The Archive and The Other: Reading *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* Through the Lens of Jacques Derrida*

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Abstract

This paper explores *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* (2022) through the critical framework of Jacques Derrida's concept of the archive, examining how the game manipulates archival structures to both engage and subvert player agency. We analyze the archive, the in-game "Stanley Parable Museum" including the "Skip Button Ending" inside the computer game, highlighting how its design embodies Derrida's notion of systemic violence by its selective preservation of content. The selection and exclusion of the museum's content creates tension by its dual role as both a repository and a regulatory mechanism. Further, we incorporate Emmanuel Levinas' idea of "the Other" to explain how the tension generated from the archive simultaneously manifests player involvement and its opposite, player estrangement.

Keywords

Ludology; player agency; the archive; Derrida, Levinas; systemic violence; alterity; beyond gamification

1. Introduction

Video games have become one of the most dynamic and influential forms of cultural expression in the contemporary digital landscape. As interactive experiences, they offer players the illusion of agency, control, and a personalized narrative journey. Yet, many games also play with these concepts, deliberately subverting player expectations to expose the underlying structures that guide and confine interactions [1]. One such game is *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*, from 2022, a sequel to the original (2013) that turns the spotlight on itself and its mechanics by transforming its own design elements into a self-referential commentary on choice, control, and narrative boundaries [2-8]. The sequel game teases the player by letting the narrator discus the title to the real follow-up of the original game. The narrator proposes the highly imaginative title: "The Stanley Parable 2".[2]

The narrator just needs to complete the "Skip Button Ending" (fandom.com), which refers to the new content permanently added to the game —T*he Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*. Once the ending to the "The Stanley Parable 2" is finished, the narrator will inject the game content into the original 2013 game. Until then, "The Stanley Parable 2" rests in the archive in the in-game "Stanley Parable Museum" inside the new game, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*.

Basically, we are dealing with three games in one: *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* that we are playing; the embedded "Stanley Parable Museum", which is a mockingly nostalgic remix of the original game from 2013; and, finally, the imaginative "The Stanley Parable 2".

This paper hypothesizes that by examining the role of the archive within "The Stanley Parable 2" (the fictional game within the produced game) through the lens of Derrida and Levinas, we can uncover the inherent tensions between player agency and narrative limitations, revealing how game design mirror broader philosophical and ethical issues. Central to this analysis is the idea that the archive, far from being a neutral repository of information, operates as a site of both knowledge and systemic violence—a concept explored in the works of Derrida and Slavoj Žižek.

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[2]The "Stanley Parable 2" is also a website (https://stanleyparable2.com) and a song by Tom Schley (Spotify, Apple Music, 2022).

Derrida's reflects on the archive in his book *Archive Fever*. He highlights how the process of archiving enforces a boundary between what is preserved and what is excluded, and, importantly, how this boundary exhibits a form of objective violence in its structuring.

Žižek's notion of objective violence is particularly relevant in examining how *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* imposes structural boundaries on the player's experience, which are not overtly violent but subtly coercive in their design. Objective violence, as Žižek explains, is not the immediate physical or emotional violence typically recognized by the individual; rather, it is embedded within systemic structures that shape and limit subjective experience in 'invisible' ways. In *The Stanley Parable*, this form of violence materializes through the narrative architecture itself, where choices are presented yet remain both contested by the narrator *and* constrained within predetermined pathways, ultimately rendering agency an illusion.

This paper begins with an overview of the theoretical framework, drawing first on Derrida's concept of the archive and its role in shaping knowledge and power relations, followed by Žižek's analysis of objective violence within systemic structures. The focus then shifts to a reading of *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* centering, in the first part, on how the game's in-game museum serves as both a manifestation of archival violence and a site that radically queers traditional game dynamics. The second part incorporates Emmanuel Levinas' notion of "the Other" to question and explain the tensed relation between homecoming and estrangement experienced by the player in the game. The concluding section will tie together these ideas, reflecting on the implications of this perspective for understanding the intersections of the game's design, player agency, and philosophical inquiry. Finally, we propose a tentative frame-work for how insights from *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* analysis might foster a stimulating learning environment—not as a prepackaged gamification tool with predefined didactic goals, but as a vehicle to guide students away from an instrumental approach to gameplay and toward a mode of interpretation and critical scrutiny with broader philosophical and societal implications.

2. Archive and Violence

In the essay "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)", from 1984, Derrida et al. defines the archive, rather traditionally, as a "general machinery of a culture, with all its techniques for handling, recording, and storing information" [9] (p. 26). For Derrida, the science of the archive not just involves the practicalities of librarianship but must be seen as a wide-ranging knowledge of the general machinery of culture, a theory of "social memory". Roughly a decade later, in *Archive Fever*, Derrida suggests that the archive is not a passive repository but a site of power and lawfulness, a structured space where knowledge is produced, organized, and controlled. He insists that "[t]he archive is not merely a place for stocking the past, but also the location of the production of the present and future" [10] (p. 17). By determining what is archived and what is excluded, the archive enforces a system of inclusion and exclusion that governs memory and knowledge. In discussing the functioning of the archive machine—specifically, how the archive's principles of structuration operate—Derrida refers to "une structure d'archivation" (p. 52), which can be understood as the structure of the archive both as a system that archives and as a process of archivization [11]. Thus, the archive not only contains information; it also dictates how this information is organized and maintained. The archive functions as both an organizer and an organization. It is precisely this silent yet forceful foundation (or "law") of the archive that captures Derrida's interest. Thus, the archive can be seen as a site of systemic or structural violence, as it imposes a coercive order upon memory and the transmission of knowledge, actively shaping our understanding of history through what it includes and what it suppresses.

Derrida links this violence to the law itself, arguing in *Force of Law* [12] that the very act of establishing a rule or law involves an inherent violence. Concerning the intricate relation between law (*droit*)[3] and justice (*la justice*), he ponders:

> The structure I am describing here is a structure in which law (*droit*) is essentially deconstructible, whether because it is founded, constructed on interpretable and transformable textual strata (and that is the history of law [*droit*], its possible and necessary transformation, sometimes its amelioration), or because its ultimate foundation is by definition unfounded. The fact that law is deconstructible is not bad news. We may even see in this a stroke of luck for politics, for all historical progress. But the paradox that I'd like to submit for discussion is the following: it is this deconstructible structure of law (*droit*), or if you prefer of justice as *droit*, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible (p. 14).

Derrida points to a distinction between the institutionalized forms of law and the folk epistemological demand of justice. The law, in its rigid application, often excludes and marginalizes those who do not conform to its rules, enacting a form of systemic violence against them.

Slavoj Žižek's exploration of violence, in the book *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, illuminates Derrida's ideas by differentiating between subjective violence with its direct, visible acts of aggression, and objective violence embedded in language, ideology, and systems. The latter form is far more insidious and omnipresent, Žižek insists, as it creeps into the very assemblies that define social and political order [13], in Marxism known as ideology or the superstructure. The archive, as Derrida describes it, precisely functions as such a form of objective violence, a force that shapes how the Other (other stuff, other people) is perceived, remembered, or erased within cultural and institutional frameworks. In the following section, we will pursue how the systemic violence embedded in the archive plays out in *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*.

3. The Archive in *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*

The biggest novelty of the original *The Stanley Parable* was the introduction of a narrator who recognizes and reacts to the player's actions. The role of the narrator is that of a guide as it gives the player clear objectives [14] [15]. The well-established literary tradition [16] is echoed and satirized in *The Stanley Parable,* as the narrator persistently teases and continually urges the player to engage in transgressive acts of play. The player becomes aware of her objectives as if they have already been completed within the narrative, while the gameplay distinctly reveals that these actions are only just unfolding. We are then put in a position where the only choice we have is either to submit fully to the imperatives of the narrator or to try to break the game. This transforms *The Stanley Parable* into a rivalry between player and narrator. The player can either comply to the will of the narrator or attempt to outsmart the narrator.

Building on Derrida's ideas of the archive as a site of both knowledge and systemic violence, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* enhances this rivalry between game system and player action while also serving as a compelling case study in exploring how digital spaces can act as both preservers and enforcers of interpretive limits.

Within the game's new content, the so-called "Stanley Parable Museum" operates as a self-referential archive—a meticulously curated space that houses discarded game concepts, unused content, and meta-commentary on the game itself. This museal treatment of the game's own elements is not merely an act of preservation and a clever play of intertextuality. It is an active

[3] The term *droit* carries multiple interconnected meanings, each essential to understanding its broader implications. First, it refers to the discipline or practice of law. Second, it signifies a legal entitlement, privilege, or moral claim. Third, it can denote a charge or tax. As an adjective, *droit* describes someone or something honest or morally upright. Finally, as an adverb, it conveys the idea of moving in a direct line. These meanings intertwine to form a conceptual framework. The morally 'right path'—linear and upright—becomes a metaphor for the normative way to 'charge' *droit* (to claim its 'tax') by adhering to the 'right' direction, which is institutionally established. Derrida argues that these layers of meaning coalesce to shape and sustain the concept of "the law".

demonstration of the archive's power to dictate which narratives are foregrounded and which remain hidden in the shadows of the game's development process. [4]

For Derrida, as we saw, the archive is not just a storage place, but a space defined by its boundaries, by the laws that determine what is included within it and what is excluded: "The archive, as a place of consignation, is also a place of violence: it is established through an operation that implies a certain prohibition, a marking of boundaries" (p. 4). This violence is not always physical, as also noted by Zizek, but is manifest in the structural limitations that the archive imposes, confining knowledge within prescribed parameters while simultaneously discounting other possibilities.

In *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* the museum of "The Stanley Parable 2" serves as an embodiment of this prohibitive law, enforcing a boundary between what the player can and cannot access. It is a place where game ideas are presented as though frozen in amber—concepts that are both displayed and discarded, highlighted as potential paths that were intentionally abandoned or cut off from the game's primary narrative. This segregation of 'salvage' material is mockingly publicized, within the game, when it directs the player away from direct entrance to the so called "Mind Control Facility". Instead, the player goes to the hallway with "Escape" written on it and arrives at the Museum Ending. Here, the player is greeted by the words of the narrator:

> "Okay. You remember how cheap and unsatisfying the Ultra Deluxe content turned out to be? Well, it got me thinking about the past, and how much better *The Stanley Parable* used to be. So, I made something special and tucked it away here where the game's developers won't find it. Just our little secret. Take a look!"

This act of self-archiving, where game content is locked away in a simulated museum setting of a "much better" day and age, becomes a symbolic gesture that shapes the player's perception of what the game could have been but never was. It reflects Derrida's insight that the archive is a site of both preservation and exclusion, a dual act of revealing and concealing.

The museum's layout itself is a demonstration of Derrida's concept of the archive as a place of both power and repression. The player, wandering through this space, confronts the limitations imposed by the designers, realizing that the curated presentation of unused game elements is not merely a neutral act of sharing past ideas but an assertion of control over the game's narrative trajectory (and therefore also over the player's experience). The player's role is reduced to that of a spectator, barred from transforming these elements into playable content, thus emphasizing the prohibitive nature of the archive as Derrida describes it. As a result of this abridged role, the player is treated by the game's *droit* (law) in a specific way. Drawing on Levinas, to whom we will turn shortly, she is regarded as Other-as-same rather than Other-as-different. In this way, the player becomes just as 'frozen', shushed and acquiescent, as the game memorabilia on display. This corresponds to Derrida's concept of the "force of law". What might be perceived as *la justice*—namely, the player's emotionally charged freedom to move within the game or archive, amassing causes and effects along the way—is overridden by the commanding and restrictive force of *droit* (law). What does this force do? It confines movement to past events and musealized content. The violence here is not blatant but systemic; it lies in the game's ability to enforce its own interpretive limits and deny the player the ability to transgress beyond what the designers have sanctioned. Discussing the original game, Feng Zhu [17] makes a similar argument in relation to the tension between freedom and restriction: The game's "own ambiguous status brings out the dissonance between two objectives: to give the player freedom and room for expression (to be a 'good' game),

[4] It's interesting to note the etymology of 'museum': The word museum originates from the Greek word *Μουσεῖον* (Mouseion), which referred to a place or temple dedicated to the Muses, the goddess-es of art, learning, and inspiration in Greek mythology. A Mouseion was a sanctuary for the cultivation of the arts, philosophy, and sciences. The connection to hospitality and, by extension, 'hospital' lies in the ancient Greek and Roman ideals of *xenia* (hospitality) and *cura* (care). A Mouseion was not just a place of learning but a space that provided intellectual hospitality, offering scholars and visitors a site for intellectual nourishment and communal engagement. Also, the word 'curator' originates from the Latin term *curator*, which means guardian, overseer, or manager. This, in turn, is derived from the verb *curare*, meaning to care for or to take care of.

and to be a tight and cogent work that provokes reflection about freedom and the possibility of meaning (to be a 'good' Lukacsian novel/work of art)" (p. 130).

This idea of the archive as a site of systemic violence parallels Žižek's notion of objective violence, which he describes as the unseen, underlying forms of coercion embedded within social, political, and cultural systems. Žižek argues that this type of violence is the violence inherent in a system: not only in its repressive apparatus but in the very way it structures social relations. In *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*, the museum does not just passively display unused content; it actively frames these elements within a narrative of incompleteness, rendering them artifacts that are distant and untouchable—or, in the vocabulary of the game itself, 'dead'. This framing itself constitutes a form of objective violence, as it subtly manipulates the player's understanding of what is possible within the game world. Ultimately, when everything within the game, including the previously narrated gameplay and past game objects, is subjected to the rigid rules of archivization, adhering to already established guidelines, 'life' within the game becomes a moot point. As the narrator sardonically remarks:

> "When every path you can walk has been created for you long in advance, death becomes meaningless, making life the same. Do you see now? Do you see that Stanley was already dead from the moment he hit start?"

By archiving alternative game paths and ideas in a manner that both invites the player's curiosity and simultaneously denies their engagement, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* exposes the hidden structures of power that shape interactive experiences. Not just in this game, but in all games [18]. It critiques the player's own complicity in the demand for coherent, complete narratives, holding up a mirror to the desire for control over the game's unfolding. This self-referential critique of game design expectations reveals how the player's chase for narrative closure [19] [20] is intertwined with the underlying, ideological violence of the archive—a structure that, while appearing to offer access to knowledge, enforces a rigid framework that limits the scope of possible interpretations. Furthermore, this act of turning game content into bits and pieces of a museum can be seen as a commentary on the broader cultural phenomenon of the museal treatment of digital artifacts. Just as museums in the real world exert control over how history and culture are represented, the museum in *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* exerts control over the narrative possibilities within the game. The archive, in this sense, becomes a form of sociopolitical apparatus that defines the terms of engagement with the game's world. It dictates what players can remember and what they must forget, what they can experience and what remains forever out of reach, locked away by the design's invisible hand and piloted by the narrator's "force of law".

In comparison to the more open-ended nature of the original *The Stanley Parable*, where players could explore branching narratives and alternative endings, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* turns these discarded possibilities into a static exhibition, radiant background textures. This shift highlights the paradox inherent in the archive: while it purports to open past possibilities to scrutiny, it simultaneously limits those possibilities by framing them within an immutable structure. The game confronts the player with a question that echoes Derrida's interrogation of the archive's authority: Who has the power to decide what gets archived and what is erased?

By reducing potentially vibrant narrative choices to mere exhibits, the museum in *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* exemplifies the violent suppression of the player's alterior moves and motives —their desire to play the game differently. This reduction represents the repression of the game's 'Other'. It is the systematic violence imposed on the player's will—her sense of "justice"—to move beyond the game's predetermined paths and trajectories. The game's use of this archive space critiques not only the limitations imposed by game design but also the broader cultural and philosophical implications of how we treat the past—what we choose to remember and what we consign to oblivion. This resonates with Derrida's idea that the archive is always already a site of violence, as it imposes a selective narrative that marginalizes other voices and possibilities. In this light, the game serves as a meta-commentary on the foundational violence of the archive, both in

digital and cultural contexts. It forces the player to confront their role not just as a passive consumer of content but as a participant in a system that defines and limits what can be thought, experienced, or imagined. By doing so, it aligns with both Derrida's critique of archival power and Žižek's analysis of objective violence, turning the digital space into a microcosm of broader social and ideological forces that shape our understanding of history, knowledge, and the Other.

