clubs' and ritual humiliation featured in these mobile videos, which are subsequently uploaded to social media and Internet sites such as YouTube (Bhole, 2015), creating forms of commodified 'global humiliation' to be traded online. Is this preferable to prisoners playing video games in cells?

The United Kingdom is an internationally renowned start-up scene for innovative games and entrepreneurial developers of every stripe, from coders to designers to producers and developers – the kinds of artists who fundamentally shape the course of the industry now and into the future. What is the rehabilitative potential in recognising this? So many prisoners are creative and inventive. In the last year, the UK game industry contributed millions to the UK economy. In 2018, games accounted for more than half of the entire UK entertainment market outselling music and video combined, for the first time. Yet how is that recognised in prison rehabilitation initiatives?

Prison Architect (Paradox Interactive, 2019) is merely a fun prison simulation game, a form of escapism that plays on the building and effective management of prisons. In considering how to run prisons, players are not tasked with considering the placing of game consoles into prisoner's cells but rather, a relatively stark and binary choice of rehabilitation or repression facilitating imprisonment in pursuit of profit. Yet even in this short piece I have attempted to argue that as a vista it might be considered in a more meaningful way, with deeper thought, and in doing this we might make for better understandings of the tensions between security and rehabilitation and a more nuanced consideration of the wider way in which prison ought to be considered and understood in a changing digital age.

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