UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Walk Like an Englishman?

The Cultural Experience of Walking Simulators

Felix Schniz

Klagenfurt University

"English people can't run."

(Elliot 2015, n.p.)

"I mean, we *can* run, but we usually choose not to."

(ibid., original emphasis)

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Walk Like an Englishman?

1. **Walking Simulators** – a Gem of a Genre

2. **Walking** – a Cultural Practice

3. **Video Games** – Provisioners of Experience

4. **Englishness** – the Spectre of National Spirit

5. *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* – a Thoroughly British Game

6. **Questions** – for there will be many!

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Walk-Like an Englishman?

- Walking simulators are defined by and decried due to their precious composition

  A genre as an "explicit attempt at mechanical minimalism"
  (Keogh 2015, n.p.)

- As an essential genre, they encourage us to ask essential questions:
  - What is the aesthetic effect of mechanic minimalism? (cf. Moralde 2014, Zimmerman and Huberts 2019)
  - Why is this minimalist state capable of putting us in touch with the extraordinary? (cf. Ruberg 2019)
  - How do they encourage us to re-evaluate interdisciplinarity in game studies? (cf. Carbo-Mascarell 2016)

  "How does the experience tap into cultural narratives, and which ones?"
  (Kagen 2022, 137)

- Walking simulators provide a condensed take on play-walking

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Walk Like an Englishman?

- Tradition of self-focused, emancipatory musing from antiquity to metamodernity

"Walking is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together."
(Solnit 2001, 5)

- Wandering foregrounds a distinct awareness of the relation between self and surrounding

To walkers, approaching the ground they tread is an intrinsically playful act.
(cf. Careri 2017)

- Tool for the (self-)exploration of locally unique moods and ambiences (cf. Debord ([1955] 1981, 8)

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

- (Role)playing is an act of sanctifying the ordinary

> *"The play-character, therefore, may attach to the sublimest forms of action."*
> (Huizinga [1949] 2016, 18)

- Experience at the centre of game design and game play

> *The video game experience is a self/orchestrated, self/contemplated, and self/motivated liaison with a tangibly virtual construct*
> (cf. Schniz 2021)

- There is an embodied sensation of 'being there' (cf. Harviainen et al. 2018, 88) in the act of *sich-selbst-durchspielen* (cf. Feige 2015, 173)
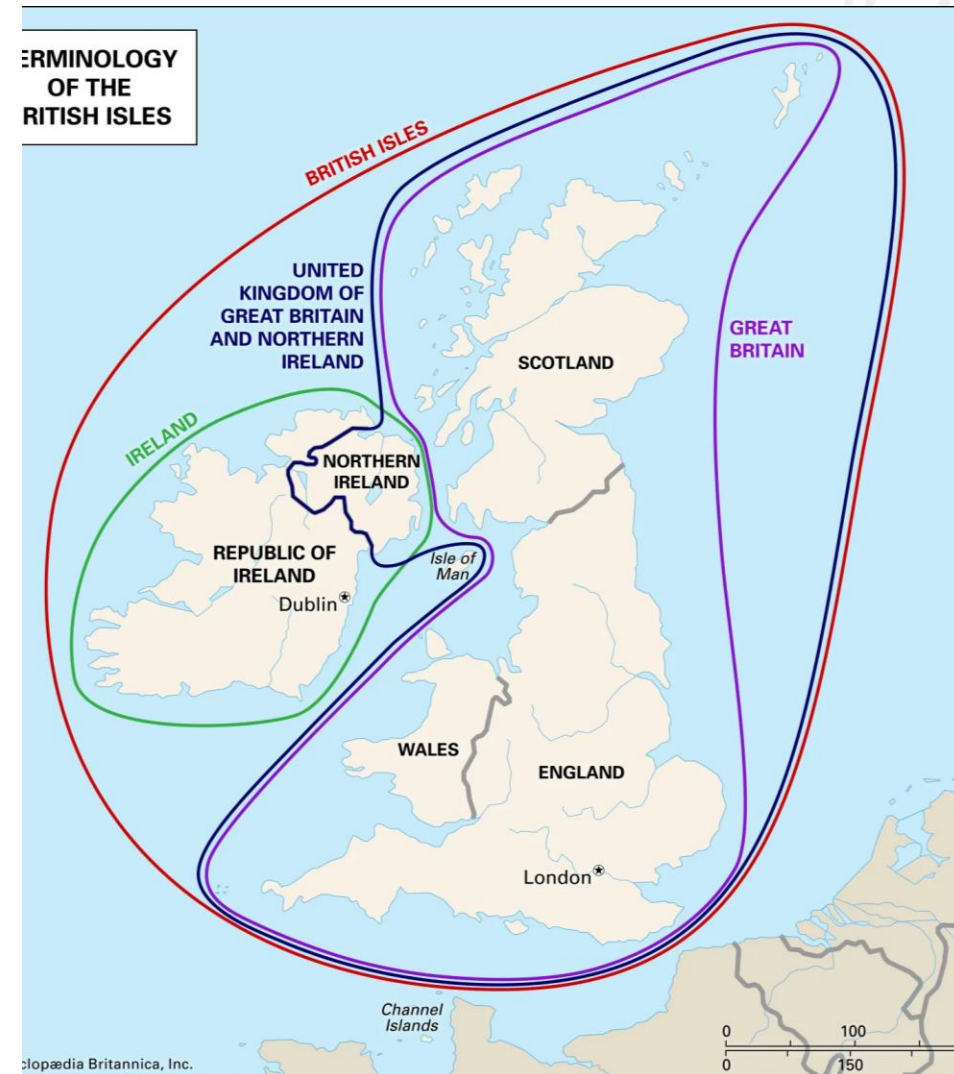
UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Walk Like an Englishman?

