

Survival and Ontology: A Tentative Genealogy of Survival in Gaming and Contemporary Philosophy*

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Abstract:

In the popular computer game with the succinct title *Raft* one continually recovers items and material from the ocean in order to adapt a makeshift vessel, building it to unseen dimensions. As in many other games, survival is experienced as casual and amusing gameplay. In desperate isolation, one is flooded with an overabundance of stuff, mirroring our present consumerist capitalism. This can be taken not only as a symptom of the current atmosphere of dystopian realism and mainstreaming of the survival genre, but also as a productive hint or allegory for philosophy. The seemingly inhuman and desolate ocean is full of things and potential. This is a potential that should of course be extended beyond the primitive accumulation of the *Raft*, because survival is prevalent not only in pop culture and gaming; we can find it to a similar degree also in contemporary philosophy. We can also categorize the poetic survivalism of new materialist thinkers (Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti), “thirst for annihilation” (Nick Land), theorization of current situation as a form of civil war (Alliez and Lazzarato), the (cosmic) pessimism of other speculative thinkers (Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, Eugene Thacker) or even the pop catastrophism of some ooo proponents (Timothy Morton). In gaming as well as in contemporary thinking, the demand to address the dystopian contours of our time are demands for ontology. Rather than presenting a criticism of these games and theories, we can frame them within such an economy and demand for ontology.

Keywords: survival; ontology; gaming; contemporary philosophy; player vs. environment; post-apocalyptic narration; dystopia

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In the popular computer game with the succinct title *Raft* (2018) you are shipwrecked on a tiny derelict vessel in the middle of an ocean. Your isolation is soon disturbed by a shark, a relentless companion to the player that kills you any time you would like to swim around, as well as by a constant feed of scrap material. Consequently, in almost no time you can build up your makeshift raft to immense proportions and levels just by crafting the abundant detritus from the sea. The situation and the entire game is symbolic with respect to current philosophical and environmental conditions in several ways.

(1) The overall scenario of desolation and survival very easily turns into entertaining gameplay with plenty of sandbox¹ potential.

(2) Similarly, the situation of scarcity (having only a tiny raft) quickly spirals into an overabundance of material. Whereas classical building strategy series (like *Settlers*, *SimCity* or *Anno*) work with resource extraction and processing management, competitive environment or scarcity, *Raft* picks up on this tradition from the opposite side. The survival condition is that of an affluent environment and endless possibilities.² In both respects, this perfectly fits with our current vibe of *dystopian realism*. A situation where environmental and other critical issues seem ever more pressing, yet consumerist capitalism (which undoubtedly has its key effect in all of this) continues to thrive.

(3) Last but not least, this game exhibits relatively original worldbuilding mechanics, tailored precisely to survival resource management. Its crafting game mechanics, similarly to its physics or your navigation within the world of the game, foster an experience of freedom and building your own world. In this respect the game not only fits the paradigm of *dystopian realism*, but also that of current *ontological demand*, an urge to redefine the fabric of what we consider to be our world according to our contemporary condition, which so strongly inheres a sense of environmental crisis, individualism and survival itself.

1 In sandbox games players usually do not have one central goal or way of playing, but explore plurality of action and engagement with the gaming environment.

2 From among many popular gameplays available on Youtube, I can point particularly to the channel Let's Game It Out, which turned to the game *Raft* on a number of occasions. For instance, Josh (the author of Let's Game It Out) tries to traverse the game using one single element – a wooden plank: Let's Game It Out, "I Completely Broke the Entire Game with Just 1 Item in Raft", *Youtube*, 9. 8. 2022. Available online at [www: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-uQ70LZEyc&t=302s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-uQ70LZEyc&t=302s) [cit. 1. 4. 2023].

The very activity of Let's Game It Out and its exploration of sandbox options in various games is symbolic of how we can approach ontologies and survival today.

While many facets of this popular game setting or particular examples have been explored,³ the ontological core and its relation to current developments in philosophy have been left largely unnoticed. In the following text I would like not only to run through several parallels from gaming and philosophy in terms of survival, but also to grasp precisely these contours of current *ontological demand* and its *dystopian realism*. In gaming culture, survival regularly represents a subgenre where the player's task is to survive in a hostile, often open-world environment by gathering and crafting resources or equipment.

However, in my tentative genealogy of survival in philosophy I want to link this game-form with broader questions of the player vs. environment (PvE)⁴ model, post-apocalyptic setting/worldbuilding (or more specifically human survival and ecological crisis), or surviving as a symbolic component of contemporary life under capitalism. The post-apocalyptic setting (from a more narrative and atmospheric perspective), PvE (in terms of game goals or limits) and survival (on the level of game mechanics) form something like a worldbuilding triangle or ontological complex, where several games can explore just one direction, or mutually reinforce all three aspects.

1. 2007 – Survival Unbound

Survivalist narration and philosophy have had an intimate relationship throughout our history. One can certainly recall Plato's cave allegory, or the Promethean myth, Cartesian doubt, the works of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Cioran, or Bataille. But while the philosophy of these authors used the survival narrative as a critical and subversive tool aimed against the backdrop of standard mainstream epistemologies and "normal" societies, today the dystopian setting has gone mainstream, becoming the default setting of many narratives as well as ontologies.

In the 21st century it has been speculative realism, or more broadly an attempt at post-anthropocentric ontologies, that has worked with the idea of human extinction (and survival). In 2007, the year in which the eponymous

3 See for instance: Perron, B., *Silent Hill: The Terror Engine*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press 2012; Perron, B., *Zombie Escape and Survival Plans: Mapping the Transmedial World of the Dead*. In: Boni, M. (ed.), *World Building*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2017, pp. 215–230.

4 This model of gameplay and its space sets the player a priori against the gameworld. It can involve enemies monsters or just the necessity of find the means of subsistence. Such gameplay may on more general plane imply tense relationship with the world itself or reduction of monsters and NPCs (Non-player-characters) to enemies, as will be argued later.

conference at Goldsmiths launched speculative realism, Ray Brassier published his seminal and so far only book *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. Here he opens up virtually all the contexts in which the survival-extinction (or real-negative, being-nothing) dichotomy can be philosophically relevant. He addresses death (Heidegger) and extinction (Nietzsche), void (Badiou) and Nothing (Laruelle), our manifest image of the world (Sellars), the Enlightenment and its pitfalls (Adorno and Horkheimer) and last but not least the basic issue with realism and correlationism in relation to Quentin Meillassoux's solution.⁵

Meillassoux himself published his famous *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* one year later. Here he symptomatizes correlationism, the archenemy of (contemporary or speculative) realists. It is a supposition that the subjective and objective cannot be conceived separately. From one side it means we (as humans) cannot ever reach the "objective" reality beyond our anthropocentric perspective, and that even with regard to ourselves as perceiving subjects we need to always think in relation to the objects of our world.⁶

In opposition to such correlation, against our supposed inability to think the world beyond our human perspective, Meillassoux is not proposing some kind of access to material or objective reality in a direct sense (like object-oriented ontology, which quite simply posits the existence of objects without subjects /humans/). Meillassoux's realism is a neo-rationalist one. He tries to locate the fundamental and absolutely necessary principle of the real (which would be independent from humans and therefore "objectively" real). Interestingly enough, Meillassoux finds such a principle in the fact that everything is arbitrary (including the laws of physics). His realism does not harbour us in some kind of refuge of the real, but threatens that our lives and the entire world are subjected to pure chance.

But what is even more interesting for our present investigation is the basic argument against correlation which stems from the concept of ancestry.⁷ For Meillassoux there are obviously facts that precede the very existence of humans (the evolution of our planet or even the solar system). In his view, correlationist philosophies cannot assimilate these facts, since for them what exists is trapped within the relationship between subject and ob-

5 Brassier, R., *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. London, Palgrave Macmillan 2007.

6 Meillassoux, Q., *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. London, Continuum 2008, p. 5. For a further line of argument see: Janoščík, V., The Territory and the Map: Speculative Thinking and the Problem of the Grand Dehors. In: *Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones 2007–2017*. Prague, Academy of Fine Arts in Prague 2019, pp. 302–334.

7 Meillassoux, Q., *After Finitude*. London, Bloomsbury 2008, pp. 4–45.

ject. Speculative realism therefore posits a world without humans, be it before we came into existence (Meillassoux) or after we are extinct (Brassier). The hopes and joys of speculation, the promise of the real, the other of man, all come through the prism of the extinction/survival dichotomy.

2. 2009 – Dystopian Realism and Gaming

Around the same time Mark Fisher famously used this mainstreaming of dystopias as the basic argument for his claim about capitalist realism, which he defines as an atmosphere in which “it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”⁸ In his view, the popularity of dystopian narration and its usual tropes of social breakdown or devolution into some sort of turbo-feudal or tribal order, signals a lack of political imagination. When capitalism disintegrates there is only destruction and despair, at least in popular culture.

Some things have changed since 2009, when Mark Fisher proclaimed capitalist realism. Besides the regular or stereotypical dystopias, there are narratives that deploy more and more nuanced work with apocalypticism, our anxiety, or everyday problems. Take as an example the TV series *Years and Years* (2019) created by Russell T. Davies for HBO and BBC One. The six-episode mini-series takes place between the years 2019 and 2034, and follows the life of the Lyons family from Manchester. Their troubles and emotions are intertwined and complemented with various catastrophes, ranging from a fascist-populist Prime Minister of Great Britain, detention camps for immigrants, irl face filters, to butterflies becoming extinct or the melting of the last of the Greenland ice. Dystopia comes to be seen from the vantage point of kitchen sink drama. It is no longer a hyperstition⁹ of capitalist realism, a self-fulfilling prophecy of our inability to develop an order other than capitalist. Rather it presents a laboratory for our affectivity, resilience, relationality and sense of community.¹⁰

8 Fisher, M., *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, Zero Books 2010, p. 2.

9 Put as succinctly as possible, hyperstition is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It was coined by CCR (Cybernetic Culture Research Unit), and it connects the two words hyper and superstition. It denotes ideas or propositions that force themselves onto the future. In this particular context, the idea that there is no alternative to capitalism is taken to be such a hyperstition. It is not a fact (insofar as I believe there are some directions of social development other than the capitalist ones) but rather it is a commitment that itself constricts our possible futures.

10 I have addressed this problem of dystopian realism in depth in my homonymous monograph: Janošík, V., *Dystopický realismus, Jak se učít skrze kapitalismus a temné budoucnosti*. Prague, AVU 2021.

Limits (projected onto our future not only in a temporal but mainly in a political and emotional sense) afford agency (to deal with our presence and proximity). And this is where gaming comes in, since it is not only a cultural sphere where the survival genre dominates, but even more importantly it is gaming where setting limits is meant precisely to afford action. The UI (user interface), gameplay, control system, navigable space,¹¹ diegetic and narrative tools all seem to impose rules and limits that enable a player to explore and act upon the gameworld.

In his newly published and illuminating book *Player Vs. Monster, The Making and Breaking of Video Game Monstrosity*, Jaroslav Švelch frames the entire sphere of gaming from the perspective of the (player's) other – the monsters. Historically, he anchors the very presence of monsters in gaming with the player vs. environment model that is the object of our survivalist interest. This player vs. environment (PvE) setting was not always the default scenario of video and pc games. As Švelch shows, early computer gaming was rather focused on player vs. player (PvP) or other forms of gameplay featured by the earliest games like *Spacewar!* (1962) or *Pong* (1972). It is only in 1993 that the term PvE first appears in literature.¹² Yet today it seems like an ever-present source of gameplay.¹³

From, naturally, the genre of FPS (first person shooter) and any other military/action games (*Last of Us*, 2013), through strategies and colony simulators or resource management (*RimWorld*, 2013; *Factorio*, 2016), to games focused on narrative or more original forms of gameplay (*Death Stranding*, 2019), all genres of gaming offer a hostile environment that is a source of challenge and gameplay for the player. It would be an extensive and delicate task to map out the reasons for such a change. One may certainly attribute relevance to climate change and the sense of multiple interconnected crisis,¹⁴ or the history of computers and cybernetics in general.¹⁵ But far more than tracing such roots I am interested here in a peculiar analogy between gaming and philosophy.

11 Navigable space and its importance for the whole sphere of new media elucidated mainly by Lev Manovich in his classic: Manovich, L., *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MIT Press 2001.

12 Švelch, J., *Player Vs Monster, The Making and Breaking of Video Game Monstrosity*. Cambridge, MIT Press 2023, p. 38.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

14 For the conceptualization of “polycrisis” see: Tooze, A., Welcome to the world of the polycrisis. *Financial Times*, 2023. Available online at [www: https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33](https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33) [cit. 1. 4. 2023].

15 Galison, P., The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision. *Critical Inquiry*, 21, 1994, No. 1, pp. 228–266.

3. 1980–1979 – Pac-Man and PvE Ontologies

The year is 1980. Roland Barthes and Jean-Paul Sartre die, Louis Althusser strangles his wife, Saul Kripke publishes *Naming and Necessity*, considered by many analytical philosophers to be the most important book on philosophy of language of all time, and also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari finish their legendary *Thousand Plateaus*. The split between continental and analytic philosophy is deeper than ever before. The latter set to seemingly objective and scientific endeavours, the former taking a much bumpier road along the poststructuralist and postmodern paths.

Thousand Plateaus in particular can be, and should be, read as an exercise in thinking and engaging with the environment. Not only does it teem with environmental metaphors like de/reterritorialization, smooth and striated space, rhizome, assemblages, plane of immanence, lines of flight, strata and stratification, it also provides us with a truly environmental ontology, where entities are never self-contained or isolated, but constantly evolve in an intimate relationship with their surroundings. Drawing in particular on the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon, Deleuze and Guattari conceive of any entity in the form of its becoming (not being), forming assemblages (rather than identities), focusing on the molecular (level of particles) rather than molar (macroscopic level of objects) activities of things.

Commercially the most successful video game of 1980 was *Pac-Man*. It offers the notorious gameplay of navigation through a maze in order to collect dots and avoid four coloured ghosts. The game poses increasingly difficult threats and challenges to the player due to the hostility of its environment. Therefore, *Pac-Man* introduces a typical PvE (player versus environment) ontology, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, who provide us with PwE (player with environment). The latter has a tremendous impact on contemporary (speculative or neomaterialist) philosophy, but is only very rarely featured in games. Their fetish of player-avatar freedom, identity and control is still hermetic.¹⁶

It is worth noting that another poststructuralist, Jean-François Lyotard, published his *The Postmodern Condition* and a shorter interview *Just Gaming* only one year earlier in 1979. Interestingly, in the book *Just Gaming* (originally titled *Au juste*) essentially nothing is said about games. Rather it addresses the problem of writing or theory after postmodernism or deconstruction; the intersection between theory and fiction. Lyotard focuses on

¹⁶ Notable exceptions of games with processual, assemblage-like or even rhizomatic gameplay could be *Everything* (2017) or *Lichenia* (2019).

being “pagan” or “just”,¹⁷ which means being just without any universality, justice taken always from a particular place defined by human activity and judgment; creating the just on the fly, through our activity, and not deriving it platonically from our ontology;¹⁸ dispensing with the I notion that there can ever be a just society.¹⁹ No wonder gaming is a tacit metaphor for such an activity and condition.

Yet again, the most commercially successful game of 1979 was *Space Invaders* (1978), a game that, according to Švelch, had a big impact on the implementation of PvE into gaming.²⁰ Like other successful games of the era (*Galaxian*, 1979; *Asteroids*, 1979) it provides the player and his spacecraft with a universe filled with monsters to be shot and capitalized upon. Nonetheless, the PvE setting and survival elements (a fight against an environment or enemies in order to prevail) are still rather simple and abstracted, waiting for more advanced computer tools to provide a far more complex, affective or immersive space of survival. In any case, gaming and philosophy obviously stand on different sides of the cultural divide, the former in most cases presenting the culture industry, the latter providing its critique and trying to save some space for difference, experimentation and the queer.

4. 1992 – The FPS and RTS Neoliberalism of the 90s

The 1990s saw the final establishment of gaming genres and forms of gameplay. For instance, in 1992 the commercially most successful games *Street Fighter II* and *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* consolidated their already established genres of fighting/duel games for the former and platformer/sidescroller for the latter. Apart from these console games, we also have some pc projects that found success commercially and even in establishing their own genre. The *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* series both published their fifth title, consolidating what was at the time (particularly in Japan) the very popular genre of top-down RPG. Even the survival setting reached another level, particularly with the first title of *Shin Megami Tensei's* postapocalyptic dungeon crawler RPG and the groundbreaking *Alone in the Dark*, which is praised as the first ever 3D horror survival game. In this game, inspired by both H. P. Lovecraft and E. A. Poe, you visit a haunted mansion in 1920s Louisiana in order to inquire about the suicide of its owner. Thanks to its eerie atmos-

17 E.g. Lyotard, J.-F. – Thébaud, J.-L., *Just Gaming*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1985, p. 19.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

20 Švelch, J., *Player Vs Monster*, pp. 52–58.

phere, original camera and relatively non-linear gameplay, this game won not only numerous awards and critical acclaim but also defined horror and survivalist aesthetics in gaming.

However, I would like to focus on two different games from 1992 that have more structural relevance and influence on their respective genres. The first is the legendary *Wolfenstein 3D*, where the player attempts to escape from a Nazi prison. One has to go level by level, killing Nazi soldiers or dogs and bosses. Its deployment of first-person camera, easy gameplay and game control or replayability brought the game both critical and commercial success. Moreover, it has been referred to as the “grandfather of 3D shooter”, since before 1992 shooter games rather featured a 2D scrolling space (like *Xevious* (1982), featuring an aircraft eliminating other flying objects as the screen “scrolls” almost constantly forward).

Wolfenstein 3D not only established the very form of FPS (first-person-shooter), but it ingrained it with some basic aspects that remain at the core of the genre to this day. One of them is the dungeon-like structure or level-design.²¹ In each level the player encounters monsters (in the form of Nazi soldiers) that are there exclusively to be eliminated. The navigation through the gamespace and the pleasure from playing is derived almost solely from killing, domination and survival.

An analogous point applies also to the other legendary game and its genre of RTS (real-time-strategies), namely *Dune II*, which is set in the famous Frank Herbert universe where three major factions (the houses of Atrides, Harkonnens and Ordos) compete for domination of Arrakis, the only source of spice. The spice is not only the most valuable known resource, but it also has radical psychoactive effects or is intertwined with the mode of existence of the Fremens, the indigenous race living on Arrakis. But the game features only tactical battles between the factions. You have to build production facilities and other infrastructure in order to create armies with troops, tanks or various other war machines like ornithopters or special units pertinent to each faction, to confront and crush the enemy. Level by level you uncover more complex technologies and robust weapons.

Similarly as with *Wolfenstein 3D* and FPS, even this seemingly simple gameplay establishes virtually all the features of the RTS genre. What is crucial for our current perspective is that in such a game-world there is virtually no space for any kind of peaceful collaboration, exploration or cohabitation. With relatively few exceptions of NPCs (Non-player-characters) or neutral

21 We can recall once again Švelch and particularly his analysis of the influence of DnD (dungeons and Dragons) on the establishment of the PvE formula in gaming in general. Švelch, J., *Player Vs Monster*, pp. 40–52.

aces that have been implemented in the FPS and RTS genre since then, all you are destined to do is survive and eliminate all the other agents of the game-world. Not only PvE and PvP are firmly established in this sense.

5. 1992 – The Monster in the Basement of Reason

This world-setting need not be taken literally. (We know that in reality we can't just chop off the heads of other people. And we also know that the power-fantasy of action games does not necessarily lead to more violent behaviour irl (in-real-life).) But even as a metaphor, as a gaming vision of possible worlds, this survivalist PvE setting is terribly unsettling. In fact, it very acutely fits a visionary quality of a particular philosopher of the time. Yes, I have in mind the controversial Nick Land, who published his first book and essentially his only regular monograph *The Thirst for Annihilation, Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* in that same year 1992.

In this book already, Nick Land opens up virtually all his big themes; he seeks to develop his fierce antihumanism or totally secular religion (of excess and death); he intends to spread sickness in the form of love,²² which is a negation of life; he wants to “abort the human race”.²³ Later on (particularly after his retreat from the University of Warwick in 1998 and academia in general), he extends this philosophical programme into a political perspective of neo-reaction and dark enlightenment,²⁴ a position that is anti-egalitarian, antidemocratic and seeks to accelerate capitalism with its destructive effect on mankind.

It is not hard to see the connection between Land's philosophical fervour and the brutal gameplay of both *Wolfenstein 3D* or *Dune II*. Let us just start with *Wolfenstein's* freeing of violence in the form of “the monster in the basement of reason”, where the identity of the player (or his ingame avatar) is not finite or singular, but rather like “a corridor; a passage cut from the soft rock of loss.”²⁵ Even the labyrinth (as a recursive, fractal space of repetition and death) ties Land to *Wolfenstein 3D*.²⁶

Similarly, the fierce extractivism and domination in *Dune II* work totally along the lines of Bataille's solar energetic economy, where “life appears as a pause on the energy path; as a precarious stabilization and complication of

22 Land, N., *The thirst for annihilation, Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*. London, Routledge 1992, p. 134.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

24 Land, N., *The Dark Enlightenment*. Available online at [www: https://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/](http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/) [cit. 1. 4. 2023].

25 Land, N., *The thirst for annihilation*, p. III.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

solar decay. [...] To produce is to partially manage the release of energy into its loss, and nothing more. Death, wastage, or expenditure is the only end, the only definitive terminus.”²⁷

Moreover, both games possess a certain psychedelic quality, due to their strict rhythm, a quality that forced many people to spend sleepless nights in search of Landian gratification from fervour, exhaustion and repeated death. “Between ecstasy and torment there is no longer an interval of moderation; there is not even an alteration.”²⁸ This is a quality that paradoxically seems lost rather than augmented with the development of games in a more “realistic” direction.²⁹

Sometimes I just wish that games like *Dune II* or *Wolfenstein 3D* were accompanied by a Landian voiceover... “Survival dissolves as a frangible dam does – eroded to bits by the tumult of energetic rage – so that sexual craving is the howl of nature’s fringe pounded into trash by the sun. Life is a scream which one cannot desire to ameliorate. It is rather that one would exacerbate it. Agony alone has the power to seduce us, and it is to our most savage torments that we most ardently cling. We know that a life which was not torched into charcoal by desire would be an unendurable insipidity.”³⁰

6. 2009 – Realist Plants Vs Capitalist Zombies

The year of recovering from the 2008 crisis was a good one for survival in gaming. Classic horror survival shooter *Resident Evil* made it to its 5th instalment. Another popular zombie shooter, *Left for Dead*, got a sequel. The famous *Assassin’s Creed* franchise also released a second title, popularizing the open world setting (large environment with nonlinear set of quests or plot lines) for action games. But new survival games thrived in 2009 too. We have *Borderlands*, combining FPS (first person shooter) with RPG (role playing game) and compelling cartoon-style graphics. In *Borderlands* the player visits the distant planet Pandora in search of a precious vault, at first fighting its inhabitants and wildlife and later on teaming up with them against the Atlas corporation, which is also striving to find the vault. Also *Minecraft*,

27 Ibid., p. V.

28 Ibid., p. 135.

29 Of course, this is a highly subjective generalization. Naturally, you can endlessly hone your skills even in *League of Legends* or spend excessive time in *Genshin Impact*. Nonetheless, from my own experience and countless discussions, there is some kind of different addictive pattern in 90s gaming for example, where relative scarcity and the newness of games create a more Landian space of exhaustion, excess and death. Furthermore, it appears that today these Landian topics seem to be more visual and aesthetic rather than based around the abstractive logic of the gameplay itself.

30 Ibid., p. 124.

a perennial and hyper-popular instance of the survival genre, presented its first version in 2009.

However, I want to focus on another classic with survival elements that premiered in 2009, namely *Plants vs. Zombies*. This is basically a tower defence game where the player defends a house against swaths of zombies by placing various plants on the grid that represents a lawn in front of the house. Some plants shoot at zombies (Peashooter, Repeater...), explode (Cherry Bomb, Potato Mine...) or block the enemies (Wall-nut, Tall-nut...). In each level the player picks several types of plants with seed packets and faces different types of zombies. Similarly as with our initial example of *Raft* and its desolation, here too the flood of zombie-enemies and the survival game goal create entertaining, straightforward and even more addictive gameplay. The apocalyptic setting is marketed and consumed with the ease of *Candy Crush* or actual urban gardening, precisely fitting our present rise of mobile gaming and the vibe of second screen attention.

Mark Fisher also published his aforementioned book *Capitalist Realism*, an essay that has had an unprecedented impact on current left thinking or critical theory, in 2009. He articulates his famous capitalist realism thesis as “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it,” or even more popularly: “it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”³¹ From this particular wording it is obvious that for Fisher, dystopian narration is a general symptom of the lack of political imagination of our future, since a post-apocalyptic setting of storytelling usually really commits to show the desolation and ruin after capitalism has been demolished.

But what do we make of computer gaming where joyful apocalypticism or entertaining dystopias are now relatively common? The question clearly sets a slippery slope of interpretation, since even Fisher himself in his treatment of dystopias from this perspective works with a huge generalization. But there is one obvious yet productive aspect to notice. In order for us to consume dystopias as unproblematic and (seemingly) apolitical products, their overall imagination needs to be mainstreamed, flattened out, and in the same dynamic also pulled closer to our everyday condition. The mainstreaming of dystopian and survivalist narration can also be demonstrated by the newly established category of teenage (or young adult) oriented sci-fi dystopian fiction. Such a genre can be exemplified by the groundbreaking *Hunger Games* (2012–2015).

31 Fisher, M., *Capitalist Realism*, p. 2.

Paradoxically, this mainstreaming prefigures the narrative form not only to smooth commercialization, it also opens up options for its more complex and nuanced deployment, which in this specific perspective I call dystopian realism. And it is this mode of sensibility or narration that will be of particular importance henceforth.

7. 2015 – Decorative Survival of (Philosophical) Horror

While previously I have attempted to map survival elements in gaming itself and its various forms, in the last decade we can finally discern survival in a stricter sense. In the early 2010s the basic tenets of survival gaming were already being explored. *Minecraft* (2011) features a sandbox openworld, a large system of resource management and item crafting, providing players with the basic survival element of mining, crafting and fighting. *Last of Us* (2013) deployed the survival logic in terms of post-apocalyptic narration. But it is *Rust* (2013), *DayZ* (2013) and *Forest* (2014) that define the classic feel of the survival genre, forcing players to roam in hostile environments, gather, craft or scavenge basic resources and confront enemies or each other.

Besides these examples, one of the subgenres is presented in survival horror games. Already touched upon with *Alone in the Dark* (1992) or *Resident Evil* (2002-), this form of gaming draws on a more cinematic affectivity, working with a fear of obscurity of the ingame threat. In 2015 it was *Soma*, *Until Dawn* and *Dying Light* that attempted to reinvigorate the subgenre with new features or accentuations. *Soma* invests in the philosophical question of consciousness and its horrors, focusing more on the walking simulator genre (gameplay in which it is instrumental to navigate through space, and action becomes less important if present at all) and walking-simulator-friendly mechanics (like exploration, interaction with environment, puzzle-solving, stealth). Story-wise, the player is stranded on an underwater research facility after an experimental brain scan, facing monsters that embody various features of the game-world.

Dying light, on the other hand, draws a lot of gameplay and atmosphere out of an open world setting infested with zombies, where players can roam more freely exploring various locations or accepting tasks from NPCs. In *Until Dawn* the player controls 8 characters fighting for their survival on Blackwood Mountain. The game invested so much in its narrative and choice-driven dimension that it dispensed with player movement control entirely, although it intended to incorporate the first-person perspective in the early stages of its development. In *Until Dawn* you can cinematically see how the story unfolds according to your decisions.

Returning once more to the philosophical genealogy, the trilogy *Horror of Philosophy* by Eugene Thacker was completed in 2015. In the first instalment of his project *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy vol. 1*, Thacker foreshadows a project of how to think a world that becomes “increasingly unthinkable” or a “world-without-us”.³² But what follows is rather a revisiting of some key themes and intersections in how horror, philosophy and theology (or black metal) have dealt with the negative. The other two titles, published in 2015, have even more specific tasks. *Starry Speculative Corpse: Horror of Philosophy 2* rereads philosophy as if it were horror; and inversely *Tentacles Longer Than Night: Horror of Philosophy 3* takes horror fiction as if it were a work of philosophy.

8. 2015 – There May Not Be More

In *Starry Speculative Corpse* Thacker’s conclusion can be seen as twofold. With respect to philosophy and its history, he contends that from a peculiar perspective it can be seen as “a somewhat panicky, feverish attempt to cover up suspicion that there may not be more,”³³ while with respect to ourselves as humans, he claims at the very end that our existence is always overshadowed by our non-existence, that we are dragging this “starry speculative corpse” with us all the time.³⁴

The final volume of the trilogy again resumes very diverse sources of thinking the unthinkable, from Dante’s *Inferno*, through Lautréamont’s *Maldoror* to Vilém Flusser’s semi-speculative science-fiction about a Vampire squid. Thacker culminates the whole trilogy in a series of fragments or incantations (form that seemingly suits him the best) formulating a “phantasmagorical imperative”: “to be beside oneself”, “everything unreal must appear”; and “phantom imperative”: “act as if everything real is unreal”.³⁵

Thacker’s concepts of horror, the unthinking, the negative or world-without-us definitely relate to our theme of survival. Firstly, all the games discussed here (although they are definitely mainstream, “low”, cultural artefacts in relation to the classics of Western and Eastern cultures discussed by Thacker) could be seen through his lens as mediating apparent and dark,

32 Thacker, E., *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy 1*. Winchester, Zero Books 2011, pp. 1, 5.

33 Thacker, E., *Starry Speculative Corpse: Horror of Philosophy 2*. Winchester, Zero Books 2015, p. 153.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

35 Thacker, E., *Tentacles Longer Than Night: Horror of Philosophy 3*. Winchester, Zero Books 2015, p. 178.

thought and unthought, and even more so, surviving and dying, the human and the machinic. But also his confrontation of ourselves with the negative, thought and unthought, can be seen as a further philosophical specification of survival.

What his thought-world, which he sometimes dubs “cosmic pessimism” gives us is a sense of philosophical, but also life-like and life-long activity of facing the inverse of ourselves or being. Thacker somehow fails to address more specific issues (like how exactly this relates to our present environmental conditions and their emo-political ramification, other than their rather obvious intuitive affective entanglement, or how not to end up in mere self-satisfying existential-romantic self-reflection.) But Thacker consolidates a position for a contemporary thinking of existence, insisting on the fact that as we continue living, we constantly face our very negation.

Let us turn back to *Soma* and its ending (spoiler alert). During the course of the game, you discover that you are in the underwater facility as a copy of the former you (that had the brain scan), because humankind has been wiped off the surface of the Earth by a comet. The survival plan is to upload all the minds of humans onto a starship in order to save them. When you fulfil all the tasks at the base, your avatar Simon is eager to get aboard the ARK and travel away from the desolate Earth. The moment the process is completed he stays at the base, angry, cursing the computer Catherine which he followed, since he failed to realize that it was a copy of himself that was uploaded onto the Ark, not actually himself.

Yet after the final titles there is something more. You are spawned as a copy that has successfully entered the ARK. Has it not also been our hope, throughout our history, to have some after-title sequence? After all is resolved; after crises have reached their climax; to have another say, another try, however brief, to make it a happy end?

9. 2016 – Staying with the Survival Trouble – Building a Factory in the Chthulucene

Apart from *Raft*, discussed at the very beginning of this text, two noteworthy survival games were released onto the market in 2016. It is the remarkably titled game *Judgment: Apocalypse Survival Simulation* that features all the aspects usually connected with colony/survival simulators. You manage a group of survivors, whose skills and experience can be levelled up, the game features traditional resource management and also tactical combat against various demons.

Picking up on the colony sim genre, the other game released (in early access) in 2016 is *Factorio*. Sometimes dubbed a construction and management

simulation, it represents a factory simulator. The player has crashed on an alien planet and in order to rebuild your spaceship and get back home you need to create an admirably complex factory, exploiting all the available resources on the planet. These extractivist and capitalist-productivist motives of the gameplay are even more perverse because the planet and its ecosystem actually tries to defend itself against your ruthless exploitation.

It is not clear whether the intention of authors, or the effect on the player, is at least to some extent to force us to think about this politically reckless scenario or simply enjoy it, or both. Nonetheless it presents basically an inverse perspective against the backdrop of current environmentally-oriented philosophy. In this respect, two key monographs were published in 2016: Donna Haraway's long awaited *Staying with the Trouble, Making Kin in the Chtulhucene*, and Tim Morton's *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. As the very titles suggest, the two books have an underlying argumentative structure. For Haraway it is an appeal against belief in definitive solutions (to ecological crises as well as other problems). Rather than that, we should learn how to live *with the trouble*. Not only is the ecological catastrophe here already and we know we cannot avert it, but also it is we who are the trouble-makers who have to deal with our influence on ecosystems. "We are the compost."³⁶

Similarly, in Morton's dark ecology the basic plot is that: "The darkness of ecological awareness is the darkness of noir, which is a strange loop: the detective is a criminal."³⁷ This means we are both the detective and the criminal. We are, as objects, critically entangled with other objects: "We have been hurt by the things that happened to us. But, in a way, to be a thing at all is to have been hurt. To coexist is to have been wounded."³⁸

In this respect we see a big rift between philosophy and gaming. In the current field of thinking, the incentive to go beyond the anthropocene, to re-evaluate not only our current eco-catastrophic behaviour but also the whole centuries of philosophical self-coronation of the human subject, is of utmost importance. By contrast, in gaming the fetish of control, the firm grip of the player over the game-world is still challenged only by few indie games. (Let us just mention a few games initially released in 2019: *Lichenia* /2019/ and *Terra Nil* /2019 prototype, 2023/ from an environmental perspective; *Oikospiel Book I* /2019/ from a more general perspective of game control; or *Stillness of the Wind* /2019/ focusing on life's repetitiveness or ageing).

36 Haraway, D., *Staying with the Trouble, Making Kin in the Chtulhucene*. Durham, Duke University Press 2016, p. 97.

37 Morton, T., *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York, Columbia University Press 2016, p. 9.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Of course, games usually serve the power-fantasy of a player being able to kill any opponent or boss, achieve global dominance, or roam with sublime freedom in an open world (empire).³⁹ But it is precisely this power fantasy of control imbued in the very principles of navigation and interaction that needs to be challenged.⁴⁰ It seems obvious now that we need more games, in which we act as grounded, socialized, complexly and problematically embodied agents, acting in reference and with sensitivity towards all sorts of other agents.

10. 2018 – The Wild West Comes Home as Capitalism

One direction of approaching this more complex or “post-playercene” world-building that has been intensively explored in recent years is of course the open world, a vast space where the player can roam more freely between various locations, NPCs, missions or landmarks. One of the games that have been most praised for creating such an environment is *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2019). The player assumes the perspective or avatar of Artur Morgan, a member of the Van der Linde gang, facing not only the dissolution of the group but also the entire Old West, which is being industrialized and urbanized in 1899, the year in which *Red Dead* takes place.

The game does not fall exactly within the survival genre, but like most open world games it implements survival features in the form of combat (both PvE and PvP) or food and resource management necessary for subsistence. But even the plot-line follows a similar path, since in the final stages (spoiler alert) Artur is diagnosed with tuberculosis and faces the deterioration of his strength, eventually leading to death. Hence, while most commonly open world games tend to absolutize and extend the freedom of players, here you face the inevitable death of both yourself and the romanticized American Frontier.⁴¹

39 Patterson, C. B., *Open World Empire: Race, Erotics, and the Global Rise of Video Games*. New York, NYU Press 2020.

40 It is not only the narrative and worldbuilding, which I have mostly dealt with, but also the most basic forms of gameplay like dealing damage and loosing hitpoints or absolute obedience of units in players army, that support the player-control paradigm. It is because these simplifications severely reduce the social, psychological and even physical complexity of humans (or non-human agents). Such simplifications are often necessary but the problems arise from the universal of these premises in gaming and in the type of (controlable) world they purport. Of course, even in this respect there are notable exceptions like *Rimworld* (where agents enjoy some degree of autonomy. Alternative to hitpoint system are present in tabletop gaming (*Blades in the Dark*, 2017, or *Forbidden Lands*, 2018).

41 For the importance of the American Frontier in gaming see: Gunkel, D. J., *Gaming the System: Deconstructing Video Games, Game Studies and Virtual Worlds*. Bloomington, University of Indiana Press 2018, pp. 29–60.

What a historic (as well as ludic) moment of 1899, with capitalists defeating the Old West; the geographical frontier becoming economic, pushing ever further and having no Pacific to stop them; colonial violence transforming into the regular (economic) violence we experience to this day. It is this very moment, the homecoming of colonialism,⁴² that has an instrumental role in the genealogy of war and its internalization described by Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato in their 2019 book *Wars and Capitalism*. Their goal is to trace an alternative, counter-history to capitalism or an inverse history to the traditional story of ourselves developing liberal democracies. It is a story of how wars became less militaristic and increasingly economic in their nature and practice. How they became inflicted upon ourselves.⁴³

Indeed, there have been many philosophers who contend that we currently live in a global civil war (Schmitt, Arendt, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Negri and Hardt, or Marvel's Avengers). The specificity of Alliez and Lazzarato may consist in their meticulous interest in Foucault's concept of (bio)power and Deleuze and Guattari's war machine; and consequently in the limits of the thinking of '68. Both biopolitical discipline and an aestheticized, nomadic war machine are at the core of *Red Dead Redemption's* experience.

11. 2019 – Survival is Dead, is this Something Worse?

Death Stranding from 2019 could be seen as a sort of culmination of the survivalist gameplay and aesthetic in gaming. Hideo Kojima's long awaited "masterpiece" features not only an original world with compelling aesthetics and original, yet simple, gameplay. It is also a meditation on solitude, connection and death. In the figure of Sam Bridges, you are a post-apocalyptic delivery man trying to reconnect an America torn apart by the dead coming back to life due to an unknown event. You accept deliveries and reach new fortified points and locations to establish a "Chiral network", a post-apocalyptic supply-chain-internet.

Survival here is not a matter of combat and traditional resource management, as in other representatives of the genre. Rather it builds upon the atmosphere, the long period of traversing the sublime landscape, the plot and the constant presence of dying. Often you encounter Beached Things, BTs, which haunt you. When successful, you enter an underworld where you can still swim to reconnect to your body or cargo and respawn, all this due to a symbiotic baby within your suit called an "odradek" (a reference to Kafka's

42 Aimé Césaire actually claimed that it was fascism that was the homecoming of colonialism. Césaire, A., Culture and Colonization. *Social Text* 28, 2010, No. 2, pp. 127–144.

43 Alliez, E. – Lazzarato, M., *Wars and Capital*. South Pasadena, Semiotext(e) 2018, p. 393.

short story *The Cares of a Family Man*). The journey through the open world of *Death Stranding* can be further aided by other players. They cannot be present in your world personally, but you can use their equipment, deliver lost cargo and leave a message, complementing the desolation of the gameworld with a positive connection with other players.

While in gaming the survival genre and its broader elements are taking on an ever-greater presence, it is also in current philosophy that the critique of capitalism is gaining an ever-increasing foothold and becoming the dominant form of survival philosophy today: from Landian neoreaction to socialist strategies (Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams); from Fisherian capitalist realism to various speculative endeavours (Tim Morton, Afrofuturism); from neomaterialist and post-Deleuzian modes of nonhuman cohabitation (Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Rosi Braidotti) to agonism as a revival of the conflictual core of democracy (Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau); from Žižekian “post-ideological” irony to reclaiming the poetics of language of Franco Bifo Berardi.

Yet it may be worth tearing apart the whole stage of capitalist critique, which is precisely the point of McKenzie Wark’s 2019 *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* Her direction is to admit that the informatization of current economies (it is information rather than money that circulates) calls for a different system, where there is no longer (just) the capitalist – owning the means of production – but also vectorialists⁴⁴ – controlling the vector of information (i.e., the data that determines what to distribute to whom in order to capitalize).

According to her, we can renounce not only the idea of capitalism but its old ideological counterpart too and become “acommunists.”⁴⁵ We are free also to forsake the “genteel Marxism” that was ever so finely attuned to criticize only the superstructure (becoming cultural Marxism), and embrace vulgar Marxism, teleporting us back to the transparent logic of history, with the hope of reaching a stage different from capitalism. In a very crude analogy with Sam Bridges, the main character of *Death Stranding*, Wark wants us to quit as workers “subsumed into the production of sameness” and become hackers “subsumed into the production of difference.”⁴⁶

44 Wark, M., *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* London, Verso 2019, pp. 11–13.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

12. Survival as the Limit of Ourselves

Contemporary gaming, philosophy or even game studies can be considered a very messy environment.⁴⁷ Rather than tackling this mesh frontally by systematizing or analytic argumentation, rather than just taking the category of survival for granted, I have attempted to provide a different plane of thought about what constitutes survival logic in gaming and philosophy. Such a parallel reading of the both fields allows us to see not only how survival (relying on the overall PvE setting of most gaming genres, and the popular post-apocalyptic narrative setting) proliferates and develops diverse forms, but also how it is embedded in the history of gaming in general.

Specifically, we have seen early gaming and the implementation of the PvE model (*Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, 1980-79); the sedimentation of the classic genres of FPS and RTS (*Wolfenstein 3D*, *Dune II*, 1992); an ironic or casual take on and mainstreaming (beyond the hard gaming communities) of PvE and survivalist elements (*Plants Vs. Zombies*, 2009). Finally, we came to the three main subgenres: survival horror and its narrative of atmospheric focus (*Soma*, 2015); a factory or colony simulator style of survival games, oscillating between a harsh extracitivist ideology (*Factorio*, 2016) and inventing new modes of cohabitation (*Caves of Qud*, 2015, *RimWorld*, 2013); and thirdly open world survival (*Red Dead Redemption 2*, 2018) and its force in terms of sublimity and affectivity (*Death Stranding*, 2019).

From the side of philosophy, we have mapped the “original” acceleration⁴⁸ of working through the de-territorializing power of capital (Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, 1980-79); right or neo-reactionary acceleration pushing the (socially) destructive power of capital beyond any limits (Land, 1992); the left-wing or critical perspective and particularly the capitalist realist thesis about futures lost (Fisher, 2009); cosmic pessimism and the certain romantic persistence of the negative (Thacker, 2015); neo-materialism and object-oriented ontology as attempts to form new ontologies and strategies tailored for the already ongoing survival (Haraway, Morton, 2016); consolidation of a critique of capitalism elucidating the concepts of (civil) war and survival (Alliez and Lazzarato, 2018); and finally an attempt to move beyond the now almost (in critical literature) omnipresent critique of capitalism (Wark, 2019).

47 Keever, J., Videogames and the Technicity of Ideology: The Case for Critique. *Game Studies*, 22, 2022, No. 2. Available online at [www: https://gamestudies.org/2202/articles/gap_keever](https://gamestudies.org/2202/articles/gap_keever) [cit. 1. 4. 2023].

48 Noys, B., *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*. Winchester, Zero Books 2010.

13. Contemporary Art – Compositing and Composting

Instead of closing or concluding this brief genealogy, let me broaden it even more in respect to contemporary art, as far as its production and forms may go even deeper into the nuances of dystopian realism, survival sensitivity, and its relation to ontology, and present a more complex and cultivated counterpart to survival logic in gaming. Even in the context of modern art, we could trace survivalism through its entire history, from early 20th century Russian cosmism and its overcoming of mankind's limits (being Earth-bound or mortal), through the constant presence of surviving an airplane crash in the work of Joseph Beuys, or the concept of the auto-destructive art of Gustav Metzger. But let us concentrate on the current forms of survivalism and its ontological horizon, namely on work of a Korean artist duo Moon Kyungwon and Jeon Joonho, and one of the most known figures of contemporary art, Pierre Huyghe.

Moon and Jeon's principal art project "News from Nowhere" involves long term collaboration with other artists, scientists, designers, and architects, and features a relatively vast amount of videos, exhibitions, and speculative projects. It envisions a post-apocalyptic world where society has collapsed, and humanity must confront its past, present, and future. In the somewhat central piece, a double-channel videoprojection, *Fin el Mundo* (2012), presented at documenta 13, we can observe male and female protagonists on separate screens. First experiencing the very apocalypse that changed the world during which he intensely continues to work on art. The second character revisits remnants of the pre-apocalyptic objects and aesthetics. Not only the work of Moon and Jeon incorporates the suits, props, and design, made and envisioned by scientist and designers. Their very work and perspective embodies compositing of past and future, apocalypse and survival, objects and humans, aesthetics and ontology.

Pierre Huyghe, on the other hand, arrives at survival perspective from a more post-anthropocentric or non-human and less explicit direction. In the very same documenta 12, he created a highly discussed environment (*Untitled*, 2012) in the compostarium of a baroque garden in Kassel. It consisted of a beehive on the head of a statue, a dog with his leg painted cyan, aphrodisiac and psychotropic plants, and a trunk of an oak tree, originally planted by Joseph Beuys. Huyghe's other known and major project, *After A Life Ahead* (2017), was presented at Skulptur Projekte Münster. Huyghe created a complex ecosystem in an unused ice stadium, incorporating bees, algae, venomous snails, and pyramidal hatches on the roof of the building that periodically opened and closed. His work aims at confronting artistic and planned systems with alleatorics of organic life and interaction. In such a vein, he

wants to not only contemplate on or point to specific dynamics of proliferation, materiality, but rather to play them out, to create ecosystems, rather than to point to their detriment or collapse, to open up the rupture and interaction between human and nonhuman, rather than just describing it.

Moon, along with Jeon and Huyghe, show affinity not only in terms of topics materials or postmedia practice, but even more aptly in terms of their aim to show a way how to deal with the limits of humans and the logic of survival. While the former takes as a model and method *compositing* (interlaying of perspectives, fields of expertise, materials and stories), the latter focuses on *composting* (creating open ecosystems free to ferment on their own). It would be too naive to generalise these two artistic approaches. But they indeed represent maybe the most complex work with survivalist logic, and two respective avenues how to work with ontology (sometimes dubbed as worldbuilding in the artworld and gaming) on the limits of being human. They also form a counterpart to the survivalism typical for gaming, as outlined above.

14. Conclusion

It would be necessary to analyse the forms of survival further in order to see not only their proliferation and parallelism but also their actual functioning vis-a-vis the current challenges with the environmental cataclysm, the inhuman (AI) or political discontent. But from this tentative genealogy we see the main roles and components of survival in both gaming and philosophy. The current sphere of gaming is permeated by the PvE model, in which the constitutive clash between the player and the environment creates the basic incentive for action, narrative, combat or resource management. This underlies the success of survival games. Their popularity could also be ascribed to the ideological mirroring of survival in the current neoliberal conditions (which are often addressed in philosophy in terms of survival). The ideology of meritocracy, the fetishism of success, resilience, coping and doping (the dialectics of surviving and still having fun), self-help or pressing economic conditions somehow fit the gameplay competition and combat, defence and damage control, scavenging or scarcity.

Naturally, in philosophy survival is taken less as functional and more as a perspectival tool. Most famously it has, mainly in the form of post-apocalyptic narration, been seen as a repository of our political imagination (or more precisely the lack thereof). Another avenue to survival is through current post-anthropocentric thought and its attempts to devise non-human (friendly) ontologies. But put into the broader perspective of current thought (about capitalism), we could see the instrumental value of survival

for philosophy. We have positions that embrace and articulate the violent, survivalistic quality of current situation, be they from the Right (Land) or the Left (Alliez and Lazarrato), or those who try to counteract these tendencies by creating new forms of cohabitation and post-anthropocentric forms of survival (Haraway, Morton).

Survival in contemporary philosophy can be seen as a representation of the limits of the human or anthropocentric, be it literally about extinction (Brassier), machinic fervour (Land), (post)capitalist futures (Fisher, Wark), the horror of nonexistence (Thacker), civil war (Alliez and Lazarrato), or the inhuman (Haraway). We can speculate as to what ways we are already living the survival; with what strategies to actually survive; or whether it is worth it in the first place. What exactly are the current PvE ontologies (from Brassier, via Thacker, to Lazarrato)?; do they represent a new paradigm replacing modern ontologies of progress, or rather postmodern deconstructive doubt about any ontologies whatsoever? Survival as a topic not only evolves and thrives in philosophy. It is also the case that philosophy shifts its goals and world-setting and indeed itself in respect to survival.

In gaming the survival genre has been defined only loosely, but it has very specific components (resource management, crafting, a hostile environment, a combat system, a horror or postapocalyptic setting) that can be applied in great variety. In our tentative genealogy we have focused on how these features correspond to larger, underlying problems concerning the very ontologies that dominate current games. Similarly in philosophy, survival is not just an ever more important (but still perhaps surprising) topic. It seems as if you just need to take a stance. Survival is not a matter of TV shows or wildlife, it permeates our lives and imaginations, be it set in relation to global warming, AI, the political or economic-political claustrophobia of neoliberalism. Fortunately, survival is not only about possible ends (of our species, world, visions, ourselves), but also about the games we play together. It materializes (not only) our fears of losing our world, but also our wish to access and construct a new one (demand for ontology).