Building upon the interplay between archival violence and the destructibility of player agency, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* may also serve as a humorous yet radical example of 'queering' the traditional game experience. In most video games, player agency is a core element of the interactive experience [21-23], granting the player a sense of control over the narrative and the unfolding of events. However, *The Stanley Parable* franchise explicitly plays with and undermines this concept. The presence of the "Stanley Parable Museum" as an archived space of discarded game concepts exemplifies the tension between the player's desire to explore and the designer's imposition of boundaries. The archive's rigid structure diminishes the player's role from active participant to passive observer—casting the player's life as "meaningless", as the narrator says, even to the point of suicide—where the illusion of choice is systematically revealed as a designer's trick. By doing this, the game fundamentally challenges the notion of player agency itself. The museum's confines illustrate how any perceived freedom within the game is a deception manipulated by the game. As Derrida suggests, the archive enacts a violence by delimiting what can be accessed, explored, or known; similarly, the game enforces a narrative boundary that subverts ('queers') the player's autonomy, showcasing how their choices are ultimately restricted by the prohibitive laws of the game's design.

This critique of agency is amplified by the game's self-referential commentary on game design expectations and player biases. The museum's layout acts as a labyrinth of broken paths, exposing how the player's attempts to assert control are thwarted by the systemic violence embedded in the narrative architecture. In this way, the game confronts the player with a realization that their role is not that of a master of the narrative but rather a subject caught within its predefined limitations.

4. Levinas, the Other, and Stanley

Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy, articulated in works like *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, centers on the ethical relationship that arises when the self confronts the face of the Other. He contends that this encounter elicits an infinite ethical responsibility, which should be at the heart of any metaphysics, compelling the self to respond to the Other without expectation of reciprocity. "The face of the Other in its nudity and defenselessness signifies: 'Do not kill me.' This is the first word of the face, its first meaning" [24] (p. 199).

Levinas' idea of hospitality is the ethical foundation of this encounter. Hospitality, for Levinas, is not a transactional or conditional act but a fundamental openness and receptivity to the Other, a welcome that destabilizes the self's sovereign control. The self is called to embrace the Other in its full alterity, beyond the limits of recognition and assimilation.[5] This ethical stance challenges any reduction of the Other to a familiar or manageable entity, asserting that true hospitality requires a surrender of power and a disruption of established norms. Levinas argues that the familiarity and agency inherent in the concept of 'home' must encompass hospitality. On one hand, home provides the conditions necessary for developing a sense of interiority; on the other, it fosters openness toward alterity. In this context, the welcoming home that invites alterity—what we might call a hospital—stands in stark contrast to the archive, understood in the Derridean sense as a force of

[5] This conundrum of recognizing true alterity is discussed at length in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2002) [29], in which Derrida writes about the allure of animalism or the animalistic and how the naked encounter between human and animal eludes reason. It becomes a matter of absolute otherness, monstrous and comically absurd, as when Derrida's cat, his "neighbor", gazes upon its naked master in the bath: "The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat" (p. 380). For Derrida, the impossible is not simply what cannot happen, but rather what challenges the very limits of possibility itself. The truly Other represents an encounter that is always beyond what can be anticipated, calculated, or comprehended; true hospitality and forgiveness is impossible because each would require an absolute break from exchange, reciprocity, and recognition.

law. The archive potentially excludes elements that would otherwise breach its own principles of categorization. It is this simultaneous presence of an inviting home and an excluding archive that serves as a framework for the portrayal of the museum in *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe.*

Hospitality, for Levinas, is not merely a passive welcome but an active responsibility to the Other, who remains irreducible to our preconceived notions or expectations. In this ethical framework, the Other resists totalization, representing an infinite demand that cannot be entirely contained within a system of thought or interaction. *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* operates precisely as a subversion of this notion of hospitality, akin to the violent impulse of Derrida's archive. The museum's archive represents a space that is inhospitable to the Other. Here, the Other can be understood as the untapped potential of alternative narratives, unplayed game mechanics, or the player's creative engagement—material that might have been 'alive' rather than 'dead', or which might lead to despair and even suicide due to the game's deceptive boundaries. The game welcomes the player into this space only to reveal its cold, restrictive boundaries, more *droit* than *justice*, more law than morality. It invites exploration but only within the tightly controlled confines that it has preordained. In Levinasian terms, this interaction is not an ethical encounter but a closed system that denies the player true openness or responsibility to the unknown. This framework of inhospitable design is further accentuated by the game's deliberate use of meta-commentary to expose the artificiality of its choices. Rather than opening itself to the Otherness of potential narratives or unexpected player actions, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* keeps the player trapped within a (cybernetic) circuit of known possibilities, highlighting the violence inherent in the game's archival structure. The ethical encounter with the Other is thwarted as the game systematically assimilates and neutralizes any genuine player deviation from its narrative blueprint.

In subverting player agency and embracing its own inhospitable stance, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* effectively queers the gaming experience, disrupting normative expectations about how interactive narratives should operate. To 'queer' in this context means to challenge traditional frameworks and norms, to subject the 'justice' of the game to deconstructibility, as Derrida says, and to resist the dominant trains of thought that dictate coherence, control, and linearity in gameplay. The game's use of the museum as a parody of archival space does precisely this by ridiculing the player's desire for clear-cut choices and predictable outcomes, revealing these desires as themselves complicit in the violence of structured narrative. By enthusiastically playing the game, we become frozen members of its museum and agreeable members of its inherent ideology (or law). The game ingeniously employs this museal dynamic on the player, blending humor and cynicism, by directing its "Escape" route straight into the museum—a symbolic graveyard for player agency. This queering effect is humorous yet radical, as it invites players to rethink their relationship to the game's world and to question the assumptions that underlie their expectations of control and agency. The game's playful yet critical engagement with these concepts aligns with queer theory's broader aim to unsettle and reconfigure established norms [25]—similar to the desired deconstructibility of the binary "law" that Derrida talks about. By foregrounding the absurdity of its own structure and the impossibility of true player autonomy, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* challenges players to confront the limitations and biases they bring to their gaming experiences.

One could say that the game redefines what hospitality, in the Levinasian sense, might mean in a digital context. Instead of offering a seamless, welcoming environment, it confronts the player with the discomfort of their own narrative desires being thwarted. The museum's archive does not extend an open hand but rather a sly grin, acknowledging the player's expectations only to dash them against the walls of its meticulously designed structure. This act of queering transforms *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* from a simple critique of game design into a broader philosophical meditation on control, expectation, and the ethics of the encounter with the Other. The radical gesture of the game is its refusal to fulfill the player's normative desires for mastery and coherence —ultimately reducing the choice of resisting to play the game at all—instead offering a space that is both in-hospitable and radically open to interpretation. In its resistance to player control, *The*

Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe enacts a kind of digital hospitality that aligns more closely with Levinas' notion of an encounter with the ungraspable Other-as-alterity [26]—a form of engagement that defies totalization and forces the player into a state of perpetual ethical questioning.[6]

5. Conclusion

In examining *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* through the philosophical lenses of Derrida's archive and Levinas' concept of the Other, we uncover a unique and complex intersection of game design, player agency, and ethical inquiry. The game's structure deliberately subverts player expectations of freedom, mastery, and control (key components of game feel), instead presenting an inhospitable narrative space where any meaningful exercise of agency is continuously deferred or negated. This design choice compels players to confront the game's restrictive boundaries and, in doing so, invites reflection on the inherent limitations of interactive media and the illusory promises of digital autonomy.

Through Derrida's notion of the archive, we see how the game embodies a law (*droit*) that shapes, categorizes, and excludes certain narrative potentials, revealing the archival impulse as a mechanism of control that enforces normative boundaries. Just as the archive preserves certain materials while dismissing others, the game's design enforces a rigid narrative framework that silences alternative possibilities, thus embodying an ethical violence against the player's creative agency. The in-game museum becomes a parody of this archival force, offering a curated interaction that entices players with apparent choice, only to enforce a preordained order—a law that is more exclusionary than welcoming.

Levinas' notion of hospitality, with its call to ethical responsibility and openness to alterity, deepens this analysis by highlighting the potential for an encounter with the Other within digital spaces. However, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* disrupts this potential, presenting a world that denies true openness or ethical engagement with the unknown. More than at home in the game's environment, the player is estranged, exiled, a "Jew" as Derrida writes. The Other, embodied in the player's desire for uncharted narrative paths or divergent play styles, is constrained, assimilated, or neutralized. This inhospitable design challenges the very notion of player agency as we commonly understand it, positioning the game as an encounter with alterity that refuses reciprocity or genuine engagement.

Ultimately, as outlined, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* redefines hospitality in a digital context by queering traditional frameworks of interactivity. It does not invite players to master its world but rather to experience the discomfort of thwarted control and to reflect on the limitations inherent in digital spaces. This act of queering extends beyond the mechanics of the game (and of course transcends matters of gender and sex), proposing a philosophical meditation on the ethical encounter and the 'violence' within structured narratives. By denying players their normative expectations, their justice vis-à-vis the law, the game destabilizes familiar expectations of agency, compelling us to consider new possibilities for understanding the ethics of interactivity in gaming.

In this light, *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* not only critiques game design conventions but also opens space for a broader philosophical inquiry into the nature of control, expectation, and freedom. The game's approach to narrative hospitality and its inhospitable archival structure offers a reconfiguration of digital space as an encounter with alterity, inviting players and critics to reconsider what it means to be open to the Other, especially within the structured confines of a digital archive. This intersection of philosophy and game design reminds us that games, far from being neutral, are fertile grounds for ethical questioning, where the boundaries of player agency and the expectations of hospitality are continuously negotiated.

Overall, our analysis underscores the inhospitality of the game environment, its complex relationship with—and resistance to—player agency, as well as its archival dimension, which inherently carries an underlying ideology of systemic violence. Returning, finally, to the idea

[6]Maybe because the game, from the outset, is designed as an *intentional* journey of ludo-narrative dissonance. But that is a longer story which cannot be pursued here

briefly introduced in the introduction, this approach to dissecting the layers of a commercial game —albeit a deliberately 'artsy' one—could guide us toward exploring how more critical forms of play might help us rethink gamification and serious or applied games. We would not go so far as Linehan et al. (2015), who, in their paper "Games Against Health: A Player-Centered Design Philosophy", provocatively dismantle the 'games for health' paradigm as part of a neoliberal, elitist mythology [27]. However, a reading of *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*, such as the one presented here, might harness a certain 'anti-obviousness' capable of sparking broader societal discussions, particularly in classroom settings. For instance, at first glance, the game—and others like it—positions itself as an open and inviting canvas for subversive exploration. In practice, however, it operates in opposition to this promise: It actively restricts the free trajectories of its players, as though to subtly and implicitly underscore a level of resistance—here encapsulated in the form of a popular 'game'—that is deemed intolerable within the underlying ideology of archival structures and narrative frameworks. Which is to say, the game reveals how we recollect memories, particularly the kinds of memories we are permitted to hold (and thus archive). It also comments on the sociocultural standards of storytelling and interpretation, suggesting that deviating from these norms leads, as portrayed in *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe*, to despair and even suicide.

This provocation operates through mockery and satire in much the same way the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise uses the chaotic environments of Liberty City and Los Santos as exaggerated parodies of real-world urban landscapes, saturated with mediated information and 'fun' gangsta material [28]. Most importantly, by employing *The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe* as a lens to step outside the established gamification canon, the game becomes a tool for fostering heated classroom discussions. These discussions can illuminate forms of violence that are not immediately visible but instead reside at the intersection of systemic injustice. In doing so, it prompts students, educators, and players alike to reflect critically on the insidious mechanisms underpinning archives, narratives, and institutions.

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