- (National) identity as an act of constructed imagination (cf. Anderson 1983)

- English walking traditions in an invigorating back and forth with romanticism (cf. Wallace [1983] 2011, 67) and new antiquarianism (cf. Coverley 2006, 123)

- How would we define English, e.g. in a video game?

"…the agency granted to players by games allows them in effect to perform Britishness themselves, offering a more nuanced and complex engagement with ideas of national identity than that possible through film."

(Webber 2018, 10-11)

TERMINOLOGY OF THE BRITISH ISLES

BRITISH ISLES

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

GREAT BRITAIN

IRELAND

SCOTLAND

NORTHERN IRELAND

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
Dublin

Isle of Man

WALES

ENGLAND

London

Channel Islands

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

https://cdn.britannica.com/41/193441-050-13CCA6B5/Terminology-British-Isles-United-Kingdom-Ireland-Great.jpg

UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

Walk Like an Englishman?

- The Chinese Room walking sims (2012-2015):
  - Providing virtual landscapes inspired by English Romanticism
  - Immersing players in microcosms of local ambience
  - Touching *leitmotifs* of British history and cultural tropes
  - Encouraging players to walk in awe and contemplation
  - Laying the ground for British ideas of high-concept experiences, such as transcendence

Walk Like an Englishman?

The question of role-play:

Would the concept of play suffice to understand the willing simulation of a solitary state of contemplative promenading?

The question of Anglophilia:

Is a quintessential virtual playground even comparable to a real experience of Englishness? (And what would be 'real', for that matter?)

Is there a specific need for this in the age of Brexit?

The question of personal cultural experience:

How to even grasp the ramblings of a German living in Austria playing an English game on a Japanese console talking about it in Sweden?

https://unsplash.com/photos/3y1QMNZzcUU. modified by FS

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Sources Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

- Carbo-Mascarell, Rosa. 2016. "Walking Simulators: The Digitisation of an Aesthetic Practice." In *DiGRA/FDG* - Proceedings of the First International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG, 1-15.

- Careri, Francesco. 2017. *Walkscapes: walking as an aesthetic practice*. Ames: Culicidae Architectural Press.

- Coverley, Merlin. 2006. *Psychogeography*. Harvenden: Pocket Essentials.

- Debord, Guy. [1955] 1981. "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography." In *Situationist International Anthology*. Translated and edited by K. Knabb, 8-12. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets.

- The Chinese Room. 2015. *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture*. San Mateo: Sony Interactive Entertainment.

- Elliot, Matthew. 2015. "How to enjoy Everybody's Gone to the Rapture: a real Englishman explains." *Gamesradar*. Accessed 9 October 2022.

- Feige, Daniel Martin. 2015. *Computerspiele: Eine Ästhetik*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

- Harviainen, Tuomas J. et al. 2018. "Live-Action Role-Playing Games." In Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations, edited by J. P. Zagal and S. Deterding. London: Routledge. 87-106.

- Huizinga, Johan. (1949) 2016. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Kettering: Angelico Press.

- Kagen, Melissa. 2022. *Wandering Games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Keogh, Brendon. 2015. "On Everybody's Gone To The Rapture." *Brkeogh*. Accessed 2 July 2021.

- Moralde, Oscar. 2014. "Haptic Landscapes: Dear Esther and Embodied Video Game Space." *Media Fields Journal* no. 8: 1-15.

- Schniz, Felix. 2021. "What is a Videogame Experience? A Peripatetic Acknowledgement of Inner Sentiments in Virtual Worlds." PhD Diss. Klagenfurt: Klagenfurt University.

- Solnit, Rebecca. 2001. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. London: Granta.

- Wallace, Anne. (1983) 2011. *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Webber, Nick. 2018. "The Britishness of 'British Video Games'." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 26, no. 2: 1-15.

- Zimmermann, Felix, and Christian Huberts. 2019. "From Walking Simulator to Ambience Action Game: A Philosophical Approach to a Misunderstood Genre." *Press Start* 5, no. 2: 29-50.

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET