

**A Nation of Gamers:  
The History of Video Games in Canada**

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## Abstract

This thesis is a study of the economic, cultural, and political impact of video games in Canada. The trajectory of video games will be mapped beginning with the arrival of video games in Canadian markets in the mid-1970s and ending in the 2000s, with the debut of the *Globe and Mail*'s gaming section and the finalization of Ubisoft's \$263 million deal with the Ontario Government. Through this journey, it will be shown that over this roughly thirty-year period, video games have become interwoven into the everyday life of Canadians.

Today in Canada, many regard video games as important cultural objects and a growing economic sector, yet this was not always the case. The industry has managed to thrive thanks to government influences and arrivals of anchor studios at key times. Yet in the media and the government, video games were seen as a nuisance and threat to children for much of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and faced many opponents that urged them be banned or censored. Despite these scares, video games were able to grow and be consumed in Canada without the implementation of government restrictions. This history of video games in Canada argues that these factors were caused by a generation gap and larger moral panic, which dissipated after it grew into such a large enough industry and market, that it became lucrative to Canada as a whole. This research shows the reactions that disruptive technologies can instill into a nation and the lack of government involvement speaks to the influence that video games and its industry hold in Canada.

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*To my mother,  
Just look at how far we've come*

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*"I have lived my life as best I could, not knowing its purpose, but drawn forward like a moth to a distant moon... Who are we, who have been so blessed to share our stories like this? To speak across centuries?" –*

*Ezio Auditore da Firenze, Assassin's Creed Revelations*

## **Introduction: It's Dangerous to Go Alone! Take This.**

Christmas 1979. A 7-year old boy named John from Whitby, Ontario, opens his gifts praying to find a brand new Atari 2600. His mother and father sit on the couch, debating their choice. "He's going to be so disappointed that we didn't get him that game." "Of course but did you hear about *Death Race*? The government tried to ban it. It's so awful. There's no way I'm letting our son near video games." Fast-forward, John has grown up and lives in Montreal where he is one of more than four thousand people working in the city's video game industry.<sup>1</sup> For Christmas 2008, his wife buys him *Assassin's Creed*, a game made in the very city where he works. After their morning of discussing the game, the conversation turns to what games they want their children to play when they have them and the rumors of Toronto getting a new Ubisoft studio in the coming years with the help of government tax breaks. While fictional, this story outlines a very real and drastic change in the economic, cultural, and political aspects of video games in Canada. Canadians love to play video games and they are one of the biggest video game developing nations in the world, a major shift from their smaller beginnings with a limited consumer base and hesitation from national media and politicians. So what exactly led to this drastic change in opinion on video games in a period of just 30 years?

This paper will examine video games in Canada from the 1970s until the early 2000s, using three perspectives. The first chapter will examine the growth of the video game industry in Canada from its earliest beginnings until the arrival of Ubisoft Toronto. The second chapter will explore the cultural impact of video games, using newspaper

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<sup>1</sup> There were 4,400 workers in the Montreal video game industry in 2009, from David Ebner, "Toronto Scores Points in Video Game Sector," *Globe and Mail* August 2, 2009, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/technology/toronto-scores-points-in-video-game-sector/article4281020/>.

articles as a way to understand not only the video game market in Canada but also in what regard the media held games. The last chapter will examine government debates and reports to survey how both federal and provincial governments have changed their stance towards games. In each of these realms, video games began as a minor aspect of Canadian life, and grew into a much larger part of the country's economy and culture. This thesis argues that video games became a part of everyday Canadian life, as reflected in economic, political, and cultural spheres. It was not a straightforward story, with highs and lows between the 1970s and the 2010s, but despite this tumultuous journey, video games are a crucial part of Canadian society today

The source material and methodology is important when examining this subject matter. The first chapter combines big data and close reading methods, using an online database of games and companies along with secondary source material to corroborate what the database reveals. The second and third chapters use traditional historical means, drawing from major Canadian newspapers and parliamentary debates from approximately 1975 until 2005. The reason that the timeframe begins in the mid-1970s is based on the lack of overall industry prior to this period and there being little in the way of public reaction up until then. Simply put, in Canada, awareness of video games and their industry only began in the 1970s. The purpose of ending around the mid-2000s is because that period is still quite recent and it is difficult to make historical conclusions on something still ongoing. While there are still sources revolving around video games in Canada history that need to be scoured, the various aspects consulted here provide thorough and holistic understanding of how video games have appeared Canada throughout the last 40 years.

There is one major source that will not be examined in this paper that is worth mentioning: the games themselves. Particularly when looking at the video game industry in Canada, video games speak wonders about the current cultural and societal issues at any given time and playing them would undoubtedly reveal numerous conclusions on the state of Canada's industry. Time was the primary limitation regarding this decision, as the interactive nature of video games along with the numerous narrative branches available in them meant getting a full experience of any one game could take hundreds of hours. That, along with the sheer number of games made in Canada, made it impossible to play all of them within the time frame of writing this thesis. However, they will be referenced regarding their impact on Canadian culture as a whole rather than what their contents say regarding societal issues.

The other major issue that comes with this paper is gauging exactly how widespread video games were in Canada at any given point. While the second chapter uses newspapers to measure the interest in video games in Canada, there are few instances where precise numbers of people that play games were available until recently. Demographics are also difficult to determine, although there are some inferences that can be made. In 1982, game cartridges sold for \$30-\$80 or, using the Bank of Canada application to calculate inflation, \$70-\$185 in 2015 dollars.<sup>2</sup> In 1993, this number was \$55-\$80 or about \$80-\$120 in 2015.<sup>3</sup> From this, and the current retail price of new games set at about \$60-\$70, it shows that the price of video games have steadily gone down and also that the cost of games likely limited them to the middle-class and above. There are

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<sup>2</sup> David Aston, "Popularity of Video is Leaving Less Money for Other Purchases," *Globe and Mail* June 28, 1982, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>3</sup> David Smith, "Nintendo Games are the Barbie of the '90s," *Calgary Herald* February 7, 1993, accessed through Microform.

almost certainly class and audience issues when it comes to video games but without the hard numbers is difficult to define them with any precision. These issues will appear implicitly throughout this research, in all realms. The government chapter will show that the House of Commons was unconcerned with games until they became a worthwhile investment of tax dollars, and even using newspapers where reviews do not appear consistently until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reveals that games are at the hands of middle-class and often young consumers, with little interest from those that are older. That being said, newspapers and government debate are sufficient for determining the popularity of games by examining when and how often articles and discussions focus on games.

### **Historiography**

The history of video games in Canada does not have a lot of literature to draw from but this section will explore some select fields of research and how this thesis will expand upon them. To begin, Canadian economic history will be examined, revealing that despite the field's lengthy history, the video game industry and its economic sector has not appeared in the literature. Then, looking at the history of video games, it will be shown that Canada has been neglected in comparison to other nations, specifically the United States and Japan. Finally, Canadian video game industry research will be dissected and it will display that there are problems in methodology where the majority of research ignores the bottom-up perspectives of individual studios and the public's attitude towards the industry and medium as a whole.

Before looking at economic history, the sector that video games inhabit economically needs to be outlined. Video games are a part of the creative economy,

which is best defined as industries and services bound by their access to intellectual resources and creativity, rather than the physical resources required by manufacturing or staples sectors.<sup>4</sup> The transition to this type of economy has become a talking point in Canada and other Western developed nations in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>5</sup> David Hesmondhalgh is a leading scholar in the study of these industries and argues that a number of factors led to the focus on the creative economy but perhaps most significantly, in the 1970s and 1980s, Western developed nations saw severe declines in the manufacturing sector and were forced to look at the creative economy to help fill the gap.<sup>6</sup> This will be important not only when looking at Canadian economic history shortly but also in the rise of the Canadian video game industry. These economic conditions played out across the nation and parts of the country began to transition to this type of economy, which in turn brought the video game industry. The creative economy and its Canadian impact will be touched on in more depth in chapter 1.

A larger historiography could dissect the long and detailed history of economic history in Canada, but what is important to take from the research is the creative economic sector, and its arrival into Canada, has been largely omitted. Harold Innis' *The Fur Trade in Canada*, published originally in 1930, was one of the first major volumes to

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<sup>4</sup> This thesis chose to use the terms creative economy and knowledge economy interchangeably although a debate between what each term means. See David Throsby, *The Economics of Cultural Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88-89.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tsaparis, "Canada must develop our knowledge economy," *Globe and Mail* April 27, 2014, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/leadership-lab/canada-must-develop-our-knowledge-economy/article18229988/> and for European interest in the creative economy see EY, *Creating growth: measuring cultural and creative markets in the EU*, December 2014, accessed June 9, 2014, [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-Creating-Growth-Measuring-Cultural-and-Creative-Markets-in-the-EU/\\$FILE/EY-Creating-Growth-Measuring-Cultural-and-Creative-Markets-in-the-EU.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-Creating-Growth-Measuring-Cultural-and-Creative-Markets-in-the-EU/$FILE/EY-Creating-Growth-Measuring-Cultural-and-Creative-Markets-in-the-EU.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (London: Sage, 2013), 97.

appear in this field but the resource sectors are the core focus of the work.<sup>7</sup> This makes sense considering the economic conditions at the time but the staples thesis that Innis introduced carried over into much of economic history for decades. Even in a more recent example, Kenneth Norrie et al.'s *A History of the Canadian Economy*, attempted to build on earlier economic history with theory from the new social history and other aspects.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite these improvements, the creative economy is forgotten in the larger context of the Canadian economy.

One creative economic area that has received historical research is Silicon Valley's history. Silicon Valley is important to Canada's video game history in that the high-technology hub contains many of the same features that are seen in the video game industry, including clustering and creative policy making. Thus looking at how the Valley's history is written provides a solid basis regarding methodology. Another reason to look at Silicon Valley is that the city of Vancouver's relative proximity to Palo Alto and the entire American West Coast, in comparison to the rest of Canada, influenced the city's early technology cluster in the 1970s and 1980s. Lastly, the video game industry came about from the technology available in the Valley and therefore its history is a crucial part of the video game story.

Paul Freiberger and Michael Swaine's *Fire in the Valley* was an earlier work that covered the tech hub's history, drawing from personal accounts and newspaper to explore what gave rise to the area's technology sector.<sup>9</sup> The book delves not only into the larger

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<sup>7</sup> Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*, Revised Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956).

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Norrie, Douglas O'ram and J.C. Herbert Emery, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2008), xii.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Freiberger and Michael Swaine, *Fire in the Valley: Making of the Personal Computer* (Berkeley: Osborne/McGraw-Hill, 1984).

socio-political factors that allowed for the incubation of a large number of tech companies but also the people and firms that helped move the industry forward. This is an important aspect of the book's methodology that will be utilized in the first chapter, focusing on the individuals and studios that brought spin-offs and a pool of talent with them. Christophe Lécuyer's *Making Silicon Valley* looks at the history from a much broader perspective, researching the larger factors that made Palo Alto prime for the emergence of that type of industry.<sup>10</sup> These factors regarding the video game industry will be covered in both the first and third chapter, examining how economic and political factors helped the industry thrive in Canada.

The first chapter will examine how Silicon Valley and the technology hub on the American West Coast influenced the arrival of the video game industry in Vancouver in the 1980s, but examining the Valley's history also provides a strong model in terms of how to examine the industry methodologically. Combining both top-down and bottom-up methods allows the research to tell a fuller story, exploring what high-level factors affected the growth of games while also giving credit to specific people that had a hand in its success. This will be given more detail in the introduction of the first chapter but the larger point of understanding an industry at its macro and micro level is an important one.

Video game history has received less coverage in academia, although there are still a number of worthwhile pieces, both popular and scholarly, that cover the industry and the medium's cultural impact. Video games were born in the 1960s but arguably only gained positive mainstream recognition in the late 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> As such,

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<sup>10</sup> Christophe Lécuyer, *Making Silicon Valley: Innovation and the Growth of High Tech, 1930-1970* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> See Tristan Donovan, *Replay: The History of Video Games* (Yellow Ant: East Sussex, 2010), 10-11 and Randy Nichols, "Who Plays, Who Pays? Mapping Video Game Production and Consumption Globally," in



critical research on the medium was lacking until quite recently. Mia Consalvo, a communications professor at Concordia University, in her article, “The Future of Game Studies,” explores the earliest research into video games, which involved trying to link video game violence with real world aggression in gamers. By the 1980s video games had captured the attention of parents and government officials who wished to find out if video games were harmful.<sup>12</sup> While Consalvo’s research does not pertain directly to Canada, this will be seen when looking at the public and government’s reactions to video games in chapters 2 and 3, respectively. Toby Miller argues in “Gaming for Beginners” that every new cultural technology has been received with hesitation because they “threaten... the established order.”<sup>13</sup> This thesis will examine these themes from a Canadian perspective, showing that initially games were viewed with hesitation because they disrupted the current social order. Consequently as video games and their audience matured in the 1990s and 2000s, games were embraced as a part of Canadian culture.

Heading into the new millennium, the history of the video games became a topic of interest. Thus, the history of the video game industry has been well covered in the last two decades. However, while this work is thorough and mostly well written, it is not uncommon to find that the Canadian perspective on video games and the growth of the industry is sidelined in favour of other international perspectives, particularly American. It is important to know what research has been done previously on video game history and finding where this thesis will fit into the historiography.

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*Gaming Globally: Production, Play, and Place*, ed. Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Mia Consalvo, “The Future of Game Studies,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies, Volume VI, Media Studies Futures*, ed. Angharad N. Valdivia et al. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 119-120.

<sup>13</sup> Toby Miller, “Gaming for Beginners,” *Games and Culture* 1, 1 (2006): 7.

Tristan Donovan's *Replay: The History of Video Games* is perhaps the most well-known and referenced video game history book in the field. His book begins at the Second World, progresses to the birth of the video game industry and ends with broader themes in present day gaming. *Replay* is comprehensive, deep in detail and includes some international perspectives, which is critical to achieve a holistic history of the medium. Traditionally, Japan and the United States have been the dominant nations in video game industry history but *Replay* goes beyond their borders by looking at the development of industries in South Korea, Europe, and Australia. While it is likely forgotten due to its proximity to America and its assumed inclusion in the grander North American perspective on video games, Canada's role in this work is basically null, unless in passing. The other major comprehensive video game history book is Steven Kent's *The Ultimate History of Video Games*.<sup>14</sup> Released nine years prior to *Replay*, Kent's book does not cover the present due to its age but still provides a thorough examination of the birth and rise of the video games. While *Replay* excludes Canada in spite of its attempts to give an international history, *The Ultimate History of Video Games* is much more US-centric, forgoing the rest of the world to give a more in depth look at the industry in America.

Donovan and Kent have compiled excellent works that are still used to examine the overall history of video games and their industry. Donovan in particular does an excellent job presenting not only how games were made but also how they were integrated into American culture and the hurdles they faced from the public and government spheres alike. Their lack of Canadian material is why this thesis is necessary.

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<sup>14</sup> Steven L. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon and Beyond - The Story Behind the Craze that Touched Our Lives and Changed the World* (New York: Prima Publishing, 2001).

It will be shown that while video games faced struggles in the States, these were represented in Canada as well.

Tristan Donovan and Steven Kent are popular historians that have taken on video game history but academics have also examined the industry. The works by these authors, specifically Randy Nichols, Greig de Peuter, and Nick Dyer-Witheford, look at the industry with a critical eye but again, Canada is lost in the overall examination of the industry. What these books do provide though is more methodology from which to borrow, examining the industry from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. These frameworks are used in this thesis when looking at the industry and its reactions in greater Canada.

Randy Nichols is a professor of English and Media Studies at Bentley University. His latest book, *The Video Game Business*, studies in depth the inner workings of the industry including marketing practices and the video game industry model. In his brief history of the industry, Nichols combines a larger top-down perspective with case studies to examine how the principles line up with individual companies. This is an approach that will be largely modeled in the first chapter, looking at the overall Canadian industry while also keying in on important studios in the industry's history.

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter have also looked at the video game industry in their academic research. Dyer-Witheford is a media studies professor at the University of Western Ontario, and de Peuter is a communications professor at Wilfred Laurier University. In 2009, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter collaboratively published *Games of Empire*.<sup>15</sup> The book's industry history is written from a worker's perspective,

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<sup>15</sup> Greig de Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

going beyond studios in a bottom-up view of the industry. This history parallels that of Donovan and Kent, in that the political and economic factors take a back seat to the labor and social issues of the industry. When looking at the Canadian video game industry, this is a good framework to model where the larger socio-economic factors are important but the acts of individuals within the industry are also crucial when considering how the industry develops and why.

Examining history of video games and the industry reveals that the Canadian perspective is missing. As well, while the larger game history works have done well by looking at the industry through the studios, the larger trends like government and social aspects are crucial to the whole history. Moving into the research on the Canadian industry will reveal more regarding methodology but also the lack of an in-depth look at national reactions to what video games as a part of Canadian life.

When looking at the Canadian industry the works of Nick Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter again prove fruitful. In Dyer-Witheford's article with Zena Sharman from the University of British Columbia, "The Political Economy of Canada's Game Industry," they critically examine the industry and its inner workings including the role of anchor studios and economic factors that lead to a successful cluster.<sup>16</sup> Dyer-Witheford and Sharman also cover the attempted regulation of video games in North America and the types of government forces that influence the industry. These aspects will directly play into the first and third chapters of this book but the public's view on games and the change in perception of games is overlooked. The political-economic approach to the

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<sup>16</sup> Nick Dyer-Witheford and Zena Sharman, "The Political Economy of Canada's Video Game and Computer Industry," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30 (2005): 187-210.

industry is important but the way that games were received in Canada is also necessary and will be explored in the second chapter.

Greig de Peuter covers the history of the industry in more detail than Dyer-Witthford in “Video Games Production: Level Up.”<sup>17</sup> De Peuter’s book chapter opens with the founding of Distinctive Software Interactive (DSI) by Don Mattrick and Jeff Sember, an important event in early Canadian industry history. However, much like Dyer-Witthford’s article, de Peuter’s piece largely reviews the industry top-down perspective, focusing on the government and international influences on the industry. Mia Consalvo in “the Canadian Video Game Industry,” tackles the issue along similar lines as de Peuter but manages to include individual studios in her assessment.<sup>18</sup> Consalvo includes a historical case study of Bioware, an Edmonton-based game developer, in her piece. By including this, Consalvo goes beyond the political economic approach by examining the studios at the bottom and how the influences around them made an impact. Consalvo’s model is similar to the one that Nichols provides in *The Video Game Business* and this method is quite effective in critically analyzing the industry.

While these authors provide a good take on the Canadian video game industry, there are limitations to their work as pieces of historical scholarship. One such problem is the issue of their perspective. The Canadian video game industry has largely been observed from a top-down perspective, ignoring the role that individual studios play and rather focusing on larger overall forces. While de Peuter, Dyer-Witthford, Consalvo and

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<sup>17</sup> Greig de Peuter, “Canada’s Video Game Production: Level Up,” in *Cultural Industries.ca: Making Sense of Canadian Media in the Digital Age*, ed. Ira Wagman and Peter Urquhart (Toronto: Lorimer, 2012), 77-93.

<sup>18</sup> Mia Consalvo, “The Canadian Video Game Industry,” in *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, ed. Paul Attallah and Leslie Regan Shade (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2013), 238-253.

other authors provide meaningful analysis on the industry and government influences, the studios often take a backseat in the history, with some limited exceptions. The public's reaction and cultural impact of games is also lost in this analysis. These aspects will be considered in this thesis to explain how everyday Canadians interact with video games, as this is just as critical as the industry's history.

This historiography proved that while there is plenty of research on Canadian economic history, history of video games, and the video games industry, there are issues of methodology and content that need to be addressed. The creative economy has not been covered when examining Canadian economic history meaning that the video games or their related industries are not a part of this story. In the video games fields, the entire history of the Canadian games industry is still incomplete, especially as it pertains to the cultural impact on Canada. Finally, when referencing methodology, looking at this history demonstrates that when dissecting an industry and its impact, it is crucial to observe it through the socio-economic factors along with the bottom-up perspective. Through this, a holistic understanding of video games in Canada can be achieved, capturing the perspective of the common consumer and game developer along with the high-level aspects that influence the industry. These factors will be covered in the thesis' upcoming chapters, providing an overall look at the Canadian industry that has not been done before.

### **Press Any Button to Start: Conclusions**

The history of video games in Canada is a story that has had aspects of it told but not in a holistic and long-form approach. This thesis will add to the historiography and

explore how video games became a major part of Canadian culture. This is important research, as video games continue to grow in Canada and worldwide. Knowing where the industry and its consumer market in Canada came from is necessary to discovering the hurdles that games managed through in order to become a representation of culture and consider the challenges that they will face ahead. The first chapter begins by looking at the industry and its trajectory to serious economic force.

## Chapter One

### Strategy Guide: A History of the Canadian Video Game Industry

#### Introduction

The video game industry in Canada is still young, but its beginnings can be traced back to the early 1980s. It grew from there to its large size today, employing 16,500 people and contributing \$2.3 billion to Canada's Gross Domestic Product, or roughly 0.1% of Canada's 2014 GDP.<sup>1</sup> In less than 40 years, the Canadian video games industry has grown from an industry defined by a pair of teenagers in Vancouver to a major economic sector. Some of the world's largest games are produced in Canada including blockbusters *Assassin's Creed*, *Mass Effect*, and the hit soccer series *FIFA*. There is also a burgeoning indie game scene with smaller studios creating successful games like *Guacamelee* and *N++*. This prompts the chapter's central question: how did the Canadian video game industry grow so rapidly and what influenced its trajectory?

Video game development in Canada is a crucial aspect to the medium's history in Canada. The industry has both impacted and been impacted by the culture of video games in Canada. As will be shown in the second and third chapter, game development became a notable part of the media coverage and government interest in video games as it grew over time. Not only that, but the fact that games were being developed in Canada is a sign of cultural and economic impact that video games were having on everyday life. As such, it is appropriate that it be examined first, for it is closely tied with the arguments of the subsequent chapters. Beyond just its ties with society and the government, there are a ton

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<sup>1</sup> "2014 Essential Facts About the Canadian Video Game Industry," *Entertainment Software Association of Canada*, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015, 4, <http://theesa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ESAC-Essential-Facts-2014.pdf>; and "Canada GDP," *Trading Economics*, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/canada/gdp>.



of Canadians making games and the emergence of the industry is important to the overall history of video games in Canada.

This chapter will follow the video game industry in Canada from its earliest influences to the arrival of Ubisoft in Toronto in 2009. To begin, the chapter will explore the overall Canadian industry through a data-centered, or “big data” approach, using entries from an online database. A more detailed explanation of this approach and database will be provided in the methodology section. The chapter will then perform a bottom-up case study analysis of the various clusters of game development in Canada, highlighting the factors and studios that allowed the industry to thrive in certain areas while faltering in others. The big data analysis will reveal how the industry developed at a grand scale; displaying large trends that close analysis miss. The case studies will provide nuance to the data, by breaking down the larger trends at the macro level through specific moments and studios. By using both of these methods, this study will give a full view of the industry, noting its major changes and themes along with the lower-level intricacies that influenced the industry’s growth.

In the 1980s – after the global video games crash, discussed later in this chapter – most Canadian video game companies failed or shifted out of games. There was one exception: Vancouver-based DSI, founded by Don Mattrick and Jeff Sember in 1982, managed to succeed. In 1991, DSI was purchased by Electronic Arts (EA) and transitioned into Electronic Arts Canada (EA Canada). This studio would become the ‘anchor’ for the region and Vancouver’s industry would grow rapidly, largely influenced by the studio. In 1997, Montreal gained its own major studio when Ubisoft Montreal opened its doors. Currently the makers of the world-renowned *Assassin’s Creed* series,

Ubisoft has helped turn Montreal into one of the biggest video game development cities in the world. Ubisoft opened another studio in Toronto in 2009, as the city used the multi-national publishing giant as a way to solidify their already large indie development scene. Other areas in Canada have seen some growth in video games but not at the level as Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto.

How exactly did Canada become the third largest video game nation in the world? The video game industry developed strongest in Canada's largest cities: Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto. While each of these cities' industries grew uniquely, there are some common factors that allowed them to grow into significant video game development areas. Major city populations are the home to video game clusters, with the most successful areas containing a large studio to anchor the industry. The theory behind clustering and anchor studios will be explained shortly as it is important when looking at video game development. From this it follows that the Canadian video game industry revolves around the relationship between big and small business, because while anchor studios are key to a sustainable cluster, they must also be able to spawn smaller studios in order to continue growth. The cities of Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto have been able to create successful video games clusters by achieving this relationship, and will continue to grow because of this.

### **Theory and Context**

As indicated above, there are a number of factors that helped our story begin in Vancouver that warrant examination. Industry clustering is important when comprehending why the video game industry thrives most in the largest urban centres of

Canada. As a subset of this, anchor studios, a large pool of workers, and middleware companies are all aspects that lead to a strong cluster. Lastly, video games are a part of the larger creative economy, and it is important to understand what exactly this economic sector is and how it has impacted the growth of the industry in Canada.

Economic clustering theory has existed considerably longer than the video game industry has existed. Alfred Marshall, one of the most influential economic academics of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote an account of the benefits of co-locating firms of the same industry in 1920.<sup>2</sup> The Detroit automobile cluster is perhaps the best example to understanding how co-location can benefit firms. Access to large skilled labour pools, transport ways, physical materials, and other resources has allowed Detroit to thrive as an automobile hub for decades. Another example is Silicon Valley's computer hardware and software industry, which despite having an industry that does not require access to physical resources or causeways still thrives as a cluster. Keys to Silicon Valley's growth came with Stanford's ability to create a sustainable group of high-tech workers support from venture capitalists, and spin-off firms.<sup>3</sup> However, there is plenty of evidence that co-location may occur in certain industries but does not influence its ability to survive.<sup>4</sup> It begs the question then if the video game industry exists in the larger areas of Canada because of simple population influences or if there are actual benefits.

De Vaan et al.'s study on the clustering of the video game industry is perhaps the best research done on this subject. After exhaustive statistical analysis, the authors conclude that as clusters grow in size, firms within them are less likely to go out of

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Macmillan, 1920).

<sup>3</sup> Lécuyer, *Making Silicon Valley*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Mathijs De Vaan, Ron Doschma, and Koen Frenken, "Clustering and Firm Performance in Project-Based Industries: The Case of the Global Video game Industry, 1972-2007," *Journal of Economic Geography* 13 (2013): 966.

business.<sup>5</sup> There are a number of key reasons they outline that are crucial to this conclusion. Spin-off companies, defined as companies that splinter off of larger and/or established studios, are a major part of sustaining a cluster, as these firms are more likely to succeed and expand, thereby furthering the growth of the cluster as a whole.<sup>6</sup> This is seen in Canada's industry, particularly in Vancouver and Montreal where the industry has been established longer. Other areas like the Maritimes in Canada, while containing a number of development studios, do not have a large studio to solidify the area and as such only have periphery industries.

There is another aspect that influences not only the size of a cluster but its spin-offs, is the presence of an anchor studio. In Nick-Dyer Witheford and Zena Sharman's research, they found that when looking at Vancouver and Montreal, both cities were able to trace numerous companies back to studios EA Canada and Ubisoft Montreal, respectively, and that each has furthered the growth of the city's industry.<sup>7</sup> Gouglas et al. come to a similar conclusion in their report from 2009, stating that the most successful game clusters in Canada all contain a larger studio from which spawns other studios in what they call an "oak tree" model.<sup>8</sup> However, an anchor studio is not the only element necessary to growing a cluster. For example, Edmonton sports a large studio in Bioware but has not managed to see the same sort of growth seen in larger cities in Canada.

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<sup>5</sup> De Vaan et al. "Clustering and Firm Performance," 986-987.

<sup>6</sup> De Vaan et al. "Clustering and Firm Performance," 981.

<sup>7</sup> Dyer-Witheford and Sharman, "The Political Economy of Canada's Video Game and Computer Industry," 196.

<sup>8</sup> Sean Gouglas et al., "Computer Games and Canada's Digital Economy: The Role of Universities in Promoting Innovation," Report to the Social Science Humanities Research Council, Knowledge Synthesis Grants on Canada's Digital Economy, December 1, 2014, 7-8, <http://circa.ualberta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/ComputerGamesAndCanadasDigitalEconomy.pdf>.

Another element that aids in the creation of a video game cluster is the existence of middleware companies. Middleware are related industries to video game creation like digital graphics companies, and they help a cluster by providing resources to surrounding developers, making it easier to create games. In Sebastien Darchen and Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay's "Policies for Creative Clusters: A Comparison between the Video Game Industries in Melbourne and Montreal," for example, they find that the existence of these types of companies have aided both Montreal and Toronto in their games industry, by providing immaterial resources and employees to these industries.<sup>9</sup> Again, this becomes linked to why the video game industry thrives in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto as each of these cities has a surrounding creative economic sector, which will be defined shortly, to feed into video games.

Canada's game development has also benefited greatly from government tax incentives and policy support. Both Ontario and Quebec have implemented aggressive tax incentives for video game developers, which has given it an edge internationally and regionally over other areas.<sup>10</sup> The United Kingdom in particular has seen a drastic decline in their once strong industry as studios and game developers have migrated to Canadian companies in recent years.<sup>11</sup> This is crucial to this chapter's examination of the growth of the industry but will also be discussed in chapter three where it will be examined from the

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<sup>9</sup> Sebastien Darchen and Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, "Policies for Creative Clusters: A Comparison between the Video Game Industries in Melbourne and Montreal," *European Planning Studies* (2014): 4, accessed August 1, 2015, doi: 10.1080/09654313.2013.865712.

<sup>10</sup> Aphra Kerr and Anthony Cawley, "The Spatialisation of the Digital Games Industry: Lessons from Ireland," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18, 4 (September 2012): 404, accessed July 30, 2015, doi: 10.1080/10286632.2011.598515.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Rose, "TIGA: Over 40% of UK Devs who Lose Their Jobs Move Overseas," *Gamasutra* January 19, 2012, accessed June 7, 2015, [http://gamasutra.com/view/news/129164/TIGA\\_Over\\_40\\_of\\_UK\\_devs\\_who\\_lose\\_their\\_jobs\\_move\\_overseas.php](http://gamasutra.com/view/news/129164/TIGA_Over_40_of_UK_devs_who_lose_their_jobs_move_overseas.php).

government's perspective. Anchor firms, large labour pools, and government support are all factors to maintaining a large video game cluster.

Now it is necessary to define the creative economy, as this is the sector from which the video game industry belongs. While there are varying definitions to what the creative or knowledge economy is, this thesis will limit its description to industries and services that require intellectual resources and creativity rather than physical materials. In Canada, the creative economy has become an important point of discussion since the 2008 Financial Crisis. Severe declines in manufacturing have forced Canada to look to other industries in order to fill the employment gap.<sup>12</sup> Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz acknowledged this problem in 2014 when he stated that the 2008 recession would likely have a permanent damaging effect on Canada's manufacturing sector.<sup>13</sup> Many consider the creative economy, also called the knowledge economy, a solution to this problem. Paul Tsaparis, a former chair of the Information Technology Association of Canada, declared in the *Globe and Mail* in 2014 that in order to "sustain our standard of living, Canada needs to fully develop the knowledge sector."<sup>14</sup> This new economy is at the forefront of the public and media's mind today but its roots existed long before 2008.

The creative economy's emergence appeared in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. David Hesmondhalgh is a leading scholar in the study of the creative industries and argues that while there were many factors that led to focus on the creative, perhaps most importantly, "in the G7 countries between 1970 and 1990, profits fell significantly

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Moncur, "Canada's Auto Industry Thrived and Died in Windsor," *The Huffington Post* November 20, 2014, accessed June 2, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/bruce-moncur/ford-plant-windsor\\_b\\_6192208.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/bruce-moncur/ford-plant-windsor_b_6192208.html).

<sup>13</sup> David Parkinson, "Rob Insight Economy: A Wake-Up Call from Straight-Talking Poloz," *Globe and Mail* October 23, 2014, accessed June 3, 2015, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>14</sup> Tsaparis, "Canada must develop our knowledge economy."

across all sectors, but especially manufacturing,” in what Hesmondhalgh calls the Long Downturn.<sup>15</sup> In this period we see the emergence of creative economic sectors across North America. Silicon Valley is one example of a creative economic area that appeared at this time. Silicon Valley’s influence and the creative economy as a whole is a key component to the Canadian video game industry as its arrival in parts of Canada is linked to where game development first appears. This will be discovered shortly when looking at Vancouver’s beginnings in the games industry.

### **Big Data, Giant Bomb and Distance Reading: Methodology**

Alongside the theory, the methodology of this chapter is unquestionably important to its overall arguments. The history of the Canadian video game industry is explored in this chapter through a number of lenses. It combines the use of traditional secondary source material with primary sources, using the *Giant Bomb* wiki database. A wiki database is unique in that its information is created, edited, and maintained by large groups of users. This crowdsourcing approach to creating a database is beneficial, as it allows for numerous users to check and fix any flaws in the data while also allowing any to put in companies and games that may be missing. The downfall though is that even with many users inputting data, some companies and games are missed. There is also no guarantee that the database’s entries are perfect or complete. That said, like Wikipedia, procedures and controls are in place to ensure accuracy. Some flaws will undoubtedly exist, as will be seen in the analysis, but the overwhelming majority of Giant Bomb’s entries are accurate. This is where the power of big data is useful, as when the dataset in

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<sup>15</sup> Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 97.

an analysis becomes large enough, the dataset reveals larger trends than any given entry could.<sup>16</sup>

The method used in this chapter is heavily influenced by Franco Moretti's distant reading approach by using a wide array of data to get an understanding of the industry's history as a whole rather than attempting to make conclusions from just the micro level.<sup>17</sup> This means that larger encompassing trends will be found through this data giving a top-down view of the industry and its history. *Giant Bomb*, a CBS Interactive video game news outlet, contains a large collection of video game and company entries. These entries were scraped using a computer program and then organized, graphed, and geographically mapped to give a clearer idea of not only the global industry, but also the Canadian industry itself. Other studies of the Canadian industry notably those of Sean Gouglas, Nick Dyer-Witthford, and Zena Sharman are used to confirm the conclusions from the *Giant Bomb* data.<sup>18</sup>

The second way that the history of video games are explored in this chapter will be through a hybrid of business and urban economic history. What this entails is that individual agency will be taken largely into account here, highlighting people and companies that played instrumental roles in furthering the growth of Canada's industry. As well, economic conditions at the city-level will be factored in, as they are incredibly important in the growth of video games as an industrial sector. While the public and government influences are important to the industry, their roles and changes are covered

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<sup>16</sup> For an overview of big data, see "Data, data everywhere," *The Economist* February 25, 2010, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/node/15557443>.

<sup>17</sup> For further reading, see Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Gouglas et al., "Computer Games and Canada's Digital Economy" and Dyer-Witthford and Sharman, "The Political Economy of Canada's Video Game and Computer Industry."



in the second and third chapters respectively. This second approach follows a similar trajectory to my large data approach, showing that video games developers gained strong roots in Vancouver before becoming major industries in Montreal and later Toronto. Smaller clusters like the Prairies, Ottawa, and the Maritimes will be discussed as well, although evidence will show that these areas are home to primarily smaller studios with the key exception of Edmonton's BioWare.

By combining these top-down and bottom-up approaches, this chapter aims to provide a holistic understanding of the history the video game industry in Canada. It would be possible to do this analysis with one method or the other but including both allows for a much more complete view. This chapter will first begin with our big data approach.

### **Enter the Matrix: Big Data View of the Canadian Games Industry**

Before immediately diving into the results of our dataset, a detailed outline of the *Giant Bomb* database and how its data was manipulated for the purpose of this paper will be provided. *Giant Bomb* contains nearly 11,000 game company entries and more than 40,000 video games. This database is extensive but by no means complete. Specifically, the database is lacking when looking at early Canadian game history, missing companies like Logidisque. That said, it would be nearly impossible to get the information on every single development and publishing company or their video games and the *Giant Bomb* set contains more than enough entries to make larger conclusions on the video game industry as a whole. As well, its application program interface, a developer manual of sorts, made it readily available to web scrape, and contains more entries than some of the other online databases like *GamesDB* or *Moby Games*. The size does not necessarily mean that it is

better than others but it does mean that there are more entries from which to make conclusions from.

From this larger data set, two smaller subsets were created to narrow the focus down to just Canada. One set contained all the companies from Canada. This was taken by simply narrowing the country metadata – that is the data that describes the studio or game’s country location – to just ‘Canada’. This returned 189 Canadian companies with only 88 of them containing the founding date of the company. While not an inconsequential amount of data, it certainly is pressing the limit of what might be considered a ‘big data’ set. However, the trends from this set are still useful.

The other set holds all the games developed or published by Canadian companies. This set required more work to establish but also created a more populated timeline and map, as it had over a thousand entries. In order to make this set, any games made by companies were compiled, creating a set full of Canadian company games. This caused some complications, as there are instances when a game is developed or published by multiple Canadian companies, resulting in duplicate game entries. For example, Metanet Software developed *N+*, an indie game released in 2008. However, Klei Entertainment Inc., Slick Entertainment, and SilverBirch studios also helped develop the game’s handheld and console versions and so there were four entries for *N+* to reflect the four different studios. Another example is *Assassin’s Creed: Unity*, which was developed simultaneously by both Ubisoft Montreal and Ubisoft Toronto.

Despite these duplicates, the data is still useful to understanding where the industry exists in Canada. While having game duplicates seems counter-intuitive, it actually allows for a better understanding of what cities are most active in the video game

development scene. Ubisoft Montreal was the lead developer for *Assassin's Creed: Unity* but the fact that Ubisoft Toronto was active in the creation of the game still reflects the city's industry. This set is much larger than the first, with 1079 video game entries and 922 entries with a release date. These two sets reveal the scope and location of the industry in Canada.

With these sets, trends emerge on where and when the video game exists in Canada. From the Giant Bomb database, it is clear that the video game industry exists in a few set locations. The top three locations of companies in Canada are Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. These three cities contain 118 of the 174 total companies with associated city locations, or 68% of Canada's game companies. Outside of those strict cities, many of the other cities are either directly in the surrounding census metropolitan areas of these cities or within another defined geographic or economy zone. For example, Burnaby, and Langley, British Columbia are listed as separate cities with game companies but both are within the Greater Vancouver Area. This is similar for Toronto and Montreal as well with cities like Kirkland, Oshawa, and Mississauga all residing within the metropolitan limits of their respective hub city. With this in mind, the actual representation is considerably larger. Expanding the clusters from exclusively the core cities of Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal to Metro Vancouver, the Golden Horseshoe economic zone, and Metro Montreal, the number of companies from these areas is actually 136 of the 174, or 78% of the companies in Canada.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The composition of these hubs for this research was Metro Vancouver included Vancouver, Burnaby, and Langley; Golden Horseshoe was Toronto, Mississauga, Oakville, St. Catharines, Ancaster, Markham, and Hamilton; and Metro Montreal was Montreal, Kirkland, and Outremont. It could be argued that Victoria, BC; London, ON; and Quebec City, QB could be a part of these clusters as well but for the purpose of this study they were left out.

Number of Game Releases by City			
City	Total	Province	Cluster
Montreal	242	QB	Montreal
Vancouver	241	BC	Vancouver
Burnaby	152	BC	Vancouver
Toronto	100	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Quebec City	69	QB	Quebec City
Ottawa	46	ON	Ottawa
St. John's	35	NFL	Maritime
null	30		
Edmonton	30	AB	Prairie
Lunenburg	25	NS	Maritime
London	25	ON	
Mississauga	13	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Oakville	11	ON	Golden Horseshoe
St Catharines	10	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Victoria	9	BC	
Moncton	6	NB	Maritime
Ancaster	6	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Saskatoon	5	SK	Prairie
Calgary	5	SK	Prairie
Orleans	3	ON	Ottawa
Sherbrooke	2	QB	
Kirkland	2	QB	Montreal
Eastern Townships	2	QB	
Winnipeg	1	MB	Prairie
Toronto	1	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Shawinigan	1	QB	Quebec City
Saint John	1	NB	Prairie
Outremont	1	QB	Montreal
Ontario	1	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Markham	1	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Langley	1	BC	Vancouver
Hamilton	1	ON	Golden Horseshoe
Halifax	1	NS	Maritime

Table 1: Distribution of Game Releases by City

These three hubs represent the core of the companies in Canada. However, this only tells part of the story as not all studios are created equal, with some releasing far more games than others. From the other set, this representation holds true with games. Using table 1 for reference, from the 1049 Canadian game entries<sup>20</sup> that were yielded from Giant Bomb, 583 were made in Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto or 54%.

Expanding to our larger census and economic zones, 783 of the games were made in

<sup>20</sup> There were 30 blank entries as well.

these three clusters, or 73%. These three zones are home to the majority of the games made in Canada. Outside of these areas, Ottawa and Quebec City both have video game industries and these two areas have accounted for another 118 video games in Canada, making a total of 901 games made in these five city centres. The other game releases are spread across the Prairies, Maritimes, and the other parts of British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario.

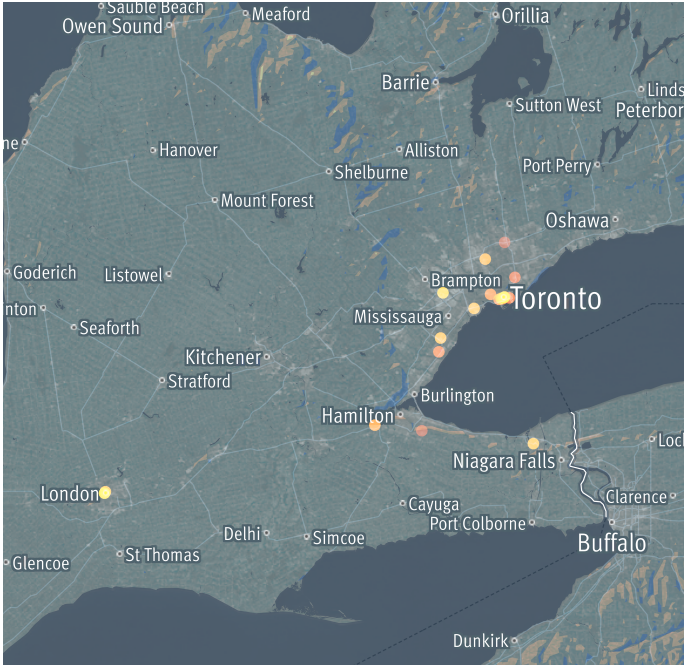
The trends from the Giant Bomb database hold true in other research. The Entertainment Software Association of Canada's 2014 report came up with similar numbers. From their "2014 Essential Facts" document, of the 329 video games companies they cite, 260 of them were from Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, or just shy of 80%.<sup>21</sup> In 2010, a University of Alberta led report to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council found that 87% of Canada game companies were located in those three provinces.<sup>22</sup> This trend has held historically as well, as in 2005, Nick Dyer-Witthford and Zena Sharman found that "roughly 150 of the 170 core [video game] companies are divided more or less evenly between Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia."<sup>23</sup> While these studies are not city focused, their findings still show that the majority of the games made in Canada come from the city clusters in Ontario, Quebec and B.C.

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<sup>21</sup> "2014 Essential Facts," *ESAC*, 4, 11-13.

<sup>22</sup> Sean Gouglas et al., "Computer Games and Canada's Digital Economy," 7.

<sup>23</sup> Dyer-Witthford and Sharman, "The Political Economy of Canada's Video Game and Computer Industry," 191.



**Figure 1: Zoomed Map of Southern Ontario's Game Releases**

Using the city and street addresses available from Giant Bomb database allows for these entries to be mapped as well, and reveals the level of clustering that exists with these companies.

Using the MapBox Studio suite, the game release data was plotted onto a standard Canada map.

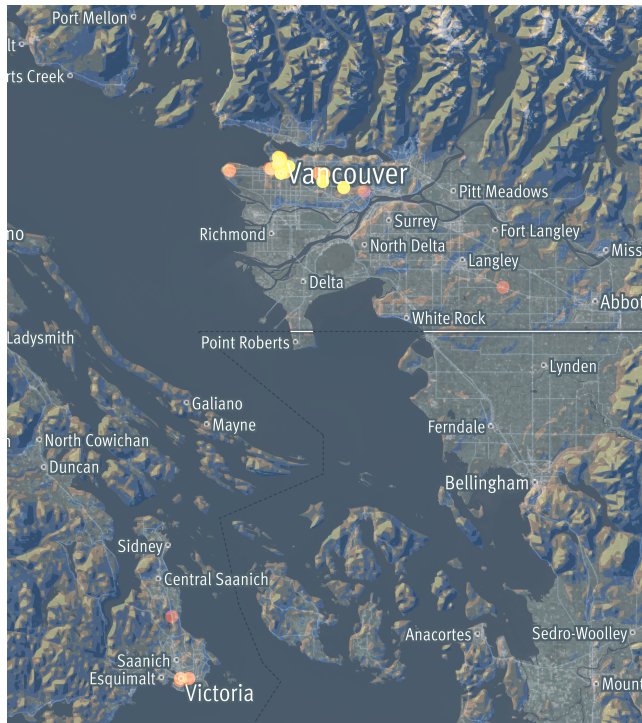
Appendix A contains screenshots

taken from this map, including close ups on the various regions mentioned earlier. From

the larger map, the obvious centres of game production are Southern Ontario, Quebec, and Vancouver.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 are zoomed in maps of Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec's video game releases.

From these figures, it reveals where the industry exists in Canada. Southern Ontario's game production wraps right around



**Figure 2: The Vancouver Valley's Cluster**

Lake Ontario except for a few cases of games in London, Ontario. Vancouver has the same grouping with some game companies setting up shop on Victoria Island although



Figure 3: Quebec's Two Clusters

still within a three-hour drive of the larger cluster across the water. Quebec actually contains two hubs with a smaller cluster in Quebec City to go along with the larger Montreal cluster.<sup>24</sup> As shown before, the Prairies and

Maritimes have some game

production but not to the same extent as these other areas. Ottawa's cluster is also present but is much smaller proportionally compared to Montreal, Vancouver, and even Quebec City, despite the fact the Quebec City's census metro area has a population of 500,000 less than Ottawa's. Using the city's current population and its total game releases to normalize game releases by population in table 3, Ottawa obviously lags behind the aforementioned cities, although it is slightly ahead of Toronto's game cluster. These clusters are evident through the statistical and spatial representations of the data.

The big data approach has confirmed that the Canadian video game industry exists in large urban clusters but does not reveal the way that each cluster emerged. This data treats each developer the same, even though, as will be shown, some studios have found more success than others and have had a larger impact on the overall industry. In

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<sup>24</sup> It could be argued that Quebec City and Montreal, along with the other cities in-between them with game studios could be a singular cluster but for this analysis, they have been considered as distinct.

order to fully understand what brought the video game industry to Canada, it must be

traced from the

bottom-up, in a

close reading of

each cluster.

This will be

done by

Cluster	Total Game Releases	Population (In Thousands)	Game per Thousand People
Vancouver	394	2,254.0	0.1748003549
Quebec City	69	695.8	0.0991664271
Montreal	245	3,764.0	0.0650903294
Ottawa	49	1,153.0	0.0424978317
Golden Horseshoe	144	6,324.0	0.0227703985

Table 2: Cluster Game Releases Over Population

focusing on the anchor studios of each region, what industry existed before them (if any),

and what larger economic factors influenced these studios. However, in order to

understand how the industry first arrived in Canada, video games need to be traced back

to their very beginning, to the labs of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in

the middle of the Space Race.

### **Before British Columbia: Pre-Crash Video Game History**

Understanding the birth of the video game and its industry is imperative to knowing how the industry arrived in Canada. Video games were born out of Cambridge in the labs of MIT, and later found an industry in California, piggybacking on Silicon Valley's rapid growth. After the creation of video games in the early 1960s, they caught on as an industry with the arrival of Atari in California in the 1970s. Atari was tied to the industry's growth in the 1970s with arcades and later consoles. The connection to the innovation region of Silicon Valley was key for the video game industry and the connections between the two creative industries and this would continue as they moved into Vancouver in the 1980s.



The atmosphere of the Cold War provided the perfect atmosphere for the birth of video games. Beyond just the military technology available in the United States, the looming fear of a nuclear war created psychological conditions where young people would attempt to rebel from this seemingly inevitable war. This was seen throughout the late 1950s and the 1960s in the anti-war and civil rights movements but it also existed, albeit much quieter, in the sphere of technology. The history of Silicon Valley, for example, benefitted greatly from the military technology.<sup>25</sup> While this military technology largely evolved into computer hardware advancements, video games were another product of this period.

There is some debate as to which game was actually the first computer or video game. In 1958, renowned American physicist William Higinbotham showed off a game he had created on an oscilloscope called *Tennis for Two*, which allowed two players to hit a ball across a net. While not created on a computer, many consider this as the first game created using computer technology and on a video screen. Higinbotham was heavily involved in the Manhattan project but following its completion joined Brookhaven National Laboratory as the head of the instrumentation division. He spent much of his life after the end of the Second World War fighting against the manufacturing of nuclear weapons, and his creation of a game from equipment used to further the United States nuclear efforts may have been his own version of rebellion.<sup>26</sup> The game was but the first of many rebellious uses of computer and other technological equipment during this period.

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<sup>25</sup> For more on this, see Stuart W. Leslie, "The Biggest 'Angel' of Them All: The Military and the Making of Silicon Valley," in *Understanding Silicon Valley: The Anatomy of an Entrepreneurial Region*, ed. Martin Kenney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000): 48-67.

<sup>26</sup> Donovan, *Replay*, 8.

Only a few years later, at the Massachusetts Institutes of Technology, a group of engineers, led by Steve Russell, in the Tech Model Railroad Club decided to do something fun with the brand new PDP-1 computer that was available to students in 1962. It is important to understand the influences of these men. The Space Race was in full swing, the Soviets and Americans had just put men into orbit and in September of that year President Kennedy declared that the United States was prepared to send a man to the moon by the end of the decade. Steve Russell was heavily influenced by Dr. Edward E. Smiths' Lensman book series, about space travellers and technology, likely another popular culture product of the Space Race and Nuclear Age.<sup>27</sup>

The product of their space fascination and surroundings was a game. Their game *Spacewar!* allowed two players to fly spaceships and shoot rockets at each other. Greig de Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witheford in *Games of Empire* regard *Spacewar!* as the first video game because of the fact that "it was such an integral expression of the culture of computer-science 'freaks' – a culture often at odds with the military institutions that funded it."<sup>28</sup> *Spacewar!*, much like Silicon Valley, took technology that was intended to further the United States efforts against the Soviet Union and transformed it into something that would become a huge consumer industry.

The results of Higinbotham and Russell are best considered a media expression of tension and inspiration during the Cold War and Space Race. However, games were yet a legitimate industry. For the rest of the 1960s, various computer games would be made in similar universities across the country but none received the attention that *Spacewar!* did. Using an early form of the Internet and physical storage media, *Spacewar!* spread to early

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<sup>27</sup> *Rise of the Video Game*, "Level 1," first broadcast November 21, 2007, 41:49, *Youtube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3u3Hc13wzHE>, 6:29-8:05.

<sup>28</sup> Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, *Games of Empire*, 8.

computers across America. The game inspired future game makers, including a young man named Nolan Bushnell, who helped take the video game from a mode of expression into a legitimate industry.

In 1971, Nolan Bushnell took Russell's *Spacewar!* and turned it into the first arcade video game, *Computer Space*. Ralph Baer had his own impact on the future of video games with the Magnavox Odyssey, the first home video game console available commercially. *Computer Space* had a more immediate impact than Baer's home console but both would jumpstart the video game market. Another important addition to this history is Atari game *Pong* (1972), which was released shortly after *Computer Space* and spurred a new popular culture phenomenon. The success of *Pong* is well documented but its importance is still necessary to note.<sup>29</sup> *Pong* was so successful that when it was first put into a pub, it was so popular it became overloaded with quarters causing it to malfunction. The game became a national sensation and proved that despite its unproven track record that the video game industry could thrive.

As early as 1973, arcades and home consoles had become a lucrative industry. In that year 50,000 arcade units were, totaling more than 40 million USD (about 215 million in 2015 USD) and Magnavox sold 90,000 Odysseys.<sup>30</sup> By 1974, the arcade industry was bringing in 250 million USD (1.2 billion USD in 2015) and the number of Odysseys sold more doubled to 200,000.<sup>31</sup> While *Spacewar!* and *Pong* provided the spark necessary to inspire and launch the arcade game industry, *Computer Space* and the Odyssey brought video games to people's homes. These numbers only reflect the market in the United

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<sup>29</sup> For more on *Pong* see Tristan Donovan, "Chapter 2: Avoid Missing Ball for High Score," in *Replay: The History of Video Games* (East Sussex: Yellow Ant, 2010), 15-27.

<sup>30</sup> Wall Street Journal Staff, "Magnavox Sues Firms Making Video Games, Charges Infringement," *Wall Street Journal* April 17, 1974, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>31</sup> Donovan, *Replay*, 26.

States but the industry's success cannot be ignored, as it would creep into Canada shortly afterward. Exactly when this happened is difficult to pinpoint but the timeline of Canada's game market will be explored in more detail in chapter 2.

Arcade video games were incredibly successful in the 1970s. With *Pong*, "Atari had gone from an unknown start-up to the leaders of a revolution in the arcades."<sup>32</sup> More companies jumped into the mix but Atari always led the way. *Tank* (1974), *Breakout* (1976), and *Space Invaders* (1978) are but a few of the many Atari arcade games that went on to become smashing successes. Arcades became incredibly popular, replacing their older pinball and other electro-mechanical machines with video game units.<sup>33</sup> In 1978, the United States arcade industry generated 472 million USD (1.7 billion USD in 2015). This was the dawn of, what is called by game historians, the Golden Age of Arcade Games but Atari also had its hand in consoles as well. The Atari 2600 was released in 1977 and built on the success of the Odyssey. It is difficult to find exact numbers of consoles sold per year, but by the end of the console's lifetime it had sold over 30 million units.<sup>34</sup>

Video games were becoming a major industry leading into the 1980s and by 1982 sales of home and coin-operated games had risen to 5.3 billion USD (13.1 billion USD in 2015).<sup>35</sup> Atari was the king of the industry although with other companies like Mattel and Phillips joining into the booming industry. Atari at the time was the fastest growing

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<sup>32</sup> Donovan, *Replay*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Donovan, *Replay*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> "Atari VCS (Atari 2600)," *Businessweek*, accessed August 7, 2015, [http://www.bloomberg.com/ss/06/10/game\\_consoles/source/3.htm](http://www.bloomberg.com/ss/06/10/game_consoles/source/3.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Donovan, *Replay*, 81.

company in United States history.<sup>36</sup> The Silicon Valley boom was closely related Atari's success as the West Coast cemented itself as the home of numerous high-technology corporations. This West Coast boom and Atari's success influenced the rest of the West Coast and had a profound effect on Vancouver.

### Birth from Burnaby: Vancouver's Game Cluster

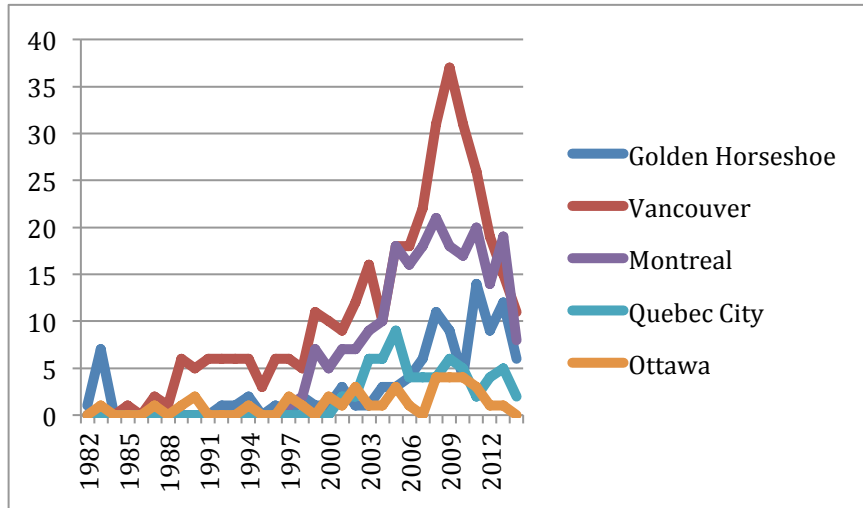


Table 3: Cluster Game Releases by Year

When Vancouver entered the video game industry, the industry's very status was in jeopardy. In 1983, the video game

industry collapsed in North America. This event was the Video Game Crash of 1983, and it sent both arcade and home console markets spiraling. There are a number of reasons for the crash, as it affected all aspects of the industry. On the console side, due to loose restrictions on who could make games for the Atari 2600, the market became flooded with cheap, low-quality games, and consumers lost their trust in the market.<sup>37</sup> As for arcades, the cause of the downfall is harder to determine but the consensus is that a lack of new and exciting games along with an increase in overall arcade game difficulty

<sup>36</sup> Nat Friedland, "Today's Atari Corp.," *Antic* 4, 11 (March 1987), accessed through <http://www.atarimagazines.com/v5n11/atariCorp.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Nick Dyer-Witheford, Geig de Peuter and Stephen Kline, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 105.

turned consumers away.<sup>38</sup> Atari, once the darling of American business and gamer spheres alike, was split and then sold and the company never regained the success it had experienced beforehand.<sup>39</sup> Video games were considered a dangerous industry, too volatile for retailers to rely on.

Nintendo's introduction of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) or Famicom, in 1985 brought the industry back to a period of stabilization. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, video games had rebounded to pre-crash levels, and console gaming was bigger than ever. However, during the Crash, games had not died out completely, but their typical haven in consoles and arcades had been ruptured. One sector that benefited from the Crash was computer gaming. In line with the Crash came the home computer revolution as lower prices allowed for more people to put them in their homes and many of those users would play games on their computers.<sup>40</sup> This is crucial to the rise of Vancouver's industry as its first major company took to making games for computers rather than consoles or arcades and likely survived because of that.

Before delving into the history of Vancouver's video game industry, the city's economic history at the time needs to be contextualized. While many of reasons for its arrival in the Canadian West Coast come down to the right people being in the right place at the right time, there were also some preset conditions that made Vancouver an ideal location for video game production in the 1980s. The creative economy plays a major role in this, as Vancouver was perhaps the earliest city in Canada to begin a major transition into this type of economic structure.

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<sup>38</sup> Donovan, *Replay*, 98 and Dyer-Witheford, de Peuter, and Kline, *Digital Play*, 105.

<sup>39</sup> Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 268.

<sup>40</sup> Randy Nichols, *The Video Game Business* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 28-29.

For much of Vancouver's history, the urban economy was based around staple industries, notably: fishing, mining, and forestry. In the 1970s, all three sectors experienced serious economic downturns. With the staples economy spiraling, a strong creative economic sector emerged.<sup>41</sup> Hollywood North rose to power in this period and a healthy TV production industry came along with it. Vancouver's proximity to Silicon Valley and West Coast United States also influenced its growth in this sector. Its proximity to these innovation regions and the city's historical separation from the rest of Canada forced it to develop distinctly from the rest of Canada.<sup>42</sup> These were ideal conditions that encouraged the emergence of a video game industry in the city.

High-technology industries already existed in Vancouver by the time the video game industry arrived and directly impacted the growth of its most important studio, DSI. Formed four years before Sember and Mattrick joined together to co-found DSI in 1982, Sydney Development Corporation played an instrumental role in bringing their first games to market. In an interview with the *Georgia Straight*, a Vancouver weekly newspaper, former Sydney owner Tarnie Williams said that the company helped Sember and Mattrick create their company and publish their first game.<sup>43</sup> Without Sydney Development and the already emerging high-tech industries in Vancouver, it is unlikely that the company would have seen the success that it did, or that it would have been founded at all.

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<sup>41</sup> Trevor Barnes and Neil M. Coe, "Vancouver as media cluster: the cases of video games and film/TV," in *Media Clusters: Spatial Agglomeration and Content Capabilities*, ed. Charlie Karlsson and Robert G. Picard (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2011), 252-253.

<sup>42</sup> Brian Wixted and J. Adam Holbrook, "Innovation, Cities and Place: An Empirical Study of the Knowledge System in Vancouver and Its Place on the Pacific Rim," in *Practice-Based Innovation: Insights, Applications and Policy Implications*, ed. Helinä Melkas and Vesa Harmaakorpi (Berlin: Springer, 2012): 327-331.

<sup>43</sup> Blaine Kylo, "Vancouver's Video Game Family Tree," *The Georgia Straight* January 28, 2009, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.straight.com/article-198534/video-game-family-tree>.

While it sounds cliché, the first major video game company in Canada was born out of the garage of a pair of Burnaby, British Columbia teens in the 1980s. Don Mattrick and Jeff Sember began making games out of Mattrick's parents' garage in 1982 and founded DSI. This company was quite lucrative for Mattrick and Sember. The pair were so successful in the early stages that they appeared on the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's game show "Front Page Challenge" in 1983, and explained that they had released Canada's first North American wide released video game.<sup>44</sup> By 1985, Mattrick had bought out Sember's shares in DSI and was sole owner of the company. DSI developed a series of personal computer games in the 1980s, perhaps most famously the *Test Drive* series and *Evolution*. This was the beginning of Vancouver's games industry, as DSI became the nucleus of the cluster.

It is difficult to determine just how successful DSI was in the 1980s but by the 1990s, DSI was a fast riser in the global industry and had garnered attention from larger studios. According to Mattrick in an interview in 2009, DSI had been approached by a number of studios in the late 1980s to be acquired, including Konami, Accolade, and Broderbund, all major game companies at the time.<sup>45</sup> However, in 1991, EA, a third-party developer out of Redwood City, California, purchased DSI Interactive for 11 million dollars, successfully courting the Canadian game designer.<sup>46</sup> DSI was renamed EA Canada and the studio would grow to become EA's largest and arguably most impactful studio.

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<sup>44</sup> "Video Games: Video kids strike it rich," *CBC Digital Archives* March 20, 1983, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/player/Digital+Archives/CBC+Programs/Television/Front+Page+Challenge/ID/1609519804/>.

<sup>45</sup> Chris Remo, "GDC Canada: Microsoft's Mattrick Talks Distinctive Days, Pioneer Spirit," *Gamasutra* May 12, 2009, accessed June 8, 2015, [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/114534/GDC\\_Canada\\_Microsofts\\_Mattrick\\_Talks\\_Distinctive\\_Days\\_Pioneer\\_Spirit.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/114534/GDC_Canada_Microsofts_Mattrick_Talks_Distinctive_Days_Pioneer_Spirit.php).

<sup>46</sup> Barnes and Coe, "Vancouver as media cluster," 256.



Contextualizing the earlier data analysis becomes fruitful here because it provides clear evidence that Vancouver's industry took off after the arrival of EA Canada. After the late 1980s, Vancouver saw a huge rise in the number of video games it was producing every year, while other clusters had little or no releases to speak of in this period. The company data has a little more noise to it, as a number of companies in the Golden Horseshoe were founded in this period, although none saw the success that the studios in Vancouver had.

The founding of EA Canada was important for EA and DSI itself as it saw the first splintering in the city's cluster history. A number of developers within DSI were not pleased with the purchase and decided to found their own company, Radical Entertainment. Firms continued to spin-off from EA Canada and Radical after this. For example, in 1997, Barking Dog and Relic Entertainment were founded with former EA Canada and Radical Entertainment employees. Spin-offs have played a crucial role in the establishment of the Vancouver industry. Blaine Kylo in an article for *The Georgia Straight* outlined that Vancouver's acorn model has resulted in generations of spin-offs and that the roots of DSI, EA Canada, and Radical can be traced all the way to some of the most recent studios like Big Sandwich Games and Hothead Games.<sup>47</sup> Here is the first evidence of the type of relationship achieved through a large anchor studio, where generations of employees and companies are spawned from a singular studio with a larger history than others.

The 1990s saw the rise of the video game phenomenon to a new level. Sega, a major competitor to Nintendo, introduced the Genesis in 1989, and the ensuing Console

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<sup>47</sup> See Appendix B for a visual representation of Vancouver's game family tree, also Kylo, "Vancouver's Video Game Family Tree."

War between Nintendo and Sega, brought the video game to the forefront of the American youth's consciousness.<sup>48</sup> The Console Wars' effect on Canada will be explained in chapter 2. Having a preset cluster by the time this period hit was incredibly beneficial to Vancouver's industry and it has grown significantly ever since. A strong anchor studio, spin-offs, and the preset environmental conditions facilitated the emergence of a video game cluster. By the new millennium, Vancouver's industry had grown to become one of the premier video game regions in the world.

### **False Starts: 1980s Canadian Game Development Outside of Vancouver**

Before moving on to Montreal and game development in the 1990s, there are some other game companies that tried their hand in the industry before it took a hold on the Canadian West Coast. While DSI was growing in Vancouver there were other companies that were making games in Canada in the 1980s. These were mostly smaller independent studios like Windmill Software and Logidisque, which stopped making games or were defunct altogether by the 1990s. However, these are still important as it shows that the games industry had already begun to creep north of the border long before Vancouver's games development cluster was solidified in the early 1990s.

Windmill Software was a computer game company for much of the 1980s. They released just fewer than ten games in the first half of the decade, including *Attack on Altair*, *Moon Bugs*, and *Styx*. A Toronto-based company, there is little indication that Windmill managed success and the games themselves were mostly unlicensed PC ports of popular arcade games. For example, *Moon Bugs* bears an uncanny resemblance to *Galaxian*, the Atari arcade blockbuster. Windmill Software was by no means the only

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<sup>48</sup> For further reading, see Blake J. Harris, *Console Wars: Sega, Nintendo, and the Battle that Defined a Generation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).

company making arcade clones in the 1980s as it played a major part in the Video Game Crash, and much of this period of gaming history was filled with companies simply making clones trying to grab some of the success that other games had achieved. Windmill Software became solely focused on computer software after their initial burst of game releases and was acquired by Dude Solutions in 2015.<sup>49</sup>

Logidisque followed a similar path to Windmill Software. In 1982, they released their first game, a Pac-Man type game, which was later shown off on CBC.<sup>50</sup> Logidisque does not appear in the Giant Bomb database but there is evidence that they released more games in the early 1980s.<sup>51</sup> Logidisque was based out of Outremont, Quebec and, according to Jason Della Rocca's research, is arguably the first developer or publisher of games in Canada.<sup>52</sup> Like Windmill Software, Logidisque would eventually shift to making computer software after a brief foray into computer games but is another example of early video game development in Canada.

These two companies represent both the promise and reality of this early period of video games in Canada. Windmill Software and Logidisque both dipped their toes into the computer and video game market before moving on to other markets. The early 1980s had opportunity for video game development in Canada but the lack of new ideas along with the North American Video Game Crash of 1983 likely spelled their downfall long

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<sup>49</sup> See "About Windmill Software", *Digger.org*, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.digger.org/windmill.html> and Dude Solutions Canada Inc., "Dude Solutions Inc. Acquires Windmill Software Inc. and its Senior Living Solution TheWorxHub," *TheWorxHub* March 25, 2015, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.windmill-software.com/blog-dude-solutions-acquires-windmill-software-and-theworxhub.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Although the link did not work on my machine it was cited in Jason Della Rocca, "The Montreal Indie Game Development Scene... Before Ubisoft," *Loading... The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 7 (11): 130.

<sup>51</sup> This video seems to be of another early 1980s Logidisque game, Vicman110309, "VIC-20 – Evasion (1983)(Logidisque)," *Youtube* January 13, 2013, accessed June 1, 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IX1p3\\_oSSZA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IX1p3_oSSZA).

<sup>52</sup> Della Rocca, "Montreal Indie Game," 130.

before they ever released anything. However, their attempts display the early attempts by Canadian companies to gain a piece of the market, albeit with limited success.

### **The Lost Valley: Ottawa and Silicon Valley North**

There was a time when Ottawa seemed to be on track towards becoming Canada's version of Silicon Valley. A plethora of high-tech companies called Ottawa home in the 1990s including, at the time, technology darling Nortel. While the city's reign as Silicon Valley North is seemingly over, its tech roots did provide a home for a few video game developers early on.<sup>53</sup>

Artech Studios is one of these developers and another example of an early Canadian video game company, founded in 1982 according to the Giant Bomb database. In the 1980s, Artech released a handful of games for the PC including a mini-putt game and flight simulator. Artech never reached the same success as DSI, and by association the same level of fame, but still released more than 30 games over the company's 22-year history. These games include *Jeopardy*, *Raze's Hell*, *Wheel of Fortune*, and a *Q\*bert* remake. Unlike Windmill and Logidisque, Artech remained focused on video games throughout the company's lifespan but never managed to break out like other studios in Canada. Artech closed its doors in 2011.

Other video game developers like Fuel Industries Inc., Holmade Games, and Playbrains have called Ottawa home but the city has never managed to create a viable video game cluster like other cities in Canada have. This is where a return to the clustering theory defined early is beneficial, as it shows that Ottawa did not possess the conditions seen in Vancouver to hold a game cluster. Unlike Vancouver, Toronto, or

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<sup>53</sup> See CBC News, "Is Ottawa still Silicon Valley North?," *CBC* June 29, 2009, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/is-ottawa-still-silicon-valley-north-1.801035>.

Montreal, Ottawa is remote and contains a smaller population than the aforementioned cities.<sup>54</sup> Other factors that have created clusters were not present either. In fact, the city's inability to create a viable video game cluster mirrors that of their high-technology cluster outcome as well. Nortel Network Corp. largely drove Silicon Valley North's success, but the firm never led to spinoffs and once that company began to fail, Silicon Valley North fell alongside it. In video games, Ottawa never gained the anchor studio needed and would have likely struggled to produce spin-offs necessary to grow the cluster. It would be naïve to believe that Ottawa's lack of success in video games caused their overall tech sector to collapse, but its inability to root itself in the area speaks to the city's overall trouble in maintaining a high-technology hub.

### **The French Connection: Montreal and the Arrival of Ubisoft**

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<sup>54</sup> Ottawa's census metropolitan area only contains 1.3 million people, which is a million less than Vancouver's, see Statistics Canada, "Population of census metropolitan areas," *Statistics Canada* last modified February 11, 2015, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo05a-eng.htm>.

Montreal is currently home to the largest video game industry in Canada. The province of Quebec boasts more than 8700 video game employees, with the majority of those working in Montreal.<sup>55</sup> Montreal is home to Ubisoft Montreal, which with over 2000 employees is currently Canada’s largest video game studio. Quebec as a whole has eclipsed British Columbia in video game production despite Montreal gaining an anchor studio later than Vancouver. It is more difficult to see Montreal’s rise in the video game industry through the Giant Bomb data. Referring back to table 3 for reference, Vancouver has released more games in a given year than Montreal throughout its history. However,

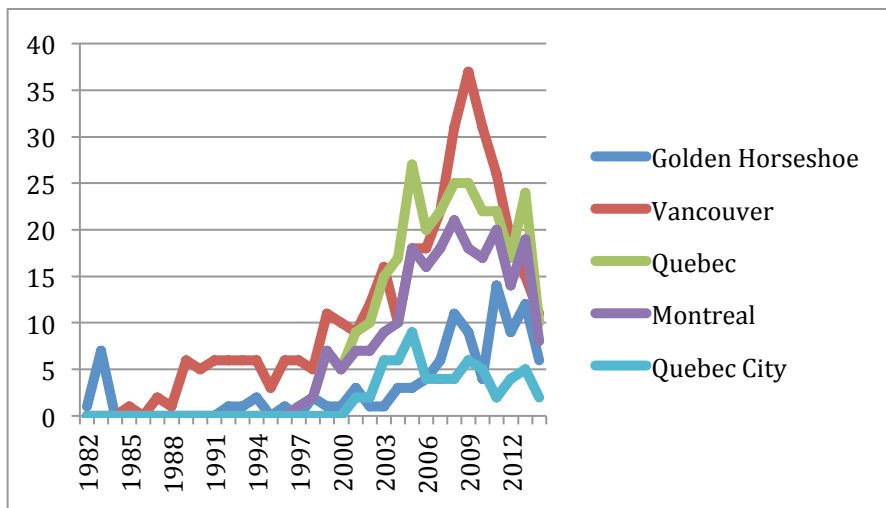


Table 4: Modified Cluster Game Releases by Year

including all of Quebec as one cluster, as done in table 4, the province gains the upper hand for several years in the early first decade of the

new millennium. Montreal managed to succeed in video games through similar means to Vancouver, establishing a technology sector and bringing game development alongside it but the city received its anchor studio in a different manner to Vancouver, importing it rather than growth from within. Montreal and Quebec’s success as a video game hub cannot be understated but the way in which they arrived to this success is much different from the Vancouver model.

<sup>55</sup> “2014 Essential Facts,” *ESAC*, 11 and de Peuter, “Video Games Production: Level Up,” 89.

However, much like Vancouver's cluster, there was a solid creative and technological industry centre by the time Ubisoft arrived in 1997. Montreal's economy saw a similar change to Vancouver's, with previously key sectors like textile manufacturing declining in the decades leading up to the 1990.<sup>56</sup> This explains why game companies began to appear at this time. Along with game companies were other middleware companies like Softimage, a 3D animation studio, founded in 1986 by Daniel Langlois.<sup>57</sup> Softimage provided a solid basis of middleware companies that deal with similar aspects of video games but not directly with game creation. Softimage was not directly involved with the forming a game companies the way that Sydney Development was for Distinctive but still illustrates that Montreal had the elements necessary to create a game hub.<sup>58</sup> The early inklings of a video game cluster were promising but it would take another decade before they reached the next level.

By the 1990s, Montreal's creative sector had grown considerably. Spillover from Softimage led to the creation of other tech companies in the region including Discreet in 1992 and Kaydara in 1993.<sup>59</sup> Hollywood and video game animation had become a significant industrial sector in Montreal and the city was growing in video game production as well.<sup>60</sup> Larger video game companies began to appear by the 1990s, including the precursors to one of Canada's largest independent developers, Behaviour

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<sup>56</sup> Peter Hadekel, "Stagnation City: Exploring Montreal's Economic Decline," *Montreal Gazette* January 31, 2015, accessed August 7, 2015, <http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreals-economic-stagnation>.

<sup>57</sup> Darchen and Tremblay, "Policies for Creative Clusters," 14.

<sup>58</sup> Yoshiyuki Watanabe, "Case Study: Konami Digital Entertainment *Metal Gear Solid 4*," *Softimage* 2008, accessed June 12, 2015, accessed via the Wayback Machine, [http://web.archive.org/web/20090213132123/http://softimage.com/products/xsi/customer\\_stories/metal\\_gear\\_4/default.aspx](http://web.archive.org/web/20090213132123/http://softimage.com/products/xsi/customer_stories/metal_gear_4/default.aspx).

<sup>59</sup> Darchen and Tremblay, "Policies for Creative Clusters," 14.

<sup>60</sup> Darchen and Tremblay, "Policies for Creative Clusters," 12.

Interactive.<sup>61</sup> The city of Montreal and the greater province of Quebec contained a burgeoning technology and multimedia sector by the late 1990s, providing enough high-tech, creative, and middleware companies that would allow for the introduction of a major video game industry.

Montreal's cluster received a major boost in 1997 with the arrival of Ubisoft Montreal, now Canada's largest video game studio. The pursuit of Ubisoft was spearheaded by Sylvain Vaugeois, a Quebec lobbyist, who proposed in the mid-1990s to give tax credits worth \$25,000 per employee to Ubisoft in exchange for them setting up a studio in Montreal that would create 500 jobs over five years. Vaugeois initiated contact with the French game publishing giant on his own accord after the proposal received little support from the provincial Parti Québécois government. This led to a bizarre scene where Ubisoft representatives visited Quebec expecting to accept an already firm offer were forced instead to negotiate with a surprised and unaware Quebec government. After Ubisoft threatened to set up shop in Boston or elsewhere, and were approached by the government of New Brunswick in an attempt to snatch the developer for themselves, the Quebec government conceded. The Quebec government provided \$15,000 per Ubisoft employee and the federal government gave the remaining \$10,000 per employee, giving Ubisoft a sweetheart deal on labour.<sup>62</sup> Bringing in Ubisoft game the Quebec cluster the anchor studio needed to build upon its already impressive multimedia sector and effectively changing the trajectory of the city's video game industry.

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<sup>61</sup> Della Rocca, "Montreal Indie Game," 131.

<sup>62</sup> Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay and Serge Rousseau, "The Montreal Multimedia Sector: A Cluster, a New Mode of Governance or a Simple Co-location," *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 28, 2 (Summer 2005): 307-308.



Ubisoft has positively influenced the city's industry over nearly two decades. While the government and pre-existing multimedia sector allowed for the founding of Ubisoft Montreal, the studio's impact on the region since its arrival is profound. The deal that the French company received in 1997 became the basis for a tax subsidy program that covered all local video game developers.<sup>63</sup> The Liberal party of Quebec spoke out against the tax subsidies while they were the opposition in the early 2000s, but in 2003 after winning a majority government, maintained the tax credits due to their success.<sup>64</sup> Other companies took note of this and more multinationals have opened offices in Montreal, including EA Montreal in 2004,<sup>65</sup> THQ in 2009,<sup>66</sup> and Warner Brothers Games Montreal in 2010.<sup>67</sup> Ubisoft was not the beginning of the Montreal industry but it sparked a period of growth.

Ubisoft is an excellent example of how big businesses have positively impacted their video game cluster around them. Ubisoft Campus opened its doors in 2005 and provided a training program for the video game industry for five years before closing in 2010.<sup>68</sup> The program's purpose was likely self-motivated as Ubisoft hoped to give a boost

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<sup>63</sup> Sophie Cousineau, "Ubisoft's job largesse comes at a price," *Globe and Mail* October 2, 2013, accessed June 3, 2015, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>64</sup> Cousineau, "Ubisoft's job largesse."

<sup>65</sup> "EA Montreal," *Giant Bomb*, accessed June 10, 2015, <http://www.giantbomb.com/ea-montreal/3010-5904/>.

<sup>66</sup> Kris Graft, "THQ Setting Up New Montreal Studio, 400 Jobs Expected," *Gamasutra* December 3, 2009, accessed June 8, 2015, [http://gamasutra.com/view/news/117312/THQ\\_Setting\\_Up\\_New\\_Montreal\\_Studio\\_400\\_Jobs\\_Expected.php](http://gamasutra.com/view/news/117312/THQ_Setting_Up_New_Montreal_Studio_400_Jobs_Expected.php).

<sup>67</sup> Kris Graft, "Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment to Set Up New Montreal Studio," *Gamasutra* March 22, 2010, accessed June 8, 2015, [http://gamasutra.com/view/news/118717/Warner\\_Bros\\_Interactive\\_Entertainment\\_To\\_Set\\_Up\\_New\\_Montreal\\_Studio.php](http://gamasutra.com/view/news/118717/Warner_Bros_Interactive_Entertainment_To_Set_Up_New_Montreal_Studio.php).

<sup>68</sup> Denis Lalonde, "Closing the Ubisoft Campus," *Les Affaires* March 9, 2009, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.lesaffaires.com/secteurs-d-activite/general/fermeture-du-campus-ubisoft/497613>.

to the local labour pool, which was unable to meet business demands at the time.<sup>69</sup>

However, the benefits to the region are still apparent. The furthering of educational infrastructure in the region is beneficial to the whole of the industry, not just Ubisoft. Similar to Vancouver with EA Canada, Ubisoft has since seen a number of studios spin-off of it and other major studios in the area. Some examples include Trapdoor Inc., Crankshaft Games, and Massive Finger.<sup>70</sup> The studio has helped the city grow its cluster into one of the largest in the world.

The growth of the Montreal game industry is different than that of the Vancouver industry. Montreal's basis for a video cluster came from its roots with animation and film. As well, the industry gained its anchor studio from a government implemented tax breaks rather than a single studio breaking through but resulting in the same outcome. Economic context provided the perfect habitat for a video game cluster and the anchor studio allowed for it to grow into a successful city industry.

### **Video Games in the Big Smoke**

Toronto's video game cluster received its own anchor studio much later than either Vancouver or Montreal but the city's video game industry dates back further than Ubisoft Toronto's arrival. Ontario's current video game industry is unique to British Columbia and Quebec in that it is primarily made up of smaller independent developers. 88% of Ontario's companies are Canadian-owned and more than a quarter of the total employees work at small firms compared to 8.9% of B.C. workers and 2.0% of those in

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<sup>69</sup> Alison MacGregor, "Mixing Business with Pleasure: Montreal's Booming Video-Game Industry has a New School," *The Montreal Gazette* July 25, 2005, accessed June 7, 2015, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>70</sup> Gouglas et al., "Computer Games and Canada's Digital Economy," 20.

Quebec.<sup>71</sup> The vast majority of these companies are located in Toronto and the Golden Horseshoe. Toronto's industry developed from a vibrant indie game scene and strong gaming cluster before the arrival of an anchor studio in Ubisoft Toronto.

Unlike Vancouver or Montreal, the makeup of Toronto's economy allowed its industries to grow with less downturn during the 1980s and 1990s. This did not mean video game development would not appear in the city but rather that it was not as big a priority to shift into a creative economy as it was in the other cities. By the turn of the millennium though, the creative economy had developed in Toronto anyway. Distinct film, 3D animation, and other creative industries emerged in Toronto at this time<sup>72</sup> and the city itself had put forth a plan to inspire a cultural renaissance in the city in 2003.<sup>73</sup> These factors provided a hotbed of available labor and middleware service providers. Developers had begun to appear in the region as well. In 1992 Denis Dyack founded Silicon Knights in the Niagara Region city of St. Catharines. Silicon Knights is one of the oldest game companies in the province and became a key cog in the movement for local game development in Ontario. In an interview with Gamasutra in 2007, Dyack said that there was ““a ton of talent in Ontario, great programmers, great artists... it was just natural to stay here.””<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Nordicity, “Canada’s Video Game Industry in 2013: Final Report,” Prepared for *Entertainment Software Association of Canada*, July 2013, accessed June 12, 2015, 28-30, <http://theesa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ESAC-Video-Games-Profile-2013-FINAL-2013-10-21-CIRC.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> John N.H. Britton, Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay and Richard Smith, “Contrasts in Clustering: The Example of Canadian New Media,” *European Planning Studies* 17, 2 (February 2009): 216.

<sup>73</sup> City of Toronto, *Cultural Plan for the Creative City*, 2003, accessed June 10, 2015, [http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/TAC/media/tac/Reports%20and%20Resources/City%20of%20Toronto/2003\\_cultureplan\\_to.pdf](http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/TAC/media/tac/Reports%20and%20Resources/City%20of%20Toronto/2003_cultureplan_to.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> Mathew Kumar, “All the World’s a Stage: Inside Silicon Knights,” *Gamasutra* November 19, 2007, accessed June 10, 2015, [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/130691/all\\_the\\_worlds\\_a\\_stage\\_inside\\_.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/130691/all_the_worlds_a_stage_inside_.php).

Silicon Knights was founded much earlier than most game companies in the region but by the mid to late 2000s, independent studios like Metanet Software, Capybara Games, and Battle Goat Studios called the Greater Toronto Area home. Even a few multinational companies like Rockstar had set up shop in the area although were much smaller than the ones that appeared in Quebec or British Columbia.<sup>75</sup> Despite the smaller studios, video game development in the city and greater metropolitan area had created a unique culture for itself. This inspired the opening of the Toronto Game Jam in 2006, furthering the creation of smaller based developers in the region.<sup>76</sup> Events like TOJam along with regional trade organizations like the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) and the Ontario Digital Media Corporation (ODMC) created a vibrant indie scene in Toronto, which continues well into today.

While the scene in Toronto by this time had spawned numerous companies and an accommodating ecosystem, the city still lagged significantly behind both Vancouver and Montreal. Academic research into the city's industry determined that a large anchor studio would provide a massive boost.<sup>77</sup> Like the other case studies before, the city had accumulated what was necessary to create a sustainable video game cluster but missed an anchor studio to bring it all together.

While the city managed to avoid much of the economic downturn of the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this would not hold into the 21<sup>st</sup>. The manufacturing sector in

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<sup>75</sup> From Dyer-Witthford and Sharman, "The Political Economy of Canada's Video Game and Computer Industry," 193; Ubisoft Canada employed 1000 people at this time while Rockstar in both Vancouver and Toronto employed 50.

<sup>76</sup> "TOJam #1 – May 5-7, 2006," *TOJam*, accessed June 10, 2015, <http://www.tojam.ca/games/default.asp>.

<sup>77</sup> Dyer-Witthford and Sharman, "The Political Economy of Canada's Video Game and Computer Industry," 196 and SECOR, *Ontario 2012: Stimulating Growth in Ontario's Digital Game Industry* (Montreal: SECOR Consulting, 2008), <http://www.omdc.on.ca/Assets/Research/Research+Reports/Ontario+2012+Stimulating+Growth+in+Ontario's+Digital+Game+Industry/Stimulating+Growth+in+Ontario's+Digital+Game+Industry+August+2008+English.pdf.pdf>.

Ontario declined drastically in the new millennium and was only amplified after the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, which put an increased emphasis on growing the creative economy.<sup>78</sup> Observing Vancouver's lumber and resource economy, and Montreal's textiles and manufacturing, it is apparent that decline of manufacturing and staples put an emphasis on moving towards the creative industries. This likely influenced the Ontario government's decision to copy Montreal and provide incentives to video game developers.

In 2009, Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government announced that, after two years of courting, Ubisoft was establishing a studio in Toronto that would create 800 jobs over a 10-year period in exchange for over a quarter of a billion dollars in tax credits. At the same time, the province announced that it was increasing the value of the tax subsidies from an average of 27.5 percent to 37.5.<sup>79</sup> The arrival of Ubisoft gave the city the core studio it had been searching for and the results suggest that it is promoting growth. Three years after the introduction of the increased tax incentives and arrival of Ubisoft, the number of video game jobs in Ontario had tripled.<sup>80</sup> It is too early to see if Ubisoft will have the same spin-off effect that Ubisoft Montreal and EA Canada have had but the history suggests that the results will be seen in the coming years.

In three different cities across Canada, similar factors fed into creating video game clusters. Toronto contained an up-and-coming creative economy along with the

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<sup>78</sup> Vanessa Lu, "Manufacturing in Ontario must be different than past," *Toronto Star* February 27, 2014, accessed June 8, 2015, [http://www.thestar.com/business/economy/2014/02/27/manufacturing\\_in\\_ontario\\_must\\_be\\_different\\_than\\_past.html](http://www.thestar.com/business/economy/2014/02/27/manufacturing_in_ontario_must_be_different_than_past.html).

<sup>79</sup> David Jenkins, "Ontario Boosts Tax Breaks For 2009," *Gamasutra* March 30, 2009, accessed June 11, 2015, [http://gamasutra.com/view/news/113907/Ontario\\_Boosts\\_Tax\\_Breaks\\_For\\_2009.php](http://gamasutra.com/view/news/113907/Ontario_Boosts_Tax_Breaks_For_2009.php).

<sup>80</sup> Mike Rose, "A Canadian Perspective on the UK's Tax Break Talks," *Gamasutra* March 22, 2012, accessed June 9, 2015, [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/167118/A\\_Canadian\\_perspective\\_on\\_the\\_UKs\\_tax\\_break\\_talks.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/167118/A_Canadian_perspective_on_the_UKs_tax_break_talks.php).

middleware and other video game developers that provide a hospitable environment for a cluster. Yet despite the success of Silicon Knights, Capybara Games, and other games studios in the area, the industry still lagged behind other parts in Canada because of its lack of an anchor studio. Small studios in the city's metropolitan area managed to create a games cluster but its lack of a big business studio that would drive its growth further was not apparent. The relationship between big and small holds again, where small studios are important but require an anchor to truly drive the industry.

### **BioWare and What Exists Outside the Clusters**

Observing Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto's game industries reveal that a large anchor studio is necessary for a video game cluster. However, looking at Edmonton's video game scene will prove that although an anchor studio is important, it is not the only element needed to create a cluster. In Canada, nearly every large and medium sized studio exists in the Quebec, Southern Ontario, and Vancouver hubs. One studio has managed to buck this trend though. Edmonton's BioWare achieved a great deal of success in the late 1990s, independent of a massive publisher until EA acquired it in October 2007.<sup>81</sup> Edmonton has very little in terms of video game production but BioWare's ascent is exceptional in that it has managed to survive and thrive despite a lacking ecosystem in the city it calls home.

BioWare was founded by a group of medicine students at the University of Alberta in 1995. The group created a strong relationship with publishers early on with the release of their first game *Shattered Steel* and from there continued to develop successful games on the PC before landing a deal to work on *Star Wars* titles, creating the acclaimed

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<sup>81</sup> Staff, "Breaking: Electronic Arts Acquires BioWare, Pandemic," *Gamasutra*, October 11, 2007, accessed June 2, 2015, [http://gamasutra.com/view/news/106783/Breaking\\_Electronic\\_Arts\\_Acquires\\_BioWare\\_Pandemic.php](http://gamasutra.com/view/news/106783/Breaking_Electronic_Arts_Acquires_BioWare_Pandemic.php).

*Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* series. Their success as an independent studio continued with many of their following releases including the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* franchises.<sup>82</sup>

BioWare's case is the exception to what otherwise is a very clear trend. According to the *Giant Bomb* database, outside of BioWare, the Prairies (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta combined) as a whole developed 41 games out of the 1049 Canadian game entries or 3.9% of all Canadian games. Of those 41 games, BioWare developed 26, or 63.4% of all Prairies video games. BioWare is by far the most successful studio in the region and is the only large studio in the Prairies.

BioWare is one of many important studios to appear in Canada in the 1990s. The 1990s were good for Canada's video game industry, seeing the founding of Silicon Knights, Ubisoft Montreal, Radical Entertainment, and EA Canada but BioWare stands apart from these because it managed to do so in Edmonton, which contains very little high-technology or video game industries. Unfortunately for BioWare, "the region has not enjoyed the seeding needed to form a cluster of companies similar to what happened in British Columbia."<sup>83</sup> When comparing Edmonton to the city's with video game clusters, some clear differences emerge. Edmonton and the prairies have created video game companies but do not have the other middleware or creative economic surroundings in order to succeed. As well, like Ottawa, the limited and remote population limits the city from enough available employees to create new companies.

The last area to look at in Canada is the Maritimes, which contains very little video game industry overall. The Maritimes have made a recent effort to gather a video

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<sup>82</sup> For more on BioWare, see Travis Fahs, "IGN Presents the History of BioWare," *IGN* January 21, 2010, accessed June 2, 2015, <http://ca.ign.com/articles/2010/01/22/ign-presents-the-history-of-bioware?page=1>.

<sup>83</sup> Gouglas et al., "Computer Games and Canada's Digital Economy," 7-8.

game industry of their own but it remains minimal to this point. There are a few studios of note, namely Other Ocean Interactive and HB Studios. These studios are small but have managed to last, much like BioWare, in an area that is considered more remote. Other Ocean Interactive came to be in 2007 after Foundation 9 – another developer – spun-off one of its smaller studios, Backbone Charlottetown into an independent company. It is situated in St. John’s Newfoundland.<sup>84</sup> HB Studios is older than Other Ocean, having opened its doors in 2000. HB Studios has a close partnership with EA Canada as they make the Cricket and Rugby games for their EA Sports lineup.

Companies in the Maritimes are often dependent on provincial based tax incentives in order to stay there, which have led to interprovincial competition. In 2009, Longtail Studios moved its office from Prince Edward Island to Nova Scotia after it was offered a better deal from the neighbouring province.<sup>85</sup> With smaller populations and no large studios, there are few factors beyond these tax incentives to keep a developer in one fixed location. Perhaps the Maritimes will foster their own cluster some day but for now, like the Prairies, they lag behind the rest of Canada.

While the three big clusters take the majority of the attention when it comes to the Canadian video game industry, it is imperative to acknowledge the companies that have managed to make a foothold in some of the other areas of Canada. Edmonton and the Prairies have BioWare and little else while the Maritimes have a few companies that

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<sup>84</sup> Brandon Boyer, “Foundation 9 Co-Founder Departs, Opens Other Ocean,” *Gamasutra* May 25, 2007, accessed June 2, 2015, [http://gamasutra.com/view/news/105049/Foundation\\_9\\_CoFounder\\_Departs\\_Opens\\_Other\\_Ocean.php](http://gamasutra.com/view/news/105049/Foundation_9_CoFounder_Departs_Opens_Other_Ocean.php).

<sup>85</sup> See Leigh Alexander, “P.E.I. Tries to Keep Dev Studio With Incentives,” *Gamasutra* July 8, 2009, accessed June 2, 2015, [http://gamasutra.com/view/news/115297/PEI\\_Tries\\_To\\_Keep\\_Dev\\_Studio\\_With\\_Incentives.php](http://gamasutra.com/view/news/115297/PEI_Tries_To_Keep_Dev_Studio_With_Incentives.php) and CBC News, “IT Company Chased Subsidy to N.S.: P.E.I. Group,” *CBC* August 11, 2010, accessed June 2, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/it-company-chased-subsidy-to-n-s-p-e-i-group-1.939356>.



continue a smaller industry. Neither of these smaller clusters currently contains the necessary components to naturally incubate a sustainable industry but their contributions are still important to note nonetheless.

## **Conclusion**

Video game development in Canada grew from the suburbs of Burnaby into the third largest industry in the world.<sup>86</sup> It was born from Vancouver's burgeoning creative economy, influenced by Silicon Valley, and grew into a large cluster anchored by flagship studio EA Canada. It then spread to Montreal with its own growing creative economy and with the aid of government tax incentives to bring in Ubisoft. Toronto's video game industry contained an already established indie game cluster before bringing in its own anchor studio to solidify its growing cluster. The big data approach combined with the historical approach confirms these findings and through these case studies has revealed what factors have led to the success of Canada's video game clusters.

Video games are made in Canada in large urban clusters, with appropriate creative economic factors like middleware studios, and are anchored by large game development studios. These factors allow for big and small studios to work off each other with big businesses providing spin-offs to grow around the anchor. Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto each developed their own clusters from these elements and continue to grow today. Ottawa's cluster showed promise along with its high-tech cluster of the early 2000s but never solidified itself. Edmonton has seen the emergence of BioWare, one of the world's premier video game studios but does not have the other components

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<sup>86</sup> de Peuter, "Video Games Production: Level Up," 77.

necessary to establish a consistent industry. The rest of the Prairies and the Maritimes have very little industry, which correlates with the clustering theory of urban centres being ideal places for game development and also speaks to the lack of high-tech or creative development in those regions.

The economic factors and studio agency perspectives are important to understanding the history of the video game industry in Canada. What is not revealed though is the public or political reaction to video games and game development. As has been hinted throughout this chapter, these aspects are tied to the video game industry's success as both Canadian consumer markets and the government play important parts. The public and government spheres regarding video games will be explored in the coming two chapters and nuance the research done here.

## Chapter Two

### Would You Like to Play a Game: Video Game Public and Media

#### Reaction

##### Introduction

Canadians love to make video games but they also love to play them. Based on estimates of game revenue from 2014, Canada ranks in the top 10 of both total and per capita game revenue.<sup>1</sup> Video games have become a part of larger Canadian culture, with more than half the country in 2014 playing games at least once a month.<sup>2</sup> These gamers did not appear overnight, as video games have steadily grown in the psyche of Canadians steadily over the last four decades. This growth was uneven, with various peaks and valleys depending on the status of the industry and larger societal influences. This chapter will explore this cultural trajectory beginning in the late 1970s and ending with the arrival of the seventh generation gaming consoles around 2005.

It is difficult to tell what the gaming scene was like in Canada before the late 1970s. Even in America, documenting the early history of video games is difficult due to the lack of sources and antiquated technology involved. By the late 1970s though, video game arcades had grown into a significant industry, and had made their way not only into Canadian stores but also the media spotlight. This chapter will draw on Canadian newspapers. Specifically: the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Calgary Herald*, and *The Winnipeg Free Press*. These newspapers represent six of the top 11 circulated newspapers in the country and are also all cited in

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<sup>1</sup> “Top 100 Countries by Game Revenues,” *NewZoo: Games Market Research*, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://www.newzoo.com/free/rankings/top-100-countries-by-game-revenues/>.

<sup>2</sup> “2014 Essential Facts,” *ESAC*, 15.

the *Canadian Newspaper Index*, *Canadian News Index*, and *Canadian Index*. Newspapers are not perfect in capturing Canadian culture, as their content is subject to editors and writers but they are the most widely available source material that are in tune with the public. It should also be reiterated that it is difficult to measure the number of games that Canadians were buying at a given time, but the amount of press that they receive is a useful indicator, and should give insight to the reception and penetration of games into the market. Newspapers do not exactly have the common person's voice, but are still able to give insight as to what is taking place in the minds of everyday Canadians.

Video game news begins to trickle in by the late 1970s, most of it surrounding the arcade game *Death Race* for its questionable moral content and the holiday rush of video games.<sup>3</sup> In the early 1980s, arcade and video games began to be seen a major industry with increased popularity and alongside it scrutiny. After a brief disappearance during the early 1980s North American Video Game Crash, video games came roaring back in the late 1980s, with the excitement of a new home console, the NES. This period also brought back the return of video game anxieties although this time centred on a fear of game addiction. By the 1990s, video games had gripped Canada and the media, both in positive and negative ways. While there was an increase in interest in video games and the industry, many articles again warned of the dangers of video games. Due to the vast amount of press following the early 1990s, the section of that decade and the early 2000s will focus on specific moments where video games received more than the usual press. By the middle of the 2000s, gaming had become big and mature enough to be featured in

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<sup>3</sup> *Death Race* and its Canadian response will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

its own section of the *Globe and Mail*, which is where the focus of this chapter will finish.

The trajectory of games in media is telling of their cultural shift in Canada. Beginning as a child's endeavor, games grew into a medium supported by enough adults that the largest newspapers in Canada began writing serious reviews of games and the industry by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This did not mean games would not totally escape the anxiety that surrounded them, but prove that they had become an integral part of Canadian culture.

### **Child's Play in the 1970s**

It is impossible to tell exactly when video games first showed up in news media or even when arcades first appeared in Canada. As a newer technology, the terminology for video games early on varied heavily, from electronic games, to computer games, and other terms, and this variety of monikers make it difficult to track their first appearance in newspapers. However, by 1974, classifieds appeared in the *Globe and Mail* advertising business opportunities for people to buy arcade consoles. The ads quote newspapers from the United States, indicating that at this time, the Canadian industry was not nearly as large as its American counterpart.<sup>4</sup> A few years later, video game articles began to pop up, albeit in incredibly limited doses. Only a handful will be referenced here, which is a reflection of the lack of pieces written on games at this time.

In the *Globe*, Ellen Roseman wrote several consumer reports on the arrival of video games in Canadian homes and what buying parents should think of them for their

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<sup>4</sup> Video Games Inc., "The Money Machine", advertisement in *Globe and Mail* July 18, 1974, accessed through ProQuest.

children. In one report from 1976, Roseman claimed that video games were the latest fad to take Canada by storm, but her numbers suggest that games were more than just a simple fad. She claimed that there was an expectation that half a million Coleco Telstars, an important game console at the time, would be sold in Canadian stores.<sup>5</sup> This is an incredible number, especially for a country of only 23 million people at the time. Roseman's articles on games were often written with a hesitation towards them, and in one case she revealed that she could "never understand the fascination with electronic games," believing that they were, "pricey..., gimmicky and dehumanizing."<sup>6</sup> The early reaction to video games was one of suspicion. The technological excitement could not be quelled though, as other articles were excited to report that computers would soon be able to play games as simple as blackjack.<sup>7</sup> Video games had become associated with the advent of computer technology but the hesitation was still there. Even from the onset, video games faced an uphill battle to acceptance as an aspect of Canadian culture.

The 1970s ended with mild mentions of video games but clear signs that they were growing as Canadian consumer products. The tone that video games were met with was one of uncertainty but with signs that the public was excited, as evident by the mass purchases of Telstar games and other articles. In one article marking the end of the 1970s decade, it directly pointed to a decade with "10-speed bicycles, blow-dryers for men,...

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<sup>5</sup> Ellen Roseman, "A Telstar in Every Home?" *Globe and Mail* August 21, 1976, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Roseman, "Electronic Games More Fun For Designers Than For Kids," *Globe and Mail* December 20, 1979, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Press, "This Computer Will Even Play Blackjack," *Montreal Star* July 19, 1977, B2, accessed through Microform.

and computer games.”<sup>8</sup> Leading into the 1980s, video games and the press that covered them would only continue to grow, but the reaction would stay mixed.

### **Leading into the Crash**

The 1980s was a rollercoaster decade for video games. Their growth in Canada was widely apparent in the early 1980s before the North American Crash of 1983 stunted the industry. During this period, worries of video game violence were rampant as experts, parents, and the government argued over the value of games and their effects, both short term and long term, on Canada’s youth. By the end of the decade, video games had rebounded to levels before the crash, bringing back with them the concerns seen in the pre-crash days. It would be a tumultuous decade but one that was incredibly important to games as a whole.

By the early 1980s, video games had grown in Canada considerably. The *Toronto Star* noted in late 1980 that coin-operated video games had replaced pinball as the go-to entertainment system. According to the report those machines had “grabbed about half of a Metro Toronto market that just a year ago was 90 percent controlled by pinball machines.”<sup>9</sup> Arcade games were not the only sector growing, home consoles had become mainstays in Canadian homes, proven by the soaring market shares of Irwin Toy, the distributor of Atari video games in Canada.<sup>10</sup> Video games were the hot ticket item of the 1981 Christmas season with papers providing articles about the booming industry sales<sup>11</sup> and the variety of choices for parents looking to give their children something exciting

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<sup>8</sup> “Running, jumping, leering through a decade,” *Globe and Mail* December 18, 1979, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>9</sup> John Quinlan, “Video Games’ Surge Knocks Pinball Flat,” *Toronto Star* August 24, 1980, A3, accessed through Microform.

<sup>10</sup> “U.S. Interest in Video Games Helps Irwin Toy Shares to Fly,” *Globe and Mail* April 17, 1981, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Moule, “Video Game Industry Rejoices Over Booming Christmas Sales,” *Toronto Star* December 23, 1981, B7, accessed through Microform.

for the holiday.<sup>12</sup> Some were encouraged by the idea of children playing these games. Michael Kieran of the *Globe and Mail* believed that games were beneficial for children enhancing their practical thinking and life skills, declaring, “all game playing is an exercise for adult life,” and that, “[playing games] stimulates [children] to thinking about things, to understanding the world and how things work.”<sup>13</sup>

Response to games was not all positive though and the debate of the value or harm caused of games started early. Along with the discussions of regulating arcades and game consoles, law enforcement had become supporters of controlling games. In 1982, the Vancouver police chief began a campaign against games, encouraging storeowners to remove them from their shops to limit their exposure to young children, believing that the contents of these games were harmful.<sup>14</sup> In the *Winnipeg Free Press*, a full-page article outlined through interviews debated the pros and cons of video games. Despite the seemingly balanced attempt to deconstruct games, the ‘pros’ section reveals that there was plenty of contempt surrounding games. One loaded question from the author asked the pro side, “since most of these games are based on the principle ‘kill or be killed,’ don’t they incite violent feelings in children?”<sup>15</sup> Even when attempting to get the positive perspective of games, the fears surrounding were evident.

It became apparent early that games had challenges with gaining a female audience, a sign of the gender issues that have plagued the industry to this day. There are major issues with the lack of empathy towards female audiences in games and the

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<sup>12</sup> Ellen Roseman, “Video Games: Plenty of Choice in Latest Indoor Craze,” *Globe and Mail* December 10, 1981, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Kieran, “Games: Computers in the Hands of Children,” *Globe and Mail* September 22, 1980, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>14</sup> Karenn Krangle, “Video Games Ban Supported by Police,” *Vancouver Sun* June 23, 1982, A3, accessed through Microform.

<sup>15</sup> Sue Mittenthal, “Are Video Games Safe For Kids,” *Winnipeg Free Press* August 18, 1982, p17, accessed through Microform.



industry, where historically games have been designed with a male audience in mind, leaving women largely forgotten. This article was one of many throughout Canada's video game history where writers noted that women were generally underrepresented in the games population.<sup>16</sup> Concerns of youth theft in order to fund their video game habit were also apparent, and there were even some groups that found the content of games particularly offensive.<sup>17</sup> In one example, a group of bank tellers spoke out against a bank robbery game, as the game allowed the player to kill the tellers in the heists.<sup>18</sup> Games provided plenty of excitement but also had many people concerned about their impact.

### **During the Crash**

In the early 1980s it seemed like games had become a mainstay in Canada but the Video Game Crash hit the Canadian market hard. As shown in the introduction, the focus of most literature on video game history surrounds the effects of the crash on the American market, with little done on Canada's industry. The video game industry was thriving in Canada but even by 1982, there were clear signs that the industry was struggling. When Warner Communications', owner of Atari, stock tumbled late that year, that hit the Canadian market as well, with important Canadian companies like Mattel, Coleco, and especially Irwin Toy taking major downturns in the New York and Toronto Stock Exchange<sup>19</sup>, with Mattel abandoning games altogether in 1984.<sup>20</sup> The next years

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<sup>16</sup> While the gender issues plaguing games are important, that topic is deserving of its own article or book; Canadian Press, "Video Industry Attempts to Lure Women," *Montreal Gazette* August 13, 1982, A7, accessed through Microform.

<sup>17</sup> John Haslett Cuff, "Cityscapes: The Problem With Pac Man," *Globe and Mail* April 17, 1982, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Neal, "Ban Video Game in Which Tellers are 'Killed,' Urge Angry Bank Employees," *Montreal Gazette* December 4, 1982, A3, accessed through Microform.

<sup>19</sup> "Share Prices Zapped by Video Game Losses," *Globe and Mail* December 10, 1982, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>20</sup> Fred Lebolt, "Big Losses Force Mattel to Abandon Video Games," *Toronto Star* February 4, 1984, D15, accessed through Microform.

were challenging for video games in Canada<sup>21</sup> and by 1985, many papers were writing mock ‘in memoriam’ pieces like “Whatever Happened to Video Games?”<sup>22</sup> and “Remember Video Games?”<sup>23</sup> Even through the down years, video game concerns continued. One Toronto vice-principal declared that video games were corrupting youth<sup>24</sup>, and a new concern arose, as people feared that video games were too addictive.<sup>25</sup> The continued anti-game articles are likely an echo from video game popularity in the early 1980s but speak to the fact that the even as video games declined, that there was still plenty of concern surrounding them. Much like the States, video games seemed to be on the way out. The industry would recover after 1985 and by the early 1990s, had become an even bigger industry than its pre-crash state.

Before heading into the post-crash days, it is important to note that the video game industry in Canada had already caught the public’s attention by the early 1980s. Don Mattrick and Jeff Sember of DSI appeared in Vancouver papers by 1982. “2 youths ‘zap ‘em’ with video game,” declared one headline. The article meanwhile explored how the two Burnaby teens were making their mark in the video game industry.<sup>26</sup> This was not a minor piece, garnering the main headline on the front page of the *Vancouver Sun*. DSI was by no means an established company but was well regarded as an up-and-comer and a company that deserved following. In another piece a few months later, Sember and

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<sup>21</sup> “Video-game boom slips into dust-laden decline,” *Winnipeg Free Press* May 23, 1984, 39, accessed through Microform.

<sup>22</sup> Bradley Bird, “Whatever Happened to Video Games,” *Winnipeg Free Press* February 2, 1985, p17, accessed through Microform.

<sup>23</sup> Sun News Dispatches, “Remember Video Games?: Vid Kids’ Dreams, Ambitions Evaporate,” *Vancouver Sun* December 27, 1985, C1, accessed through Microform.

<sup>24</sup> Denise Harrington, “Video Game Corrupt Students, Vice-Principal Says,” *Toronto Star* May 13, 1984, A16, accessed through Microform.

<sup>25</sup> Dave Haynes, “‘Pac-Man Fever’ Cited: Youngsters Admit Robbing for Video-Game Money,” *Winnipeg Free Press* July 18, 1983, p14, accessed through Microform.

<sup>26</sup> Miguel Moya, “2 Youths ‘Zap ‘em’ With Video Games,” *Vancouver Sun* December 13, 1982, A1, accessed through Microform.

Mattrick became defenders of the games industry, when it seemed at its lowest point, stating that they believed in the games market and that the industry would survive the Crash.<sup>27</sup> Outside of Vancouver, the video game industry was not newsworthy yet, but this would change over time.

### **Addicted to Nintendo**

The arrival of the NES in North America in 1985 rejuvenated the video game industry and effectively ended the downturn of the Crash. In Canada, the effects of Nintendo were not immediate, or at least not in the media's reaction to the new console system. From 1986 until the early 1990s, Nintendo would define the home gaming scene in Canada, as it did in the United States and other parts of the world. As the popularity of Nintendo grew, so did concerns over youth addictions to video games and the effects of their content. The Crash nearly killed the home video game industry in Canada but the late 1980s saw it re-emerge and grow steadily, with Nintendo captivating youth and even adults across the country.

In Canada, video games had begun to rebound by 1986. The NES would grip the country in the coming years, but first signs of video game revival came with a return to arcades. According to one Toronto arcade operator, between 1982 and 1986, three-quarters of the city's game centres closed, but he also acknowledged that games had begun to rebound.<sup>28</sup> In the same article discussing the re-emergence of arcades, the author acknowledged how the panic surrounding games and their content subsided with the significant decrease in game popularity. The Crash gave games a break from the heavy

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<sup>27</sup> Alan Daniels, "Pair Sure of Video Game Demand," *Vancouver Sun* January 4, 1986, B3, accessed through Microform.

<sup>28</sup> Salem Alaton, "Atari Puts the Zap Back in Video Games Industry," *Globe and Mail* January 6, 1986, accessed through ProQuest.

scrutiny it had faced during its peak years, allowing it time to address some of the issues that had plagued it early on, including creating more multiplayer experiences as ways of discouraging anti-social behaviour.<sup>29</sup> This is a major aspect of the late 1980s video game scene, as Nintendo's policies attempted to make games a social event and limited violent content. Of course, this would not be the end to video game criticism but it is important to note that as games began to regain their footing in the Canadian market, there was hope that they would be seen differently. Arcades and the home computer market maintained after the crash but it was the console market that would become the main attraction in the industry.

“Nintendo Addiction Frightens,” the 1988 *Calgary Herald* headline read. In it the author reported “consensus among parents is that the game is addictive – and that their addicted children will spend day after day playing the games, from *Mike Tyson's Punch Out* to the *Legend of Zelda*,” and even reported one parent threw their family's game system into a lake when his child refused to help with chores.<sup>30</sup> The fear of games had returned in full force but this time with a new focus. Nintendo was releasing a better line of family and kid friendly games like adventure and exploration game *The Legend of Zelda* or side-scrolling action game *Super Mario Brothers*, which helped quell the concerns over violent game content. However, now the anti-game literature surrounded kids becoming addicted to their NES. A few months later in early 1989, the *Montreal Gazette* put out a similar piece, advising of the dangers of the Nintendo console like wrist injuries resulting from extended play along with tips for parents to address and extend boundaries to Nintendo addicted children.

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<sup>29</sup> Alaton, “Atari Puts the Zap.”

<sup>30</sup> Linda Shrieves, “Nintendo's Addiction Frightens,” *Calgary Herald* November 26, 1988, G2, accessed through Microform.

The fear of video games is apparent in this article but it also speaks to the overall lack of respect regarding video games. At one point the author says, “the culture [the Nintendo] disseminates is, of course, junk; but what isn’t these days?”<sup>31</sup> Here lies the underlying problem that video games faced and the reason that anti-video game rhetoric came in so many different forms. Often the fears and concerns with games were based in some form of fact but the reality is that games were seen as an aspect of the new generation’s inferior culture. New music and film aimed at Generation X did not resonate with the majority of the Baby Boom generation and video games were the biggest sign of this changing culture.

While the fear of games and Nintendophobia were real and widespread at this time, the growth of games had plenty of momentum. Video games resurged during the Canadian 1988 Christmas season. The physical toy market was hit hard during this season as the Nintendo and Sega game systems were the hot ticket item of the holidays.<sup>32</sup> Nintendo was so hot that there were extreme shortages of the system at retailers, with one distributor claiming that less than 10% of his ordered product from the gaming giant had been filled.<sup>33</sup> From Nintendo’s success it was clear that the video game craze had returned to Canada.

As the consoles flooded homes across Canada, pieces began to appear about not only accepting Nintendo systems in the home but also how they could be beneficial. The Nintendo Power Pad was an add-on for the NES allowing the player to participate in

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<sup>31</sup> Newsweek, “No More Nintendo Until You’ve Done Your Homework!” *Montreal Gazette* April 30, 1989, B8, accessed through Microform.

<sup>32</sup> Marina Strauss, “Toy Makers Zapped by Hot Nintendo,” *Globe and Mail* December 13, 1988, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Kidd, “Santa Finds Video Games Are Hard to Come By,” *Toronto Star* December 15, 1988, D3, accessed through Microform.

track-meet style events and other games using the pad as a sort of running simulator. The pad was released in 1988 and the *Calgary Herald* took note of the accessory as a way for children to exercise while gaming. The article's author suggested that the pad was a sign of Nintendo attempting gain popularity with the keen gamer and more serious consumers as well.<sup>34</sup> This was not the only piece that focused on the technological marvels of games with another piece examining the exciting advent of 3-dimensional graphics in Sega's newest system.<sup>35</sup>

Serious national gamers also garnered attention in the media. In one example, a teen from Saint-Jérôme, Quebec was featured in the *Montreal Gazette* for his success in a national game competition. The same piece also pointed out that despite his fluency in games, the teenager Martin Lefebvre had managed to excel in school.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps games were not destroying the Canadian youth after all. Another writer argued that, through proper understanding and interaction, parents could use the Nintendo as a way to connect with their kids, by playing games with them.<sup>37</sup> The adult game-player was recognized around this time as well. One author in the globe found that the industry had started to target and even infiltrate the adult demographic.<sup>38</sup> The change of adult demographics in games is incredibly important to video games in Canada but this was but the beginning of a major transition, which would continue in the following years and decades.

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<sup>34</sup> Jim Bray, "Play Isn't Only Thing in Video Games," *Calgary Herald* February 2, 1989, C3, accessed through Microform.

<sup>35</sup> Jim Bray, "3D Video Game New Dimension in Fun," *Calgary Herald* November 24, 1988, F1, accessed through Microform.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Buchignani, "Nintendo Mania: St. Jérôme Youth Pushes All the Right Buttons – Quickly," *Montreal Gazette* July 16, 1989, A6, accessed through Microform.

<sup>37</sup> David Trigueiro, "TV Game Could Be Parents' Friend," *Calgary Herald* July 14, 1989, A4, accessed through Microform.

<sup>38</sup> Marina Strauss, "Sophisticated Video Games Aren't Just for Kids Anymore," *Globe and Mail* November 6, 1989, accessed through ProQuest.

Video games had grown to national cult status, captivating the minds of children and adults alike across the country. This did not mean that games were free from obstacles during this period. Nintendo's branding practices had largely kept concerns of video game violence to a minimum but other games had grabbed the attention of parents and experts alike. Arcade game *Double Dragon* was one such game, wherein the opening cutscene, a woman is assaulted by four henchmen and then taken by the group of men. This scene alarmed parents and in Toronto, some resorted to police authority, calling the anti-pornography unit and calling for the game's removal from stores. At least one store complied and removed the game in the city and it is likely that more did as well.<sup>39</sup> These fights against games were not as numerous as early examples but it is clear that the video game concerns were still prevalent.

The 1980s were a rollercoaster ride for video games. The early Atari home consoles and obsessions with arcades defined the early 1980s. This brought in plenty of criticism and concerns over violence and the effects of games. The North American crash nearly destroyed the home console market in Canada but also managed to keep the anti-video game concerns at bay. The late 1980s saw video game return to the homes of Canadians and even began to be recognized as legitimate cultural products. With the arrival of Nintendo, Canadians rushed back to an industry that had been largely left behind in the earlier half of the decade. Gaming competitions and parental advisories on dealing with video game addictions clearly demonstrate that games were becoming more than just a hobby for the youth of Canada. An interest in the video game industry appeared in this decade as well which would feed into the industry's rapid growth in the

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<sup>39</sup> Ann Rauhala, "Parents Alarmed by Message About Women in 'Violent' Video," *Globe and Mail* December 9, 1987, accessed through ProQuest.

mid-to-late 1990s. Video games had rebounded with a vengeance at the edge of the 1980s and were poised to take another leap forward in the following decade.

### **Boss Battles: Video Game Hot Points, 1990-2004**

From 1990 to the mid-2000s, video games would grow steadily in Canada. Covering all of the events that occurred in this time would fill a chapter twice this length. For the sake of brevity while still grasping the tone of the time, this section will focus on some marquee events. By late 1990, video game sales had returned to near pre-crash levels.<sup>40</sup> By 1993, more than a quarter of Canadian homes contained a Nintendo console<sup>41</sup> and consumers had spent \$370 million – or more than half a billion 2015 dollars – on video games in that year alone.<sup>42</sup> Nintendo had already solidified itself in Canada but competition from Sega would only further the market’s growth.

The Sega-Nintendo Console War brought the video game industry to new heights in Canada, but also raised concerns over their contents to levels never seen before. Citizens across the country would protest games like *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap*, demanding that games get banned for much of the decade. After Sega’s downturn and the end of its rivalry with Nintendo, the decade would see video games continued growth, with many papers beginning to write about the promise of video games both in the workplace but also as a way to benefit children and adults alike. Flashpoints occurred in the anti-game debate including in the aftermath of the Columbine shootings but this time

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<sup>40</sup> Barbara Aarsteinsen, “Sales of Video Games Close to Record Levels,” *Toronto Star* December 12, 1990, F1, accessed through Microform.

<sup>41</sup> “That’s Edutainment: Video Games Master Nintendo to Expand Border of its Kingdom with Learning Process,” *Vancouver Sun* January 30, 1993, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>42</sup> “One in Three Homes Have a System,” *Montreal Gazette* December 18, 1993, accessed through LexisNexis.



with much more even handed responses. By the turn of the millennium, video games were a part of everyday life in Canada and many observed their benefits.

### **Sega-Nintendo in Canada**

Were you a Nintendo or Sega kid? This question was asked by youth across North America in the early 1990s. After the success of Nintendo's NES system, they released their upgraded Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) in North America in 1991. Sega had released their own console, the Sega Genesis, two years before in 1989. The two game console giants became intense rivals during the days of the SNES and Sega Genesis systems, launching marketing campaigns against each other and vying for valuable market share. Blake J. Harris' *Console Wars* examines this rivalry with a focus on the United States and in some case European markets but with Canada's emerging video game consumerism, the country became enthralled in the same race. Video games began to receive the type of coverage that blockbuster films had enjoyed for years.

In early 1993, Nintendo of Canada Ltd. owned 80% of the Canadian video game market.<sup>43</sup> However, it was clear that a shift was occurring in the market with Sega on the rise.<sup>44</sup> By the summer of 1994, Sega controlled had jumped to a 60% share, a miraculous leap from the days of Nintendo's iron grip.<sup>45</sup> Just over a year later, newspapers across the country were documenting the "cut-throat game of poker" that Nintendo and Sega were playing leading into the 1994 holiday season.<sup>46</sup> The *Globe and Mail* called the war a

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, "Nintendo Games are the Barbie."

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey Rowan, "Sexier Games Lure Older Players," *Globe and Mail* June 22, 1993, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>45</sup> "Violent Video Games Gone Too Far; *Mortal Kombat II* so Horrid it Should be Boycotted," *Montreal Gazette* August 7, 1994, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>46</sup> Katherine Monk, "Nintendo Squares Off With Sega: Superpowers Waging War of Technology to Win Big by Season's End," *Vancouver Sun* August 6, 1994, accessed through LexisNexis.

battle of bits<sup>47</sup> and *Marketing Magazine* published a full-scale article documenting how Nintendo and Sega were “duking it out for control” of Canada’s video game market.<sup>48</sup> Papers had articles discussing the merits of Sega and Nintendo’s Christmas lineup and reviews of the games that each company was offering. Sega and Nintendo had taken Canada by storm, with the industry booming as a result of their competition.

The rise of video games in this period brought with it intense concerns over content. The release of *Mortal Kombat* brought extreme video game violence to the homes of Canadians at a level not previously seen before. Prior games of concern like *Death Race* and *Double Dragon* were left in arcades and *Custer’s Revenge* never experienced the level of success that the fighting game had achieved. The *Toronto Star* noticed *Mortal Kombat* and even its games writer William Burrill, who wrote reviews and editorials on the industry at the time, took a slightly harsher tone than usual in his review of the game questioning its graphic fatalities and the fact it gives the player the ability to cause extreme physical harm to women.<sup>49</sup>

*Night Trap* also was widely panned during this period. *Night Trap* was a game that simulated a horror movie where the player needed to protect a group of five girls from vampires. The game was denounced for sexualized violence and in Canada, there were a number of groups demanded it be banned nationwide. The White Ribbon Campaign, a group that works towards the end of female violence, was one of these groups in Canada. In the summer of 1993, the group organized at least one rally in

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<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Rowan, “Video Games: A Battle of Bits,” *Globe and Mail* November 21, 1994, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>48</sup> Angela Kryhul, “Sega and Nintendo Duing it Out for Control of Canada’s Booming Video Game Market,” *Marketing Magazine* 99(13) April 4, 1994: 9-10.

<sup>49</sup> William Burrill, “Violent Games Fight it Out,” *Toronto Star* September 25, 1993, accessed through LexisNexis.

Toronto, which was covered by the press, calling for a boycott to Sega products until *Night Trap* was removed from store shelves. Jack Layton, a former Toronto city council member and future New Democratic Party leader, also denounced the game.<sup>50</sup>

Sega withdrew *Night Trap* from sale in January 1994, and implemented a rating system for their games largely in response to the outcry.<sup>51</sup> This was not the end of violent video games concerns. The sequel to *Mortal Kombat* drew a similar response. An article in the *Montreal Gazette* declared in August 1994 that games had gone too far with violence and that “*Mortal Kombat II* [was] so horrid [that] it should be boycotted.” The article questioned the point behind having such violent games in circulation while also claiming that these games promote aggression and violence in children that play them.<sup>52</sup> This view was consistent with what much of the population thought at the time.

Throughout the first half of the decade, there was plenty of coverage from newspapers that dissected the violence in video game issue, with many taking an anti-game stance.

Violence was the main concern that video games were associated with, but they also became a lightning rod for the problems with society. In 1991, five years after the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, one author claimed the lack of emotional scarring or pain on games was because games like *Space Invaders* dulled our culture to the disaster.<sup>53</sup> Violence was a major concern of parents and writers alike. Articles like “Where do we draw the line in video-game violence,”<sup>54</sup> “Is Super Mario evil?,”<sup>55</sup> and

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<sup>50</sup> Jack Lakey, “Firm’s ‘brutal’ video game prompts call for boycott,” *Toronto Star* July 17, 1993, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>51</sup> “Sega Withdraws Game From Sale,” *Montreal Gazette* January 11, 1994, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>52</sup> “Violent Video Games Gone Too Far,” *Montreal Gazette*.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Strauss, “Remembering Challenger: *Space-Invader* Culture has Dulled us to Tragedy,” *Globe and Mail* February 23, 1991, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>54</sup> William Burrill, “Where do we Drawn the Line in Video-Game Violence?” *Montreal Gazette* August 15, 1991, B6, accessed through Microform.

<sup>55</sup> “Is Super Mario Evil?” *Globe and Mail* August 11, 1992, accessed through ProQuest.

“Video-game violence a monster unleashed?”<sup>56</sup> captured headlines in major papers across the country. One article in the *Montreal Gazette* called the content of video games “mindless violence” and asked parents to monitor what their children were playing.<sup>57</sup> While some of the writing tried to show an evenhanded approach to video game violence, it was often overshadowed by the overwhelming fear surrounding games.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the video game violence debate was that the arguments largely took from hearsay and opinion rather than fact, while experts had reserved or even expressed positive opinions of games. In 1992, a conference was held to study the effects of games. It gathered experts from Cornell University, the University of Connecticut, and other premier Universities in the United States and found that games were not taking away from children’s studies and proved beneficial in developing spatial and hand-eye coordination skills. They also admitted that while more research would need to be conducted, that there was little to suggest that game violence would influence children outside of the living room.<sup>58</sup> Despite the lack of evidence, it was not uncommon for people to speak of video game links to real world violence as if it were fact. Video games were seen as a public nuisance by many and drove fears into the minds of parents across the country.

Violence was not the only concern people had with games. Claims were made that they were linked to gambling, obesity, and other health problems as well. In 1993 and 1994, reports came out of France and the University of Washington claiming that video

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<sup>56</sup> Karen Auge, “Video-Game Violence a Monster Unleashed?,” *Globe and Mail* February 16, 1993, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>57</sup> “Bang! Zap! Kill ‘em!; Do You Know What Your Children Are Really Playing?,” *Montreal Gazette* December 16, 1992, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>58</sup> Special from the Washington Post, “Video Games Won’t Damage Kids, Experts Say,” *Toronto Star* March 28, 1992, accessed through LexisNexis.

games were a major cause of epilepsy due to the way that the graphics and lights interacted with the brain.<sup>59</sup> At McGill University, a study was conducted that claimed that video games led kids to gamble with their peers.<sup>60</sup> Obesity in Canada has been a concern for much of the postwar period but mapping the issue of childhood obesity is more difficult.<sup>61</sup> What is clear though is that by this time, childhood obesity was on the government and media's radar. Health officials were quick to suggest that the lifestyles of kids, driven by television and video games, were the cause of a largely unfit youth culture.<sup>62</sup> One article in the *Globe and Mail* even denounced the game culture of the time for making it more difficult for people to think about new ideas, highlighted by the death of non-blockbuster novels.<sup>63</sup> Video games were under attack from a number of different angles but the larger thing to take from this is the culture of playing and enjoying games was seen as inferior and detrimental to the public.

The culture of video games was an access point for writers, individuals and groups to claim major problems with the current state of society. Violence, obesity, mental disorders, a lack of empathy were all connected to growing video game industry and what it represented in Canadian culture. *Night Trap* and the *Mortal Kombat* series were extreme examples of video game content but to many they represented the end of human decency. With more people buying games than ever before, the worry became that

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<sup>59</sup> Associated Press, "French Report Links Video Games to Seizures," *Globe and Mail* March 4, 1993, accessed through ProQuest and Warren King, "Video Games Get Blame for Triggering Seizures," *Toronto Star* April 19, 1994, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>60</sup> Lynn Moore, "Playing Video Games Leads Adolescents to Gamble More: Study," *Montreal Gazette* October 6, 1994, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>61</sup> For more on obesity concerns in Canada, see Wendy Mitchinson, "Educating Doctors about Obesity: The Gendered Use of Pharmaceutical Advertisements," in *Bodily Subjects: Essays on Gender and Health, 1800-2000*, ed. Tracy Penny Light, Barbara Brookes, and Wendy Mitchinson (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 268-302.

<sup>62</sup> "School Get Failing Grade in Phys-Ed," *Globe and Mail* April 15, 1993, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>63</sup> Bronwyn Drainie, "It's Becoming Harder to Get Lost in Thought These Days," *Globe and Mail* March 19, 1994, accessed through ProQuest.

these games represented what everyone was playing and leading to fears for children's well being. As will be shown in the following chapter, Canada has a history of moral panics related to the content that children were able to access, such as comic books or television, and video games are no different.<sup>64</sup> The fears regarding games were that they would desensitize youth from violence or tragedy.

Not all press that covered video games was negative, as seen by the way that the video game console race was covered. Beyond this coverage though, some had begun to notice the ability for games to provide more than just entertainment. In 1993, a *Vancouver Sun* article covered how Nintendo was developing games and products that would encourage learning in Canadian youth.<sup>65</sup> In 1994, the Calgary Stampede, one of Canada's largest festivals that brings in hundreds of thousands of people, announced that it would be bringing in new games to its festival and one author from the *Calgary Herald* declared that the new games' arrival indicate that the "Future is here at Stampede."<sup>66</sup> The *Vancouver Sun* published an article from *Newsday*, in the Business section no less, about *Myst*, a game with such a strong legacy that it is currently featured at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The piece explored the intuitive and elaborate game and how it immersed people in a mysterious and exciting world.<sup>67</sup> The industry in Canada was also

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<sup>64</sup> See Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 143-145 and Malcolm Dean, *Censored! Only In Canada: The History of Film Censorship – The Scandal Off the Screen* (Toronto: Virgo Press, 1981), 6.

<sup>65</sup> "That's Edutainment," *Vancouver Sun*.

<sup>66</sup> Lisa Dempster, "Future is Here at Stampede," *Calgary Herald* July 14, 1994, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>67</sup> *Newsday*, "Mystical Island Adventure a Hit: Game is an Intuitive, Mythic Journey to Alternate Realities," *Vancouver Sun* August 25, 1994, accessed through LexisNexis.

making headlines still as the opening of Silicon Knights and their recent success was covered in the *Toronto Star*.<sup>68</sup>

The competing rhetoric and news coverage surrounding games showed that with their growth came both excitement and animosity but also reveals a much larger trend in the culture of games. Games represented the culture of the next generation and the resulting fear came from an older guard, unsure of their value or effect on those that played them. By the 1990s, many of those that had played games in the arcades of the late 1970s and early 1980s had grown up and had maintained video games as a pastime. Even more remarkably, video games had begun to capture a market of Canadians that had never played games before. In a statement to *The Globe and Mail* in June of 1993, a Sega of Canada representative stated that “kids are starting to grow up with game play and as they mature there are greater demands from the machines... I do believe there is a maturing in the game player.”<sup>69</sup> In 1995, the *Globe and Mail* reported that Canadian software retailers had noticed a drastic increase in game software sales from adult computer users. Games like *Myst*, *Sim City 2000*, and *Microsoft Golf* were among the best sellers. These games make sense for adult audiences. *Myst* is a graphic adventure puzzle game; *Sim City 2000*, a city-building simulator; and *Microsoft Golf*, a golf-sports game. All these games are calm in comparison to other violent games but even *Doom*, a first-person shooter denounced for its ultra-violent gameplay, was being bought by many of these consumers. Current reports claim that the average age of gamers in Canada is 33 years, but the change from youth interest to an older demographic took place over time

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<sup>68</sup> Canadian Press, “Two Hit Pay Dirt in Computer Games Field,” *Toronto Star* December 14, 1993, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey Rowan, “Sexier Games Lure Older Players,” *Globe and Mail* June 22, 1993, accessed through LexisNexis.

and by the early 1990s, this shift was evident. This new wave of adult gamers would feed into the industry's growth not only as consumers but also as creators. The arrival of Silicon Knights and other Canadian studios in the early 1990s was a clear sign of this and would only continue throughout the decade.

In 1995, Sony joined Sega and Nintendo in the battle for video game supremacy with the release of their own console, the PlayStation.<sup>70</sup> Sega's Saturn release was largely a dud and over the next decade, the company would fall out of game hardware and eventually transitioned into purely software. The effect of the Sega-Nintendo console war had elevated video games to new heights in Canada and brought a new demographic of gamers to the Canadian market. This growth and trend would continue through the decade and into the next but the late 1990s would prove to be another hot point in Canada's video game debates.

### **Turn of the Millennium**

The type of coverage that came with the Console Wars continued throughout the decade and into the present. Video games had become a major part of news coverage and Canadian lifestyle. As well, video games were an important part of Canadian kid culture with a growing number of adult gamers. Despite this growth, they had yet to enter the mainstream. While game reviews and positive articles appeared in the 1990s, it would take time before the reviews and articles were geared towards the mainstream and adult audience. By the turn of the Millennium, the arrival of new consoles from Nintendo and Sega, along with newcomer Sony had continued the growth of video games in Canadian consumers.

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<sup>70</sup> Frank Lenk, "Sony Gets in the Game with the PlayStation," *Globe and Mail* September 9, 1995, accessed through ProQuest.



In the years leading up to 2000, video games in Canada saw a number of significant moments. In 1998, the Pokémon video games arrived in North America and brought with it a new pop culture phenomenon. After the Columbine shooting in 1999, the media was quick to draw conclusive comparisons to video games violence as a source of blame, but this time with competing claims with some commenters even defending video games. Along with these moments came support of video games and more stories on the growing industry in Canada. All these events display a growing support of video games, as the industry and its consumers matured, and also a change in the type of coverage that they received. Video games were no longer seen as a self-contained industry but as important cultural objects with repercussions felt in the larger economic realm. Video games had not reached mainstream status in Canada yet but by this period, they were heading in that direction.

### **Cultural Status Snapshot**

Video games continually made the news throughout the rest of the 1990s. As experienced during the Console Wars, the coverage varied in its style and tone. Some pieces touched on the growing games industry in Canada. The *Montreal Gazette* took to writing articles on the arrival of future mega-studio Ubisoft Montreal. One covered the studio more than a year after its arrival, describing its relaxed office culture and how the firm represents the revitalization of Quebec's economy through the multimedia sector.<sup>71</sup> The *Globe and Mail* wrote a similar piece in 1999, noting, "with the proliferation of computer games, graphics and digitized film production, electronic animation is in high

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<sup>71</sup> Andy Riga, "The Fun Business: Ubi Soft's Arrival 18 Months Ago Has Helped Make Montreal a Hotbed of the Computer-Game Industry and a Big Employer of Young Artists," *Montreal Gazette* April 10, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

demand.”<sup>72</sup> Suddenly, the rise of video game studios was not simply a matter of a cool new company making its way in an American dominated industry but rather a representation of a growing knowledge economy, anchored by video games.

Montreal was not the only city to receive this kind of press as Vancouver’s video game industry caught the attention of the media as well. Radical Entertainment, the EA Canada spinoff from the early 1990s, was featured in the *Globe and Mail*.<sup>73</sup> As with the Montreal industry articles, the piece linked back to growing new media industries in the British Columbia area. The following year, the *Vancouver Sun* noted that the city’s old Yaletown district had become a new media sector of the city with graphics and video games companies inhabiting the former factory haven.<sup>74</sup> Companies like Bliink<sup>75</sup> and EA Canada had taken over the Greater Vancouver Metro, causing revitalization in the neighbourhoods where it planted itself.<sup>76</sup> The video game industry was growing in Canada and its effects were being noticed in the Canadian media.

Alongside this coverage of course was an array of surrounding video game coverage. Reviews had always appeared in newspapers but they were written with a greater frequency at this point. *Civilization II*’s value was examined in the *Globe and Mail*<sup>77</sup>, the *Calgary Herald* rejoiced the arrival of *Star Trek: Starfleet Academy*<sup>78</sup>, and the

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<sup>72</sup> Simon Tuck, “Montreal Mounts a Big Comeback,” *Globe and Mail* November 13, 1999, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>73</sup> Deborah Wilson, “Radical Firm Defies the Odds: Some Pioneers May be Struggling but Not This Games Maker,” *Globe and Mail* July 23, 1996, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>74</sup> Doug War, “Everything Old Looks New Again in Yaletown,” *Vancouver Sun* April 16, 1997, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Wilson, “Bliink Into the Future: Interactive Games Grow Up and Move to Yaletown,” *Vancouver Sun* July 2, 1997, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>76</sup> Wendy Stueck, “Electronic Arts Builds Workplace Wonder,” *Globe and Mail* September 21, 1998, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>77</sup> Frank Lenk, “Fighting Factions Vie for All of Civilization,” *Globe and Mail* June 3, 1999, accessed through Lexis Nexis.

<sup>78</sup> Grant McKenzie, “Sci-Fi Adventure Arrivaes With Two New Games,” *Calgary Herald* October 26, 1997, accessed through LexisNexis.

*Toronto Star* said that *Mario Kart 64* was “the best new game of [the] year.”<sup>79</sup> The population readily enjoyed games but that did not save them from the scorn that had followed them. Obesity<sup>80</sup>, lack of empathy in youth<sup>81</sup>, and many other claimed effects of video games that had been brought up over that last 20 years continued to be fractured during this time. What is important to gather from this wave of articles is that the video game press continued in the second half of the 1990s, but also brought some new light on the way that the industry was viewed in Canada. Video games press was beginning to change and this is seen especially when looking at the emergence of Pokémon and the aftermath of the Columbine shooting.

### **Pokémon Craze**

Video games in Canada had seen a variety of peaks. The arcade period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Nintendo in the late 1980s, and the Sega-Nintendo Console Wars of the early 1990s had all helped begin periods of rapid video game growth. The turn of the Millennium had its own major event, the arrival of Pokémon. Pokémon are a series of role-playing games that revolve around collecting animal like creatures. The first games in the series were released in Japan in early 1996. After years of success in the country, they were brought to North America in the fall of 1998. The games and resulting spin-offs took Canada by storm and its impact could not escape the media.

The *Calgary Herald* headline read “Pokémon Phenomenon Invades West: Game is Part TV Show, Part Comic Book,” explaining what exactly the new anime craze was

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<sup>79</sup> William Burrill, “Go For Spin with Nintendo’s Latest: Super Mario Kart 64 Leaves Other Racing Games in the Dust,” *Toronto Star* March 6, 1997, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>80</sup> Robin Harvey, “Health Experts Blame TV for Overweight Kids,” *Toronto Star* October 31, 1997, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>81</sup> Charles W. Moore, “Guns Are Not the Problem: Our Culture’s Ethical Bankruptcy is Producing Amoral Pre-Teen,” *Calgary Herald* April 1, 1998, accessed through LexisNexis.

and how it had taken over Japan. It also pointed out that while Pokémonmania had been limited to Japan, it would soon take over Canada.<sup>82</sup> In just over seven months after the games releases in September 1998, they had sold over 200,000 copies,<sup>83</sup> and that total reached 400,000 by August 1999. There had been moments of video game excitement before but Pokémon had brought a new kind of euphoria resulting in ‘buyers panic’ where parents were fighting for the last games in stores.<sup>84</sup> The television show, comics, trading cards and most notably the games had first begun as a fad but with new games and material coming, this fad would last much longer than pogs, crazy bones, or other temporary child fascinations of the time. Articles appeared explaining to parents the main characters and plot of the game and TV show. Pokémon had grown to a cultural icon and its growth would only continue with each new series of games released. Pokémon is the second best-selling video game franchise of all time, having taken a hold of Canada and the rest of the world over the last fifteen-plus years.

Of course, with Pokémon’s success came its share of scorn. A *Calgary Herald* writer asked if Pokémon “is the worst blight cast upon the Earth since Barney?”<sup>85</sup> The *Montreal Gazette* took a hard stance on the game series, claiming that, despite the cuddly exterior, Pokémon were violent.<sup>86</sup> After a stabbing at a Montreal high school occurred over a Pokémon trading card dispute, the media was quick to blame the cards and

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<sup>82</sup> Darren Zenko, “Pokemon Phenomenon Invades West: Game is Part TV Show, Part Comic Book,” *Calgary Herald* October 16, 1998, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>83</sup> Kathryn Greenaway, “Pokemoncaptures world’s tween,” *Montreal Gazette* May 7, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>84</sup> Dave Ebner, “Toy Firms Pocket Pokemon Riches,” *Globe and Mail* August 28, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>85</sup> Ray Turchansky, “Pokemon Phenomenon Predicted to Top \$10 Billion Before Going Way of the Purple Dinosaur,” *Calgary Herald* November 12, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>86</sup> “Cuddly Pokemon Creatures Basically Violent,” *Montreal Gazette* November 2, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

Pokémon brand itself.<sup>87</sup> While not directly related to the games, the swiftness from which the media blamed the Pokémon franchise is still indicative of some of the fears that surrounded the games and series as a whole. Yet despite the concern, the fear of Pokémon was relatively minor with articles advising parents about how to deal with the craze without being afraid. One inspired author of the *Montreal Gazette* even made connections between Pokémon game mechanics and teaching about “colonialism and conservation.”<sup>88</sup> Other pieces covered the sheer growth of the industry and even what the Pokémon Movie meant to parents and the franchise.<sup>89</sup> Pokémon took their fair share of hits but even concerns over violent content would not keep the popular culture franchise from its rise.

Pokémon is one of the most successful franchises in history and its success was well marked in Canada. It is also interesting that the largest popular culture phenomenon of the time was based on a video game. *Pac-Man*, *Super Mario*, *The Legend of Zelda*, and other game franchises had all garnered a form of national craze but nothing comparable to the way that Pokémon took over Canada’s youth. The franchise of course was much larger than games but it is interesting that the origin came from a video game, where as others from past were usually based off of cartoon shows, comics or action figures. Games had grown to a point where they were what incited national crazes. It was seen with Pokémon and most recently was *Minecraft*.<sup>90</sup> Video games were so successful that

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<sup>87</sup> Ingrid Peritz, “Pokémon Craze Leads to Schoolyard Stabbing,” *Globe and Mail* October 28, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>88</sup> Susan Pinker, “Why be Afraid of Pokemon?: Parents Can Rein in Children by Just Saying No or Use the Craze to Teach Some Valuable Lessons,” *Montreal Gazette* November 16, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>89</sup> “Parents Can’t Say No to the Pokemon Movie,” *Toronto Star* November 5, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>90</sup> See Elizabeth Renzetti, “With Minecraft, I’m not just playing a game, I’ve entered a secret society,” *Globe and Mail* September 19, 2014, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/with-minecraft-im-not-just-playing-a-game-ive-entered-a-secret-society/article20712228/> and Murat Yukselir and Shane Dingman, “Why Minecraft is so popular and why Microsoft is interested,” *Globe and*

they were the most influential form of youth popular culture media in Canada. The fears and hesitations maintained but games had grown despite them.

### **Tragedy Fallout: After Columbine**

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold walked into their high school in Littleton, Colorado, pulled out an assortment of firearms and shot 33 people before turning the guns on themselves. The shooting took a toll on the American psyche, and prompted questions about what had prompted these two teenagers to become so hostile. Video games became one of the biggest sources of blame and in Canada, opinion pieces and editorials covered the issue and shooting long after the crisis was over. Similar to earlier in the decade, many jumped on the anti-video game bandwagon, but others took neutral stances and some even supported games. This was one of the major societal battlegrounds justifying video game violence and the rhetoric reveals a change in the way games were both written about and seen in a cultural light.

It is not difficult to understand the immediate finger pointing right after the shooting occurred. In a *Globe and Mail* article, a former peer of the shooters was quick to point out that the two became isolated after they became engrossed in violence and video games.<sup>91</sup> In the *Vancouver Sun*, a survey of Canadians and parents found that 80% thought video game violence was partially to blame for the shooting.<sup>92</sup> The *Toronto Star* ran an article where the Littleton District Attorney linked the shooting to the violent

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*Mail* September 10, 2014, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/technology/tech-news/why-minecraft-is-so-popular-and-why-microsoft-is-interested/article20518975/>.

<sup>91</sup> Alanna Mitchell, "'Creepy' Duo Favoured Swastikas and Lipstick," *Globe and Mail* April 22, 1999, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>92</sup> Andrew Duffy, "Canadians Blame Bad Parenting for Massacre," *Vancouver Sun* April 27, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

content of televisions and video games.<sup>93</sup> One writer in an opinion piece directly blamed the popular culture of violence and in reference to video games, and openly asked, “can anyone seriously pretend that [video game violence] has no effect... the depravity in our culture must reflect some sort of social or moral decline.”<sup>94</sup> For many, linking video games to what happened in Littleton was simply connecting the dots. The culture of violence rhetoric was alive and well but its hold on the media was waning.

Other articles were not as quick to link the tragedy with the content of violent video games. One in the *Vancouver Sun* featured a Littleton educator who pointed to much larger issues that led to the shooting pointing out that, “if the home has violence or hatred or indifference express, and then a kid goes and hangs around with (similar) kids, he will deal with violence he sees on video games and TV very differently than a child who comes from a loving, caring home and is taught to handle conflict non-violently.”<sup>95</sup> A letter to the *Globe and Mail* editor also let video games off the hook, acknowledging larger factors at play.<sup>96</sup> Another poignant writer was quick to point out that if violent video games were a sign of a child’s likelihood to commit violent acts that officials would need to “round up half the nation’s high-school students and line them up for state-instituted therapy sessions.”<sup>97</sup> This group of defenders offered a new dimension to Canadians views on video games. While Columbine elicited many of the same responses to games that were seen during earlier decades and even the Console Wars of the early

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<sup>93</sup> Ted Anthony, “School Massacre Sparks Crusade to End Violence,” *Toronto Star* April 24, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>94</sup> Marcus Gee, “Littleton and the Culture of Violence,” *Globe and Mail* April 28, 1999, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>95</sup> Rebecca Wigod, “In the Wake of the Colorado Tragedy, a Call to Reach Out,” *Vancouver Sun* April 23, 1999, accessed through LexisNexis.

<sup>96</sup> Greg T. Marks, “Letters to the Editor: Lessons of Littleton,” *Globe and Mail* April 28, 1999, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>97</sup> Lean McLaren, “I was a Teenage Misanthrope: There is no Easy Link Between Being an Outsider and a Mass Murderer,” *Globe and Mail* May 1, 1999, accessed through ProQuest.

1990s, this reaction was more even-handed, pointing out the larger issues at play rather than putting all the blame on video games.

The aftermath of Columbine showed the emerging defense of video games, which up until this point had been a much smaller contingent but now was coming in larger groups. Video games were slowly becoming part of the mainstream culture and as such were finding allies in research groups and the media. The industry had always been covered with a sense of excitement and accomplishment but now the content was less of a concern than it had been in the past. That along with the continued growth of the industry was bringing video games into the limelight. The 1990s was the most crucial decade for video games in Canada. The lack of a crash meant that video games experienced a period of uninterrupted growth during the 10-year period. That along with a generation of gamers growing up meant that video games were becoming not only accepted but also embraced as a part of life. Heading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, games would continue to grow and soon integrate into mainstream culture.

### **Welcome To The Mainstream: *Globe and Mail's* Gaming Section**

By 2004, the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> generation of game consoles releases (Wii, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3) was right around the corner. The public knew that the new consoles were on their way and the excitement for them was palpable in Canadian news media. Randy Nichols argues that by the release of the 7<sup>th</sup> generation consoles, video games were part of mainstream culture.<sup>98</sup> While this claim is based on the United States, it holds true in Canada as well. Late in 2004, the *Globe and Mail* began including a 'Gaming' section

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<sup>98</sup> Nichols, "Who Plays, Who Pays?," 19.



as a mainstay in their paper. The section, written primarily by Scott Colbourne, included reviews of games and related news.

This section strongly resembled what would be seen on a video game news website like *Gamespot* or *IGN*, with reviews of what was going on in the industry and recommendations on games. The writing often took the form of opinion or feature pieces. A review of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005* touched on the rise of online gaming<sup>99</sup>, a review of *Shark Tale* spoke on the integration of film and video game media<sup>100</sup>, and, in very Canadian fashion, a review of *NHL 2005* discussed the 2004-05 NHL lockout.<sup>101</sup> These reviews combined the content of video games with larger concepts and real world events. The larger gaming industry became a big part of the *Globe*'s coverage as well. Gaming 'Year in Reviews' talked about how the industry had changed<sup>102</sup>, and features covered the arrival of Sony and Microsoft's new consoles, along with the issues that came with them.<sup>103</sup> Beyond just the games themselves, the media was beginning to understand video games as a nuanced cultural object. One article encouraged readers to check out a variety of video game books to learn more about the medium's history and their societal impact.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Scott Colbourne, "Gaming: Gold Buddies," *Globe and Mail* September 10, 2004, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>100</sup> Scott Colbourne, "Gaming: Cue the Controller," *Globe and Mail* October 15, 2004, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>101</sup> Scott Colbourne, "Gaming: You Click, You Score," *Globe and Mail* October 1, 2004, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>102</sup> Scott Colbourne, "The Year in Review: The Next Level," *Globe and Mail* December 30, 2005, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>103</sup> See Scott Colbourne, "Gaming: Staying In: The Long Wait for the Xbox 360," *Globe and Mail* May 13, 2005, accessed through ProQuest and Scott Colbourne, "The Xbox – So Hot, It Overheats," *Globe and Mail* November 29, 2005, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>104</sup> Scott Colbourne, "Gaming: Put Down the Joystick, Pick Up a Book," *Globe and Mail* June 10, 2005, accessed through ProQuest.

Video game news had found a new medium in Canada. While it has been shown that newspapers had written positive and exciting parts of games for years, now they had their own dedicated section in one of the largest newspapers in Canada for the public to read about and build knowledge on the daily aspects of gaming. The arrival of this section came alongside a period of largely positive press surrounding games. Articles appeared that called games an “economic force”<sup>105</sup> or covered the arrival of new studios, eager to grow the video game industry in Canada.<sup>106</sup> Even some of the earlier notions of video game violence were being combatted, with one reporter wondering in an article “are violent video games that bad?” This did not mean violence in games had been accepted or fears entirely subsided, as the aforementioned article pointed out that many parents still figured that video games violence were damaging.<sup>107</sup> Yet, it shows that video games were written about in a drastically different way. Video games were an important media object, critical in their cultural value, and necessary to the growth of the knowledge economy.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the press coverage of video games in Canada from the late 1970s until the early new millennium, the change from fearful child’s hobby to critical mainstream fixture is a drastic one. Over the course of nearly 30 years, video games experienced periods of growth with the rise of arcade games prior to 1983, after the crash they steadily regained their faith in consumers before the Console War of the early 1990s

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<sup>105</sup> “Video Games Touted as Economic Force: Study,” *Globe and Mail* May 16, 2006, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>106</sup> Simon Avery, “Video Game Firms Likes Canadians’ Skills,” *Globe and Mail* October 26, 2005, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>107</sup> Tara Parker-Pope, “Are Violent Video games That Bad?” *Globe and Mail* August 23, 2005, accessed through ProQuest.

brought video games to new heights. After this, video games experienced a steady climb, with more adults flocking to them before reaching the mainstream by the early 2000s.

Video games faced criticism throughout this period with the never dying claim that video game violence was harming children beginning as early as video game coverage existed. The threat of video game violence was subdued during the Crash only to hit new heights during the Console Wars. Other fears would become prominent throughout at different period of times including obesity, a lack of overall empathy, and behavioral changes. While the games themselves were criticized, the industry in Canada was largely sources of pride. Hope for a new economy centered on video games and other media industries fueled this coverage and as the industry grew in Canada, the press grew in turn.

## Chapter Three

### **It's Fashionable to be Against Strip Clubs and Video Games: Canadian Government Reaction to Video Games**

#### **Introduction**

In 1977, the Canadian House of Commons brought up the violence behind arcade video game *Death Race* and fought to ban the game from entering Canada. Just over 30 years later, Premier of Ontario Dalton McGuinty stood in front of a giant LCD screen with images from hit Ubisoft Montreal video game *Assassin's Creed 2* and declared that Ubisoft was opening a new studio in Toronto. The Ontario and Federal governments were giving Ubisoft over a quarter of billion dollars in tax incentives in order to open this new studio but the Premier declared that the studio would create 800 high-paying jobs over 10 years and would help maintain a healthy digital media hub in the city.<sup>1</sup> This is a drastic shift in response to video games from government officials in such a short period time. How did video games go from a cause of fear and concern to a key to industry revitalization in Toronto?

The Canadian government progressed from cautious observer to ally of video games in a 30-year period. The violence in video games debates were prevalent throughout this time, highlighted around various hot points, but as time went on the debates subsided as financial factors overshadowed the anxiety and fear. As the video game industry grew in size, its influence was felt in politics as government officials began to move towards support of game development. To those in the House of

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Ferguson, "Ubisoft to open Toronto studio," *Toronto Star* July 7, 2009, accessed June 3, 2015, [http://www.thestar.com/news/ontario/2009/07/07/ubisoft\\_to\\_open\\_toronto\\_studio.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/ontario/2009/07/07/ubisoft_to_open_toronto_studio.html).

Commons, game development represented part of the transition to the new economy and its importance was crucial in a period when staples and manufacturing struggled heavily. This chapter will analyze how video games have been debated from the late 1970s until the pivotal introduction of Ubisoft Toronto in 2009, and explore how video games have transitioned from an object of moral panic to an industry worth investing millions of government dollars.

This chapter will draw from debates in the Federal House of Commons, the Provincial Legislative Assemblies of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, and other government reports. The search was limited from 1975 until 2005 with the exception of the discussion around Ubisoft Toronto in Ontario around 2009. The start date of 1975 was based on estimated growth of Atari in the 1970s and revealed that video games were not mentioned in the government until the late in the decade. The end date is based on the arrival of video games to the mainstream in Canada around that time. The provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec were selected for source material. As was seen in the first chapter, video game development largely exists solely in these three provinces, meaning that their discussions on the industry and games hold more weight than the other provinces. As well, these three provinces have historically represented the majority of Canada's population. While the other provinces have had important discussions on games, these three provide a sufficient and appropriate representation of the debates surrounding games and the industry.

This chapter will be arranged chronologically with a focus on clustered themes. Beginning in the late 1970s, video game discussions appeared in assembly and parliament debates regarding video game violence, highlighted by the discussion surrounding the

banning of arcade video game *Death Race*. In the 1980s, these debates ramp up regarding violence in games and their effects on children but this time with some even handed responses from other members. Also by this time, government members use video games in cultural references, a sign of their integration into Canadian culture. This also marks some discussion at the provincial level about arcades and delinquent behaviour. We also see the beginnings of one of Quebec's biggest issues regarding games, the availability of video games and software in French.

While the main focus of this chapter is to track the change of opinions on games and the accompanying rhetoric, it is impossible to not come across the party politics as well. The major parties in Canada's provincial and federal governments in the period from the 1970s until the early 2000s were and are the (Progressive) Conservatives, New Democratic Party (NDP), Liberals, and the Parti or Bloc Quebecois. The New Democrats were a left leaning social democrats group while the Conservatives were a right leaning party, with the Liberals taking a stance somewhere in the middle. The Parti or Bloc Quebecois are Quebec nationalist parties, provincial and federal respectively, with varying political spectrum but historically have leaned to the left. While each party has taken varying stances on gaming throughout their history, the Liberal and Quebecois parties have been the most supportive towards games with the Conservatives and NDP taking stances in favour of game regulation. It is uncommon to see political parties on both the left and right agree on an issue in Canada, which speaks to the unpopularity of video games, politically, throughout much of their history. This was not unanimous though, as the Liberals were quite committed to supporting games and the industry by the 2000s, as seen with their squashing of the Video Games Act of British Columbia and the

arrival of Ubisoft Toronto in Ontario. Perhaps this speaks to the Liberals stance as a middle-road party or the fact that they held the government during many of these events. It is unclear whether or not this is meaningful regarding this discussion at all but it does display the variety of opinions that exist regarding games politically in Canada.

The 1990s took much of the early rhetoric on video games and expanded it into larger issues and debates. The early 1990s marks the peak of anti-video game rhetoric as Canadian government talks mirrored American congressional hearings on video games at the same time. This is a symptom of the larger culture of violence that is debated by the Canadian government. Video games were largely blamed for the 'culture of violence' that supposedly existed in Canada and there were many periods that games came under a scrutiny. First indications of support towards the video game industry in Canada occurred at this time as Quebec agreed to give Ubisoft a generous incentives package and British Columbia gave support to its own anchor video game development studio EA. However, at this time Quebec also passes special legislation regarding the preservation of the French language, and video games became a specialty case regarding how to maintain language concerns while also allowing games into the country. This is representative of a larger shift in politics on games, where they become important cultural objects with the ability to influence the masses. This began the shift to cooperation with video games and the industry and an eventual curbing of anti-video game legislature proposals.

By the first decade of the new millennium, the Canadian government's reaction to video games was split. The culture of violence rhetoric continued and video games faced a serious chance of regulation, but this view seemed to be on the way out as the Canadian games industry continued to grow. As well, provincial governments introduced more

legislation supporting the video game industry in Canada, a continuation from what began in the 1990s. By 2009, when the Ontario government announced the arrival of Ubisoft and its accompanying tax credit for video game developers, nearly all anti-video game or video game censorship regulation attempts were gone and provincial governments across the country were pushing to grow their industry.

### **The Government and Moral Policy: Historical and Theoretical Context**

Before fleshing out the timeline, some theory and historical context need to be explored. The view on video games from the media and government are examples of moral panic and the result attempts to regulate are forms of social control. These two concepts and examples of how they have been introduced in Canada's history are a contextual necessity. While the relationship between government and video games extends beyond attempted censorship and regulation, it has been by far the most common way that government has related to the medium. Video games are a disruptive technology, completely changing the notions of how people experience entertainment with the addition of interactivity, and this was bound to result in some serious hesitation from the wider population and government bodies. While video games are perhaps the most recent example of resisted new media, this is a trend that has been seen throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as new technology becomes part of the popular media. From the results of Toby Miller's research, nearly every new form of media has been received with an initial moral panic, including film, radio, comic books, music, television, and the Internet.<sup>2</sup> This resistance is seen in a number of ways, as we have seen in the newspaper

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<sup>2</sup> Miller, "Gaming for Beginners," 7.



media section in the insistence that games are bad, but the reaction from the outcry is reflective in the government.

The repression of video games is rooted in a number of other fields of research. Firstly, social control is a term that covers more than just media but by extension the way that large groups in Canada attempt to contain or resist a particular aspect of culture or society is entirely connected to how games are viewed for much of their history. This includes how the state involved where the government will introduce regulation that is connected to morality. Through a brief literature review, it will be shown that moral regulation has been seen in Canada with its control of drugs, alcohol, and its restriction of homosexuality, amongst other things. Censorship history in Canada is also intricately connected to video games as the nation has repeatedly censored media either for moral or perceived national interest reasons.

Social control and moral regulation are necessary concepts when examining the reaction to video games in Canada. Stanley Cohen's research on social control and moral panics provides a framework that mirrors the reaction to video games both in the media and the government. In *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification* Cohen provides a strong definition for social control, which describes a wide array of bodies that provide this control, not just limited to the government.<sup>3</sup> In his other major work, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, Cohen provides a sequence that moral panics follow, which can be used here to follow how the video game anxiety progressed from its warning phase in the late 1970s, to recovery by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cohen models his 7 stages from disaster models and they are Warning,

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification* (New York: Polity Press, 1985), 2-3.

Threat, Impact, Inventory, Rescue, Remedy, and Recovery. He also admits that not all moral panics follow this model but the framework is sufficient when examining this concept.

The Canadian video game panic is rooted in the perceived necessity to protect children from their immoral content. Neil Postman and David Buckingham have explored the effects of electronic media on children in *The Disappearance of Childhood* and *After the Death of Childhood* respectively. Postman's work shows the roots of the modern social creation of childhood before exploring how the digital age has blurred the imaginary line between child and adult.<sup>4</sup> Buckingham takes a more nuanced approach arguing that perhaps this interpretation of lost childhood is the result of a "general anxiety around social change which has accompanied the advent of a new millennium."<sup>5</sup> As has been shown, moral influence from media has always been a concern, especially after the Second World War but digital media like video games have brought this fear to new heights.

As for specific examples of Canadian moral regulation, there are a number of books and articles that examine historical examples, some dating all the way back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Marcel Martel's *Canada the Good: A Short History of Vice Since 1500* follows the regulation of vice in Canada's history including sexuality, gambling, tobacco, alcohol, and even more recent examples like drugs. An interesting point that Martel makes early in his book is that it took time for the state to assume a role of major moral regulator. Before this, the church and other groups were the largest influences of social

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xi-xii.

<sup>5</sup> David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 5-6.

control but with “the creation of police forces and the expansion of the justice system, state institutions now became the means to enforce a moral order.”<sup>6</sup>

Beyond vice, morality has been regulated in other realms as well. Mary Louise Adams’ *The Trouble with Normal* finds that social control and moral regulation were instrumental in the social creation of heteronormativity. Even more related to games, Adams finds that comic books were initially viewed as deviant in the post-war period as they supposed portrayed sexualized, violent and even homosexual material.<sup>7</sup> In 1949, a bill was passed, given the Criminal Code the ability to censor obscene literature.<sup>8</sup> Again, the Canadian government has shown throughout history that it is willing to regulate media and popular culture when the material deviates from what is deemed acceptable moral behaviour. In games, this is demonstrated and evident when observing responses to violent and sexual content.

Comic books became a source of fear with regards to homosexual influences but media censorship has occurred throughout Canada’s history. In his landmark book *Censored! Only In Canada*, author Malcolm Dean explores the history of film censorship in Canada and found that even in the earliest stages of television and film in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Canadian government has attempted to limit the content of film but also newspapers and periodicals. From Dean, “by 1907, the Canada Customs Act prohibited the importation of immoral, indecent, treasonable, or seditious publications... [and] remains the instrument of federal censorship to this day.”<sup>9</sup> Dean’s findings also indicate that after the Second World, American and Canadian government began to regulate

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<sup>6</sup> Marcel Martel, *Canada the Good: A Short History of Vice Since 1500* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2014), 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 143-145.

<sup>8</sup> Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 149.

<sup>9</sup> Dean, *Censored!*, 6.

immoral content from minors for the purpose of preserving their innocence, and that similar censorship occurred with television after its arrival in Canada by the late 1950s.<sup>10</sup> This is integral when looking at video games in Canada, as the reasoning for nearly all of the proposed and enacted legislation related to video games was related to the protection of children in some capacity.

In more recent publications, Mark Bourrie examined a history of media censorship during the War in Afghanistan in comparison to past wars and examines how the Access to Information Act, introduced in 1985, gave the military the ability to censor the military for security purposes.<sup>11</sup> The same extends all the way back to the Second World War, as journalists were censored throughout the war through use of the War Measures Act.<sup>12</sup> The Canada Customs Act, Access to Information Act, and War Measures Act are all examples of legislature that gives the government the ability to censor film, television, and media. This type of legislation will be introduced again when concerns of violent video game content reach the House of Commons. Ian Milligan has also looked at moral fears in Canada with the arrival of the Internet, which provides perhaps the closest comparison as it occurred nearly concurrently with the video game moral panic in the 1980s and 1990s. Fueled by fears of pornography and pedophilia, many in Canada urged for the government to step in and regulate the Internet in order to protect children. Despite these cries, the Internet managed to escape from the 20<sup>th</sup> century unscathed.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dean, *Censored!*, 51-53.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Bergen, "Censorship; the Canadian News Media and Afghanistan: A Historical Comparison with Case Studies," in *Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies*, Occasion Paper Number 3, 2009, ed. John Ferris (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Bourrie, *The Fog of War: Censorship of Canada's Media in World War Two* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011), 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Milligan, "A Haven for Perverts, Criminals, and Goons": Children and the Battle for and Against Canadian Internet Regulation, 1991-1999," *Social History* 48, 96 (May 2015): 273-274.

Video games also manage to largely stay free from government censorship, but not without some close calls.

### **1970s and *Death Race***

The first game to receive widespread outrage from governments and press on a global scale was arcade game *Death Race*. The game's content was the subject of one of the earliest Canadian parliamentary debates surrounding video games and the first game deemed violent enough to deserve to be banned. Released in 1976, *Death Race* was based on the cult film *Death Race 2000* and the game's goal was to accumulate points by running over 'gremlins.' The controversy grew from the fact that the gremlin sprites heavily resembled stick people and allegedly the game was named *Pedestrian* before changing its name to *Death Race*, which led many to assume that the player was in fact running over people, not monsters.<sup>14</sup> The game was so controversial that it appeared on CBS's *60 Minutes* as a discussion of violence in video games.<sup>15</sup> The game was eventually removed from store shelves because of the amount of outcry, but before this it was brought to the House of Commons.<sup>16</sup> *Death Race*'s content would be considered tame by today's standards but at the time it was a big deal and it caught the attention of Members of Parliament in Canada.

The matter of *Death Race* was first raised in the Federal House of Commons in the March of 1977. Stan Schellenberger, an Albertan Conservative Party Member, brought up the issue as a matter of customs control. While the game manual of *Death Race* clearly outlines that the enemies of the game are gremlins, Schellenberger stated to

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<sup>14</sup> Gamespot Staff, "When Two Tribes Go to War: A History of Video Game Controversy," *Gamespot* March 7, 2004, accessed June 14, 2015, <http://www.gamespot.com/articles/when-two-tribes-go-to-war-a-history-of-video-game-controversy/1100-6090892/>.

<sup>15</sup> Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Gamespot Staff, "Video Game Controversy."

the house that the game's objective was to run over pedestrians.<sup>17</sup> The MP also acknowledged that the Canada Safety Council had expressed objections to the game and proposed, "in the name of family safety the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce immediately ban this game from entering Canada."<sup>18</sup> The issue was revisited a month later and after a brief discussion, the Minister of National Revenue stated that under the current version of the Customs Tariff Act there was no legal justification to ban the game for violent content.<sup>19</sup>

Nearly a year to the day after *Death Race* was first discussed in parliament, the debate on *Death Race* came to a head with the proposition for an amendment to the Customs Tariff Act, labeled C-232. The readings of this amendment display that there was a vocal group in favor of banning games *Death Race* because of their violent content. Stan Schellenberger, who first made mention of the game *Death Race* to parliament, tabled the amendment and made it known that he thought it necessary to enforce this bill for the protection of the youth who would consume this entertainment. Others who spoke during the second reading carried this same opinion, and Charles-Arthur Gauthier, a Social Credit Party Member, even called the game in question, an item "of rather sadistic inspiration."<sup>20</sup> Roger Young, a Liberal Party Member, mentioned a more peculiar omission from this bill, being that games that could be manufactured in Canada.<sup>21</sup> At this time, Canada had no video game industry to speak of, still a few years away from the founding of DSI, but it is first here that there is an acknowledgement that video games

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<sup>17</sup> Exidy, "Death Race Exidy Service Manual," accessed June 14, 2015, 1, <http://www.arcade-museum.com/manuals-videogames/D/DeathRace.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 30<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, March 24, 1977 (Ottawa, Canada), 4277.

<sup>19</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 30<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, April 25, 1977, 4944.

<sup>20</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 30<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, March 14, 1978 (Ottawa, Canada), 3763.

<sup>21</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 30<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, March 14, 1978, 3765.

and their content could become a domestic issue. As well, Alan Martin, at the time the Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and a Liberal Party Member, mentioned that while the game *Death Race* is an example how games exhibit extreme violence, that it also extends to television and other forms of media and that there is no clear answer when dealing with these ideas. He states, “it is still very questionable whether violence on television actually leads to violence in the real world. The same could be said of the types of games we are dealing with here. Is there... a direct relationship in a child’s mind between the game he or she is playing and the world outside the child’s door?”<sup>22</sup> The minister here brings up a point that would be debated throughout much of video game history in Canada and worldwide.

While the majority of research today suggests that video games are not harmful and potentially even beneficial to children, this was not clear in 1978.<sup>23</sup> The 1980s saw huge waves of research dedicated to learning more about the effects of video games on the child’s mind.<sup>24</sup> In Canada, the debate surrounding the benefits or pitfalls of video games began with *Death Race*. Yet while *Death Race* is crucial in the larger discussion of video games in Canada, it disappeared rather quietly.

Stan Schellenberger’s bill was eventually forwarded to committee but its status beyond that point is difficult to know with any certainty. The bill never passed but whether it was killed due to the fact that private member bills are rarely ever successful or because of the status of the game itself is unclear. Shortly after its release, Exidy

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<sup>22</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 30<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, March 14, 1978, 3762.

<sup>23</sup> Emily Gosden, “Playing video games for up to an hour a day 'is good for children',” *Telegraph* August 4, 2014, accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/11008989/Playing-video-games-for-up-to-an-hour-a-day-is-good-for-children.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Consalvo, “Future of Game Studies,” 119-120.

ceased distribution of *Death Race*.<sup>25</sup> The reaction to *Death Race* on Parliament Hill proved mostly futile this time, as video games continued their importation into Canada unregulated. The reaction though speaks to the uncertainty in Canadian Government circles about video games and the willingness of some members to take a hard stand against them.

It is impossible to know exactly what would have happened had the Bill gained traction or if *Death Race* had stayed on the shelves. However, it is clear that had the Bill been passed video games entering Canada would have been subject to widespread censorship at the federal level. The Customs Tariffs Act would still be used to regulate games when *Custer's Revenge* appeared a few years later but the death of C-232 was a huge victory for the medium.

Other than the debate on *Death Race*, there was little other discussion on video games in the 1970s, which is likely due to the industry's minor standing and the fact that it had only been apparent in Canada for a few years. However, there were some debates surrounding the selling of games in Canada in Quebec's provincial assembly. Quebec is one of many areas around the world that limit advertising to children, spurred by a fear that advertisements influenced overconsumption in various forms. During a gathering of the Commission Permanente des Consommateurs, Coopératives et Institutions Financières the President of Mattel Canada stood in front of the committee and clearly mandated that the provincial government's intent to ban advertising to children would hinder the company's ability to grow the toys and electronic games market in Quebec.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gamespot Staff, "When Two Tribes Go to War."

<sup>26</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Commission Permanente des Consommateurs, Coopératives et Institutions Financières*, 31<sup>e</sup> Législature, 3<sup>e</sup> Session, November 15, 1978 (Canada, Quebec City), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cccif-avant-1984-31-3/journal-debats/CCCIF-781115.html>.



The Mattel representative's words express a larger concern with toys as a whole rather than specifically video games but it does mark one of the first times that the medium and its industry was defended in the halls of the Canadian government. This was a sign of the type of relationship that would appear between the government and games industry in the decades to come.

Overall, the 1970s were just the beginning of video games' complicated history with the Canadian Government but still gave glimpses of the types of discussions that would occur. *Death Race* is the first game that Parliament attempted to ban entry into the country but it was not the last. The reaction to *Death Race* displays the confusion and fear that can evolve from these games and the moral panic that accompanies them.

### **Offensive Gameplay: *Custer's Revenge* in Canada**

The 1980s in Canadian politics and games picked up right where the 1970s left off, with the discussion about banning a video game from entering the country. The game *Custer's Revenge* is generously described as flawed, and perhaps more accurately described as the most offensive video game to arrive to a major game console in history. The game allows players to control General George Armstrong Custer, a famous Civil War era American general who died at Little Big Horn while fighting Native Americans in 1876. In the game, General Custer must avoid incoming Native arrows in order to cross the screen to a tied up Native American woman, where upon arriving there he rapes said woman. Created by a studio founded by a company made up of former porn filmmakers, the game was not condoned by Atari but due to their corporate practices at

the time, there was no way for the company to stop the game's release.<sup>27</sup> The game was released on the Atari 2600, and immediately gained the attention of Canadian Parliament.

In Federal Parliament, John Evans, a Liberal, brought up *Custer's Revenge* in November 1982, noting that game "is extremely degrading to the native people, and especially degrading to native women."<sup>28</sup> The Minister of National Revenue, Pierre Bussières responded to the question by assuring members of Parliament that he was aware of *Custer's Revenge* and was undergoing a survey of Custom Tariff regulations to ensure that there was legal precedent to ban the game from importation. The following week, after the question was raised again regarding the importation of the game, the Minister announced that through the Customs Tariffs Acts *Custer's Revenge* would be prohibited entry into Canada.<sup>29</sup>

There are two things to note about the banning of this game. The first relates to its place in the wider context of Canadian censorship at the time. With the implementation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in April 1982, it had become increasingly difficult to censor media.<sup>30</sup> While literature and other material would continue to be censored after its enactment, it is unlikely that a book with the same content as *Custer's Revenge* would have received the same coverage and outrage. Here it is clear that video games were the source of more scorn than literature or film media. Secondly, while there was some clear party divides during the attempts to ban *Death Race* with Conservative and NDP members pushing for censorship while the Liberals urged caution in enacting

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<sup>27</sup> Donovan, *Replay*, 98.

<sup>28</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, November 26, 1982 (Ottawa, Canada), 21021.

<sup>29</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, December 1, 1982, 21171.

<sup>30</sup> Pearce J. Carefoote, "Censorship in Canada," *McMaster: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Publishing*, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://hpcanpub.mcmaster.ca/case-study/censorship-canada>.

new legislation for that purpose, with *Custer's Revenge* the Liberals were the ones working towards banning the game. Had the game not contained such obvious sexist and racist notions, it is unlikely that the Liberals would have been so quick to change positions, thereby not making it entirely clear what the positions of each party are towards games at this time. However, it does speak to the widespread concern that surrounded games in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with all parties finding issues with games in some capacity. It should be noted that a discussion on *Custer's Revenge* appeared in Ontario's Assembly as well, but was short lived likely due to the federal ban of the game on December 2, 1982.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the debates on these games occurring only five years apart, their outcomes were entirely different. *Death Race's* non-ban was the cause of needing to amend the Custom Tariffs Act to deal with violent video games while *Custer's Revenge's* issues also concerned racism and sexual assault, meaning it was able to fall under the confines of the law as is. So while both caught the attention of Parliament, only *Custer's Revenge* could be prohibited. It is interesting that while the issue of both games was their content, it was for entirely different types. As well, *Custer's Revenge* received ban support from the Liberal party, which had been hesitant when dealing with *Death Race* just a few years earlier. There are similarities that should be noted between these two cases that should be noted as well. Both *Death Race* and *Custer's Revenge* were heavily discussed in the United States. As well, Canadian media had covered the content of both games, likely influencing the Parliament members.

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<sup>31</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, November 30, 1982 (Toronto, Canada), <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/32-2/1158.htm>.

The discussions of both *Death Race* and *Custer's Revenge* in Canadian parliament are indicative of the type of response that video games received. The government's reaction to games and the media's coverage of these games are intricately connected. Game content and its impact on those that play them was a major concern, as the protection of youth became the rallying cry for the banning of *Death Race*. Also, messages from games that are offensive are also important to note, as the issue with *Custer's Revenge* was that it depicted rape and was demeaning to Native American and Canadian groups. The moral outcry in Parliament to these games came in minor doses in the late 1970s and 1980s but would be much larger by the 1990s. The connections here to protecting youth and moral regulation and implicit but we see some common threads with mentions of Canadian children as the victims and even some religious rhetoric when describing the foul content of video games.

### **Arcades and Other Regulations**

While arcades of today like Playdium are generally accepted as fine places for kids to play, Canadian government groups saw them as troublesome in the early 1980s.<sup>32</sup> Arcades were linked to delinquent behaviour, drug use, and robbery, and coin-operated game machines were seen as similar to lottery terminals. The arcade became a symbol of at-risk youth and crime by a number of provincial assemblies across the country and they would in turn attempt to limit the availability of arcades all over Canada.

In British Columbia, the fear that arcades were a source of juvenile delinquency was brought up in 1982 during a debate of youth crime and the Young Offenders Act.

Margaret Mitchell, a NDP member, claimed that coin-operated video games “are no

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<sup>32</sup> In 2012, Playdium was recommended for parents looking for places to take their kids during March Break in Kelly Deirdre, “Parents, Here’s How to Survive March Break,” *Globe and Mail*, March 5, 2011, accessed through ProQuest.

different from the slot machines or any other games of chance.”<sup>33</sup> The response in Vancouver was a new by-law banning individuals under 18 from being in store or establishments that had arcade games.<sup>34</sup> This by-law was not exclusive to Vancouver, as other cities across Canada including Toronto and Calgary implemented similar restrictions.<sup>35</sup> The response was not always a uniform and widespread one. Some within government offices believed that the response video games was over-the-top. Michael Breugh, another New Democratic Party Member from the Ontario Assembly, provided an astute observation during the middle of these debates stating, “I do not share some of the concerns, although I understand them, about things like video games. It is current and trendy in municipal politics to be against two things: strip joints and video games.”<sup>36</sup> Here, a dichotomy of opinion within Party lines appears. In British Columbia, parts of the NDP pushed towards arcade regulation while in Ontario, the same party pointed out that it seemed to be a fad to be against video games. Depending on the situation, all parties have differing opinions on the danger that games and their associated establishments posed. Breugh’s comments capture the mentality of the moral panic that video game arcades had caused. The government responded to the outcry of social groups by implementing regulations that acted as a high-level of social control.

Montreal’s combat with arcades was much more active in their assembly than the other provinces and cities. Beginning in 1980, the Quebec Assembly discussed giving municipalities the availability to regulate arcades. Montreal was the first city to establish

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<sup>33</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, June 23, 1982 (Vancouver, Canada), 8403, 8405.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Budgen, “Bylaw aimed at video games sparks Vancouver crackdown,” *Globe and Mail* April 12, 1982, accessed June 20, 2015, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>35</sup> Cuff, “Cityscapes: The Problem with Pac-Man,” and Canadian Press, “Curfew Urged on Players of Video Games,” *Globe and Mail* December 9, 1982, accessed June 20, 2015, accessed through ProQuest.

<sup>36</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, July 5, 1982, <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/H2vers2.asp>.

these regulations but later other cities like Saint-Laurent were vying to put these laws into effect.<sup>37</sup> In 1982, Bill 92 was proposed in la Commission Permanente des Affaires Municipales, which would enact a variety of changes available to municipal governments, article 28 of this bill gave municipal governments the ability to regulate the locations and number of arcade games in the city. The article was carried on December 16, 1982 but not unanimously. Élie Fallu was a Parti Québécois member that voiced hesitations with the bill, stating the problems with arcades and delinquency are rooted in sociological issues rather than the arcades and games themselves. Others like Jean-Pierre Saintonge, a Liberal member, pointed out the financial implications of getting rid of all arcades could be concerning.<sup>38</sup> Here we see a common thread that will appear with the regulation of video games, where the moral implications of video games are important until the financial aspects outweigh them. The Quebec government would continue the discussions of arcade regulation into the late 1980s before all regulations were repealed in 1991.<sup>39</sup>

These bylaws clustered in the early 1980s were put in place with noble intentions, attempting to limit youth from skipping school and thieving in order to sustain their lifestyle of playing games. However, it still exhibits the type of relationship that video games maintained with the government, an adversarial one at best. Clearly the Canadian government as a whole believed that video games could only do harm and needed to be

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<sup>37</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission permanente des affaires municipales*, 31<sup>e</sup> Législature, 4<sup>e</sup> Session, February 19, 1980, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cam-2-avant-1984-31-4/journal-debats/CAM-800219.html>

<sup>38</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission permanente des affaires municipales*, 32<sup>e</sup> Législature, 3<sup>e</sup> Session, December 16, 1982 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cam-2-avant-1984-32-3/journal-debats/CAM-821216.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de l'Assemblée nationale*, 34<sup>e</sup> Législature, 2<sup>e</sup> Session, June 1, 1993 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/assemblee-nationale/34-2/journal-debats/19930601/63713.html>.

limited in every way possible. In addition, the reaction to the early game bans and the arcade regulation all stem from a connection between video games and children at risk. It was much easier to do during this period because video games were still nearly exclusively linked to the public space. The financial implications of video games were brought up briefly but at the time, video games were not big enough to justify maintaining their financial sector. With the major decline in arcade video games after the 1983 North American Video Game Crash and the subsequent rise of console gaming, the legislation enacted would likely prove moot even by the time they were put in place. However, this is another example of the moral legislation that was so often put in place in response to the fear of video games.

### **Integration into Culture and Relation to High-Technology**

While the 1980s mainly mentions video games in regards to their violent content, there are moments where video games are mentioned in regards to something completely different. In chapters one and two it was shown that video games have slowly become integrated into Canadian culture as they have grown in popularity both in development and consumption. Even as early as the 1980s, however, there are clear signs from Parliament that video games have become part of everyday life for Canadians.

Verbal jabbing and insults have always been a part of politics and the Canadian Federal Parliament is no exception. One of these verbal spars came against the Minister of Finance in the form of a video game reference. On June 18, 1982, Geoff Scott of the Hamilton-Wentworth municipality moved, “Given the fact that the salary of the Minister of Finance now stands at \$102,100, which means that at 25 cents a throw he can play 408,400 video games of Pac-Man, and since this could take several years of the

minister's time, that we all send the man packing.”<sup>40</sup> *Pac-Man* is likely the earliest video game pop culture phenomena and the biggest video game of the early 1980s but even still, seeing its appearance during a Parliamentary debate is indicative of the growth of video game popularity in Canada at this time.<sup>41</sup>

While there are examples of video becoming a part of the larger culture of Canada, video games had also begun to be mentioned in regards to the growth of high technology industries in Canada. Most of these mentions were unflattering but indicative of the growth of the knowledge economy in Canada, which would nurture the games industry in Canada for the foreseeable future.

As pointed out early, the growth of the knowledge economy in Canada has become an important issue in recent years but high technology industries has been a point of discussion in Canadian government for much longer. In May of 1982, while discussing an economic trade bill, Lorne Nystrom of the New Democratic Party took a moment in Parliament to discuss the importance of the technology industries,

“The last dimension I should like to mention, Mr. Speaker, is the whole area of high technology. I have referred already to the fact that we are moving into the computer generation, not just into the PacMans and the video games, but into the micro and the silicone chips. It is an area that is revolutionizing very rapidly, where the robots are doing more and more of the calls and where the computers are doing more and more of the work. Everything is going through that massive scientific revolution. My suggestion is that we will have to put a lot more emphasis on making sure that we are in that race and that we use that technology for ourselves and for a better human life.”<sup>42</sup>

Here, during a plea for the growth of technology in Canada, video games are directly related to high-technology. Despite the attempts to regulate games and the moral panic,

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<sup>40</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, June 18, 1982, 18596.

<sup>41</sup> *Pong* was also an extremely popular video game, but did not garner the same level of popularity or memorabilia as *Pac-Man*.

<sup>42</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, May 17, 1982, 17506.



video games are explicitly connected to a major change in Canadian society. Just a year later, Lorne Nystrom again took to the House of Commons and raised the issue of games and technology. While discussing the changing economy and training programs necessary to create new jobs, Nystrom used video games to illustrate his point saying that in a discussion about his time in school, “we did not have the Pac-Man, the Atari, the Intellivision, or any of the computer games, which are so normal and natural today... This is because we are going through a society of very rapid change.”<sup>43</sup> Again, video games are mentioned in Parliament but as an indication of a changing tide. This is the first instance where video games are interpreted as a sign of an exciting technological future, not an example of the moral problems that plague Canada’s youth.

Surprisingly, Quebec’s government noted the promise of video games at this time as well. In 1984, during a discussion on Education, computers and their value to education eventually made its way to a debate of the value of games. In it, a member said that computers and their games could have educational value, which could help bring families together. Despite the Quebec government’s best attempts to limit games at arcades, it also found the value in games as a means of education.<sup>44</sup> Just a few years later, the Quebec’s assembly brought up video games again, this time in relation to their growing knowledge economy. During a discussion of financial investing in the Quebec economy, Jean-Claude Gobé of the Liberal Party posed a question about the investment of 50 million dollars into new computer equipment and asked to ensure that a great deal of the money spent on the new equipment would find its way into the Quebec electronic

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<sup>43</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, May 6, 1983, 25254.

<sup>44</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de l’éducation*, 32<sup>e</sup> Législature, 4<sup>e</sup> Session, March 30, 1984 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/ce-32-4/journal-debats/CE-840330.html>.

games industry or at the very least the high-technology sector.<sup>45</sup> This question is indicative of two things. Firstly, video games had begun to be seen as an important industry in Canada, even if it was limited and secondly, the high-technology industries had become important to the Quebec economy and government.

Leading into the late 1980s, video games had become mainly a topic of regulation and fear but there were some brief glimpses that video games were seen as opportunities. This range of opinions was the basis of the video game that continued in the 1980s and later into the 1990s. The debate of violence and the moral issues of games would take precedent for much of Canadian video gaming history but even in the beginning of video game and government debates, we see glimpses of those that perceived a positive value of games.

### **“Young Rambos”: Continued Violence Debates**

The rhetoric and type of discussions that surrounded *Death Race* and *Custer’s Revenge* would rear their heads again not long after the latter’s ban from the country. In 1986, violence in video games became a hot topic again for Federal Parliamentary Members in regards to several crime reforms acts being read to parliament. During a reading of the Crime Victims Assistance Act, Svend Robinson, an NDP representative of Burnaby described what he believed were the main problems surrounding the culture of violence in Canada including television, the media, and, of course, “the video games which children are playing involving killing as many potential victims as possible within

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<sup>45</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission du budget et de l’administration*, 33<sup>e</sup> Législature, 1<sup>re</sup> Session, June 2, 1987 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cba-33-1/journal-debats/CBA-870602.html>.

as short a time as possible.”<sup>46</sup> Mr. Robinson brought forth his concerns about youth and video game violence just a few months later during a debate of the Young Offenders Act, using almost identical language labeling children that play games as “young Rambos” that shoot away at other human beings.<sup>47</sup> His words did not point to any specific game but rather was a sweeping generalization of all games, which speaks to the antagonistic regard in which the medium was held at the time. Finally, in a discussion of the Criminal Code later that year Robinson again made his feelings on video games known, this time speaking in utter certainty about affect games have on youth. Robinson says, “Video games encourage children to kill as many creatures as possible, as quickly as possible. I am sure that leads to attitudes which can in turn generate violence.”<sup>48</sup>

Depictions of violence were not the only concern that legislators had with games. In the late 1980s, the first issues with the health implications of overplaying video games came up as well. In Ontario’s Assembly in 1989, during the question period after a school and child related crown speech, Mike Harris, a Conservative member, brought up health concerns regarding children, particularly focusing on the diminishing fitness levels of children. When explaining reasons for this issue, he points to the lifestyle that constant TV watching and video games have instilled in children. Video games again become the reason for a problem within Canadian society. Of course, television is another source of blame when it comes to this ‘couch potato’ phenomenon. Video games are a source of blame again and while they are the sole source of the finger pointing, it is still important to note the regard in which video games are held with politicians.

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<sup>46</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 33<sup>rd</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, January 23, 1986 (Ottawa, Canada), 10122.

<sup>47</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, May 22, 1986, 13540.

<sup>48</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 33<sup>rd</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, November 4, 1986 (Ottawa, Canada), 1044.

Svend Robinson's thoughts on video games are vocal but by no means his alone. The party sides of the video game debates were becoming clearer. The Conservative and National Democratic Parties were both opposed to video games and their depictions, while the Liberals and Parti Quebecois were not hesitant to impose the government into the industry and market. Robinson's attempts to bring attention to games were not immediately successful as no new legislation came into place in response to his requests but this did not stop the anti-video game rhetoric from surfacing in government halls. Only five years later, the rhetoric would reach a whole new high.

### **Battlefield Parliament: Video Games and Government in the 1990s**

The early 1990s were a critical period in Canadian video game history. The meteoric rise of games during the Sega-Nintendo Console War, the United States Congress hearings on violent content in video games, and the rise of Canada's first major development studios, all created a very mixed reaction in the House of Commons and Provincial Legislative Assemblies. On the one hand, anti-video game rhetoric reached its peak right alongside the congressional hearings and fears of violent content and the health effects on children were major talking points. However, with the solidification of numerous studios across the country, the first signs of pride in a province's video game industry appear as well. The government intervention in Quebec's industry and British Columbia's growing technology sector became talking points as evidence of this. Other issues highlight the growing influence of video games at this time. A significant portion of Quebec language debate revolved around video games and software because of their unique issues regarding the availability of French translated games. Lastly, the discussion on children's susceptibility to violent game content continued in Quebec and Ontario

Legislative Assemblies. These debates were the center of everything video gaming and government related in Canada and their tones would be a mix of fear and inspiration.

### **Les Jeux Vidéo: Bill 101 and Games as Cultural Objects**

Going back to the mid-1980s, Quebec's had substantial debates over how to legislate video games and software in regards to their availability in French. Electronic games were brought up as an issue as early as 1984 as Quebec officials discussed how to encourage manufacturers to make their games in French.<sup>49</sup> The issue was raised to la Commission de la Culture again in 1989, where some more concrete stats were presented about the 'worrisome' nature of the English language in software and video games. During the proceedings, Claude Filion of the Parti Québécois told the rest of the commission that, "two gamers [in Quebec] out of three do not have French games" and that "nearly half – 45% - of francophone home computer users do not have software in French."<sup>50</sup> The issue was raised in the House of Commons as well. Souzanne Tremblay, a Bloc Québécois member, brought up the issue of the French culture in Quebec and used English popular culture, including video games, as examples of how the French language was endangered in Quebec.<sup>51</sup> The concern about video games and their French availability was very real in the Quebec government, whether well founded or not, and would only intensify after the 1995 Quebec Referendum.

The 1995 vote for Quebec sovereignty was arguably the high water mark of the independence movement but it did not kill the fight for French cultural identity. Software

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<sup>49</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de la culture*, 32<sup>e</sup> législature, 4<sup>e</sup> session, April 5, 1984 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-32-4/journal-debats/CC-840405.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Author translation of Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de la culture*, 33<sup>e</sup> Législature, 2<sup>e</sup> Session, April 25, 1989 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-33-2/journal-debats/CC-890425.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, October 3, 1994 (Ottawa, Canada), 6424.

and video game language became the source of a form of legislature shortly after the referendum. After nearly a decade of small discussions that surrounded the difficulty in dealing with software when it came to the French language, it reached a peak in 1996 with the proposed Bill 40. Bill 40 would add an Amendment to the Charter of the French Language or Bill 101. While there were other items that this Bill tackled, its primary focus was the marketing of consumer products and electronic games. The bill was first proposed on June 10, 1996 but the debate over the Bill lasted nearly a year.<sup>52</sup> It was read over in August 1996, and almost the entire debate surrounded games and software. The argument from members was how the growth of the new economy, the Internet, and as a result video games, made it incredibly difficult to regulate how much English content the average Francophone was receiving. One recommended solution at this time was that video games and software “must include a French version available on the Quebec market under conditions at least as favorable as the Version in another language.”<sup>53</sup> The debate appeared a number of times in both l'Assemblée Nationale and la Commission de la Culture various times, primarily highlighted in the fall of 1996.

In early 1997, a revised version of the Bill was presented to l'Assemblée Nationale. While video games and software are still pushed to appear in French, the hard stance taken by the Quebec government had become more lenient. Rather than continuing to require all software to be sold with in French, the revision changed so that software would be required to be sold in French if there was an available French version. This was

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<sup>52</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de l'Assemblée nationale*, 35<sup>e</sup> Législature, 2<sup>e</sup> Session, June 10, 1996 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/assemblee-nationale/35-2/journal-debats/19960610/6673.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Author translation of Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de la culture*, 35<sup>e</sup> Législature, 2<sup>e</sup> Session, August 29, 1996 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-35-2/journal-debats/CC-960829.html>.

first presented in March 1997 and eventually made it into the final revision of the Bill and can be still seen today in the current version of Bill 101.<sup>54</sup> The debate about wording for this section brought up some interesting tidbits including when one member of the assembly used *Doom* as an example of where having a French translation that provided an equivalent experience was important to note in the language of the amendment.<sup>55</sup> A seemingly fair compromise had been met in regards to video games and software but it did not satisfy all members of the Quebec government. Even leading into the early 2000s, the French language requirements of games and whether manufacturers of games like Sony and Nintendo were doing enough to fulfill the requirements of the amendments were challenged and debated.<sup>56</sup>

This debate is an important turning point in the regard in which the government views games. Up until this point, games had been viewed almost exclusively as a disruptive technology that negatively influenced the youth population through violence. The effort that the Quebec government put into ensuring that there were adequate French versions of these games indicates that they were seen as much more than just childish games, a drastic change from the way that they were talked about in the 1970s and 1980s. Games were regarded in this sense as cultural objects. In the eyes of the Quebec government, it was entirely necessary to make sure games were available in French if possible because of their ability to influence culturally, and not having French versions

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<sup>54</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de la culture*, 35<sup>e</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup>, March 25, 1997, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-35-2/journal-debats/CC-970325.html> and Bill 101, *Charter of the French Language*, accessed July 20, 2015, [http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/C\\_11/C11\\_A.html](http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/C_11/C11_A.html).

<sup>55</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de la culture*, 35<sup>e</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup>, March 26, 1997, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-35-2/journal-debats/CC-970326.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de la culture*, 36<sup>e</sup> Législature, 1<sup>re</sup> Session, May 4, 2000 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-36-1/journal-debats/CC-000504.html>.

would be detrimental to maintaining Quebec's francophone society. Rather than accepting this in proactive or positive terms, this legislature was the result of a fear of losing Quebec's identity. This fear surfaced later again as a Parti Quebecois member of Federal Parliament stated outrage in 2003 that video game *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain* had depicted a group of Quebec sovereignists as terrorists.<sup>57</sup> The power of games was finally beginning to be respected, albeit through fear rather than thoughts of potential.

### **End the Promotion of Violence: Early 1990s Game Content Debates**

While Quebec was in the midst of its battle with culture and video games, the federal government and the provincial governments were still fighting the war on video game violence. While it is impossible to tell exactly what sparked the debates surrounding video game violence in Canadian government debates, there are a number of factors that occurred during the 1990s that led to this renewed interest. The early 1990s Sega and Nintendo console war brought video games to the forefront of the public's mind, in a way that had not been seen before. This meant games that exhibited seemingly immoral content were noticed and scrutinized far more than *Death Race* or *Custer's Revenge*. This growing awareness and alertness of the population resulted in the games *Night Trap* and *Mortal Kombat* being a national talking point in the United States and Canada.

In the United States, after Congress learned of the two games just mentioned and the content of some other games, they launched into a video game witch-hunt. This had been seen in the States before, with numerous scares surrounding games like *Death Race*

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<sup>57</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, October 23, 2003 (Ottawa, Canada), 8665.



and *Custer's Revenge* but not at the level seen in the early 1990s. Representatives from both Sega and Nintendo were called into congressional hearings in 1993 and 1994 to explain how they were ensuring that the games permitted access on their system were not ending up in the hands of audiences that could not handle their content. The congressional hearings lasted for months and there was a legitimate chance that the United States government would implement a regulation system banning certain content from games or other forms of government censorship. The result of these hearings was the industry created its own governing body to regulate the sale of games with inappropriate content. This resulted in the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), which controls the regulation of games in the United States and Canada.<sup>58</sup>

The Canadian debates surrounding video game violence appeared in both federal and provincial houses in varying degrees of frequency. In the House of Commons the concerns over video game violence were relatively minimal but there were still moments where it was brought forward. In 1990, during routine proceedings in a sitting in May, Jean-Guy Hudon, a Conservative member, presented a petition calling for an end to the promotion of violence. In this petition, Hudon cited movies, television, and video games as the main culprits of the promotion of violence in popular culture.<sup>59</sup> In 1995, after discussing a passed amendment to the Young Offenders Act, Sue Barnes, also of the Conservative party, made reference to the culture of violence promoted by video games, among other things.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the 1990s Congressional Hearings see Tristan Donovan, "Chapter 18: Mortal Kombat," *Replay: The History of Video Games* (East Sussex: Yellow Ant, 2010), 225-235.

<sup>59</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 34<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, May 2, 1990 (Ottawa, Canada), 10911.

<sup>60</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, February 20, 1995, 9800.

Provincial governments were involved in video games as well. In Quebec, in a discussion on the proposed changes to the Young Offenders Act, video game violence rhetoric was used in the same way as it was in the House of Commons. For example, future National Democratic Party leader Thomas Mulcair stated, “the distinction between the violence experienced in video games... is increasingly difficult for many children to understand.”<sup>61</sup> Again, violence in video games was portrayed as a danger to the youth in Canada. British Columbia followed suit as well and mirrored the concerns that appear in Ontario’s. As Emery Barnes, a NDP member of British Columbia, said concerning *Night Trap*’s development, “it’s exploitation of the human soul and of our problems.”<sup>62</sup> As far as government members were concerned video games such as *Night Trap* were the result of a larger societal problem, where the portrayals of violence were inspiring a larger culture that was accepting of these actions and inspiring more of them through what was being shown to Canada’s youth.

While the rhetoric continued in other parts of the country, Ontario took steps towards legitimate and full regulation. One Ontario MPP took the video game violence war north of their border and would put pressure on the Assembly to ban these games for much of the early 1990s. Elizabeth Witmer, a Conservative MPP from Waterloo North made video game violence a key discussion point in the Ontario Legislative Assembly. On July 13 1993, Witmer raised an issue she had with the video game *Night Trap*. This game was one of core games that created issues with the congress in the States. The game is modeled off of a teen horror flick where girls at a slumber party are under attack from a

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<sup>61</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission des institutions*, 35<sup>e</sup> Législature, 1<sup>re</sup> Session, April 25, 1995 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/ci-35-1/journal-debats/CI-950426.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, June 10, 1993 (Vancouver, Canada), 7068.

group of vampires. The game used full-motion video sequences to show the girls getting attacked and was accused of being violent and predatory against women. Witmer brought up the female violence when she addressed the assembly and urged that the government impose limitations on these games. She states her position strongly, saying “In my view, allowing our young people to purchase and, as a result, play these games without legal limitations is simply unacceptable and irresponsible.”<sup>63</sup> Marion Boyd, of the currently in power National Democratic Party, responded to her claims by pointing out that *Night Trap* was not being carried by most retailers in Canada and that the province was going to monitor the situation but the push for a rating system were real and would resurface throughout the following year.

In November, Witmer responded to a statement regarding spousal abuse and brought the discussion back to her comments on video games and violence against women. Important to note here as well is that the available research at the time indicated that there was a link between violence in games and real life. She used this research and said, “We can’t expect to give people a steady diet of violence and not expect that they won’t in some cases follow through, because violence has become glamorized.”<sup>64</sup> While Senator Joe Lieberman was working congress in the United States, Witmer was doing the same in Canada, and her actions became a point for other parties against the ruling National Democratic Party of Ontario, who held a majority government at the time. Just a week after Witmer made her point in November, Diane Poole of the Liberals party denounced the NDP for their stance on violence against women, “What has the NDP

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<sup>63</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, July 13, 1993 (Toronto, Canada), <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/35-3/1047.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Ontario Legislative Assembly Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, November 1, 1993, <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/35-3/1077.htm>.

done to keep violent video games... out of the hands of our young people? The answer: They've been all too silent, saying it's not in their job description."<sup>65</sup> The Conservative Party had taken it upon themselves to push for the regulation of video games. The NDP on the other hand never seemed interested in the issue at this time. This is interesting, given the NDP had been in favor of regulating video games as seen with their previous stances on arcades and *Death Race*. Perhaps video games are not within the politics of any specific party but rather an issue that crosses party lines. The contentious issue of video game violence was motivated by the moral panic but the political aspect of it cannot be ignored.

The war on video games in Ontario Government's continued into 1994, this time with Witmer bringing forth petitions from her area. The petitions were overall support for a regulation of video games but also for a proposed legislation that Witmer introduced called Bill 135, the Theatres Amendment Act, 1993. The proposed Bill would give the power of the Theatres Act to regulate games based on content. The Bill was introduced late 1993 but petitions in favour of the Bill were tabled beginning in April of 1994, and a number of other times over the following year. Witmer managed to gain signatures from across Southern Ontario, including Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, Mississauga, and other major cities.<sup>66</sup> Bill 135 never made it to vote, likely due to the majority government in place. However, this issued was viewed as significant enough to almost lead to video games becoming government regulated.

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<sup>65</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Ontario Legislative Assembly Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, November 22, 1993, <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/35-3/1085.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Ontario Legislative Assembly Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, December 12, 1993; April 7, 1994; April 11, 1994; April 20, 1994; and May 16, 1994; <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/35-3/1093a.htm>.

The early 1990s was an important time in the history of Canadian video games and politics. Moral panic influenced by the popularity of games, games on the market, and the United States congressional hearings on video games, drew games in Canada very close to government regulation. The implementation of the ESRB saved video games from regulation, at least for the time being. This forceful push for regulation also highlights the lack of true proponents of video games. By the early 1990s, the video game industry was still small although rising but without much in the way of political backing. This lack of lobbying power would not last though, as soon the government would start trying to support video games rather than condemn them.

### **Ubisoft Montreal and the Road to Acceptance**

The economic conditions of Montreal in the mid-1990s have been covered for the most in Chapter 1 but to reiterate, the city's economy was in the midst of developing a strong creative economic sector and looking to grow it further. In the mind of one lobbyist, one way to do this was by sponsoring a new studio. Lobbyist Sylvain Vaugeois proposed to bring a new Ubisoft studio to the city of Montreal by offering tax credits as an exchange for choosing Quebec's provincial capital over other cities in the North American East Coast. In order to fulfill the obligation to Ubisoft of providing employment tax credits, the federal government was asked to provide \$10,000 of the promised \$25,000 per employee credit.<sup>67</sup> The Ubisoft issue was raised to Federal Parliament on March 10, 1997. Suzanne Tremblay brought the issue to Federal Parliament asking that the government officials review the proposal to bring Ubisoft to Montreal and in turn provide the funds necessary.

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<sup>67</sup> Tremblay and Rousseau, "The Montreal Multimedia Sector," 308.

The language used by Tremblay and the Minister of Industry in response is indicative of the conflicting views on video games. When referring to Ubisoft, the jobs it would create, and the industry it would provide, there is absolutely no mention of games. The plan to bring in Ubisoft is called “a multimedia product project” and the jobs as part of the “high technology” sector.<sup>68</sup> A month later, when the deal was finalized and announced in Parliament, Ubisoft was called a “software producer, editor and distributor,” not a game developer.<sup>69</sup> This language is deliberate, Ubisoft is a large company and while it is true that it creates software, the language used when describing it shows the attempts to evade describing it as a video game company. Here lies an emerging dichotomy of the government’s relationship with video games. To the government, the video game medium portrays violent content that influences the Canadian youth, but the industry is able to revitalize the city of Montreal and should fund it in order to thrive in Canada. This is a major departure from even the early 1990s government response to games. Economics are a very compelling factor and recognizing video games as a way to further the growth of the New Economy in Canada was a major reason the pendulum was swaying from fear to acceptance regarding video games in Canada.

The arrival of Ubisoft was a turning point in Montreal and Quebec’s video game industry but also represents a drastic change in government attitudes towards games. Throughout the chapter, the rhetoric of video games was largely focused on the negative

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<sup>68</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, March 10, 1997 (Ottawa, Canada), <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=35&Ses=2&DocId=2332681>.

<sup>69</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, April 22, 1997, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=35&Ses=2&DocId=2332701#UBISOFT>.

and their effects on youth minds and bodies. Here though, video games are embraced as a means for establishing industry and growing an economy based on information and media. The push for a knowledge economy has been a talking point in the Canadian Government for years and unexpectedly video games became part of important financial dealings as a way to actively advance this.

### **Electronic Arts Pride**

EA Canada received the same treatment in British Columbia's Assembly as Ubisoft Montreal in the House of Commons. In the early 1990s, EA Canada was recognized as a vital part of the "knowledge-based industries" and particularly animation.<sup>70</sup> The video game industry was again masked as something else as a means of distracting from the fact that the government is actually supportive of the video game industry's growth. The support grew in the following years and in 1997, Paul Lee, at that time former Chief Executive Officer of EA Canada and its current general manager was named as chair of the newly formed Premier's Business Advisory Committee on Youth Employment.<sup>71</sup> EA Canada was recognized as a successful company and became an ally to the government of British Columbia.

By the late 1990s, EA Canada had become successful enough that government members could use it as an example of a growing economy. This pride also instilled an urge to keep the growth of this industry going. Discussion to further the high-technology industries abounded and EA Canada was referenced as one of the major lobbyists for tax cuts and government incentives in these matters. In one larger discussion of these

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<sup>70</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 35<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session (Vancouver, Canada), 12603.

<sup>71</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, July 29, 1997 (Vancouver, Canada), 6523.

potential tax benefits, an EA Canada employee is referenced saying “I was looking for... a new direction of government in terms of this budget... I go away with... disappointment.”<sup>72</sup> This quote is purposeful, displaying what an industry leader thinks about government policy. It speaks to the weight that EA Canada holds by this time, that the company is considered a major part of the Vancouver and larger British Columbia economy. In one instance where the company is praised, Andrew Petter of the National Democratic Party said “Electronic Arts, headquartered in Vancouver, is a world leader in games software.”<sup>73</sup> This is a major change from earlier references to game companies where the companies were described in veiled rhetoric, hiding that Ubisoft or EA Canada were actually video game designers and here EA Canada was lauded as a world leader in the sector.

### **After the Shootings: Culture of Violence Rhetoric Near the New Millennium**

Games were not entirely accepted at this point, as federal discussions still grouped games with violence behaviour and health concerns. After the Taber and Columbine shootings in the spring of 1999, there was response in the House of Commons. In Garbax Singh Malhi of the Conservative Party’s response on April 27, he blamed “Television, movies, computers, video games and the Internet, all these modern developments are leading to a decline in empathy among today’s youth.”<sup>74</sup> Just two days later, a similar speech was given by Bill Blaikie, again of the Conservatives, asking how Canadian society could “free [ourselves] from the growing fascination with nihilistic violence and

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<sup>72</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, April 14, 1998 (Vancouver, Canada); July 22, 1998; 6865, 10332-10334.

<sup>73</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, April 26, 1999, 12022.

<sup>74</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, April 27, 1999 (Ottawa, Canada), 14390.



death the permeates elements of our mass culture from video games to music and movies.”<sup>75</sup> Later that year, the debate on what video games were doing to kids health was raised again with George Proud of the Liberals worrying that “Street hockey [had] been replaced by video games,” which was having a detrimental effect on the health of Canada’s youth.<sup>76</sup> Video games had still retained their stigmas regarding their violent content and effect on children’s health.

Despite this 1990s were a successful decade for video games in Canada, especially in government circles. After initial scares that video games would be regulated in the early 1990s, video games began to gain support. Ubisoft Montreal was a huge coup for the city’s video game industry and proof that the Canadian government would back video games if there were economic reasons to do so. As well, the Parti Quebecois’ support of the studio showed that despite the concerns of maintaining the French language through video games, the party was interested in allowing the industry to grow. Other parties, especially the NDP and Conservatives were more interested in regulation but in spite of this, video games maintained their self-regulating status. EA Canada became a source of pride for the province of British Columbia, although both EA Canada and Ubisoft Montreal would rarely be referred to as video game developers or publishers, as the stigma of video games being harmful had maintained. Heading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this complicated relationship would continue with an eventual leaning towards acceptance.

### **Failed Regulation and New Studios: Video Game Policy in the New Millennium**

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<sup>75</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, April 29, 1999, 14479.

<sup>76</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, June 7, 1999, 15939.

The 2000s were a decade where video games solidified themselves as a part of mainstream Canadian culture and a billion dollar industry. On Parliament Hill, this transition is seen as the decade goes on, mentions of video games shift from adversarial to cooperative and there was clear evidence that the video game industry held lobbying power in government circles and particularly grew in popularity within the Liberal parties of Canada. In British Columbia and Ontario, Bills were still tabled for the purpose of regulating games but the outcomes and language used when describing them was significantly more positive than had been seen in the 1980s and 1990s. As well, there was far more discussions relating to the growth of the video games industry in Canada as well as how to create more jobs within the industry. The video game violence debate subsided with this but new debates appeared regarding labour and gendered issues with games, something that continues into society's current video game realm.

### **Provincial Attempts at Regulation: From Bill 19 to the Film Classification Act**

Video game violence had continued to be a concern in British Columbia. In May of 2000, a discussion began concerning violence in video games, where Liberal member Geoff Plant believed that “the level of violence in video games seems to me to be increasing.”<sup>77</sup> Concern of video game violence spilled over from the previous decade and a year later in April of 2001, the Video Games Act or Bill 19 was introduced into the Legislative Assembly, which would have allowed “for the classification of video games, the licensing and regulation of video game distributors and retailers, and allows that future entertainment technologies can be covered under this legislation,” and it also allowed “British Columbia to be the first jurisdiction in North America to provide a

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<sup>77</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, May 16, 2000 (Vancouver, Canada), <http://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/36th4th/h00516a.htm>.

classification and regulatory system for video games.”<sup>78</sup> The bill was designed to give the province sweeping power to regulate the content of video games and how retailers and distributors display them. This meant that the government would take over jurisdiction of the industry’s regulation, away from the ESRB. Despite the seeming change in perception and acceptance of video games in the citizens and media of Canada by this time, the Video Games Act would have given the province of Canada nearly sweeping control to censor the sale, packaging, and content.

If the Video Games Act had been proposed sooner, it is likely that it would have passed. Graeme Bowbrick of the NDP first introduced the Bill and with their party controlling the legislative assembly it should have managed to pass without problem. However, a general election was held only a month later and the NDP lost in a landslide winning only 2 seats to the Liberal Party’s 77. The NDP had been rocked by multiple scandals that likely killed the party’s chance to win long before the Video Games Act became an issue, but the video game industry’s response had an unprecedented impact on the election and Liberal party. The video game industry had kept quiet during previously proposed Bills, but the strength of British Columbia’s video game industry and the detrimental effects of the Video Game Act prompted a strong reaction. The Liberal Party had fought for the video game industry before, and historically the party has remained slightly in favour of game development and a self-regulated industry. Particularly in British Columbia, the party had strong ties with video games, highlighted by Party Leader Gordon Campbell’s using of EA Canada as an example of the province’s economic growth and encouraging for a personal income tax cut so that BC graduates of video

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<sup>78</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 5<sup>th</sup> Session, April 3, 2001 (Vancouver, Canada), <http://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/36th5th/h10403a.htm>.

game and other related high tech fields stay in the province.<sup>79</sup> Once the games industry was threatened with regulation of their products, they mobilized as strong supporters of the Liberals. Paul Lee and Don Mattrick, executives of EA Canada each personally donated \$5,000 to the party and Campbell gave a talk to the studio's employees during the campaign.<sup>80</sup>

After the election, the Liberals scrapped the Video Games Act. After this point, video games in British Columbia went largely unimpeded. EA Canada continued to be discussed in regards to the economics of the province and city of Vancouver, some rumblings as to the content of games took place but not at the elevated level that existed in previous decades. In 2004, a Bill was tabled that gave some more power through the province's Motion Picture Act to enforce regulations on video games but even when the new bill was tabled, it was admitted that "the vast majority of video game regulation now takes place through an industry self-regulation classification system administered and created by the group known [as the] ESRB... For most cases and on most occasions, that system of self-regulation will be used."<sup>81</sup> With the death of the Video Games Act, the ESRB had become the de facto regulation body in Canada.

Ontario took on a similar structure to their video game regulation around the same time. Ontario's Assembly proposed a Bill that mirrored British Columbia's amended Motion Picture Act by working with industry experts and enforcing the ESRB's standards rather than giving authoritative rule to the government over video games at their own

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<sup>79</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 36<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, March 16, 2000, <http://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/36th4th/h00316p.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> Dyer-Witford and Sharman, "The Political Economy of Canada's Video Game and Computer Industry," 200.

<sup>81</sup> Canada, British Columbia, *Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Debates*, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 5<sup>th</sup> Session, May 18, 2004 (Vancouver, British Columbia), <http://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/37th5th/h40518a.htm>.

discretion.<sup>82</sup> The changes to video game regulation fell under the Film Classification Act 2005 and in discussing the Bill, the language showed the change in attitudes towards games. Jim Watson, a Liberal party member declared when presenting the Bill, “We believe that adults should be able to choose the films they see and the video games they play.”<sup>83</sup> Perhaps even more telling of this changed stance on video game regulation is the way that this Bill interacted with the industry. When describing the video game section, Watson, who also helped create the Bill, stated that a partnership had been reached with the Retail Council of Canada and that the government was committed to “working with our industry experts to bring about change that consumers and parents want.”<sup>84</sup> This Bill took a much more even-handed approach to games, as the government worked with the industry and retailers to come up with a system that eased parents’ minds while not bypassing the industry in the way that the proposed British Columbia Video Games Act had. There are even mentions of younger members of parliament that play games, another indicator that, by 2005, video games had become a significant, integral, and lasting part of Canadian culture. The Film Classification Act passed by a wide margin, 64 votes to 14.

While classification skirmishes took place in Ontario and British Columbia in the early 2000s, Quebec was enjoying the benefits of having brought Ubisoft into the province just a few years before. While concerns that video games were anti-social<sup>85</sup>,

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<sup>82</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, October 14, 2004 (Toronto, Canada), <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/38-1/1072.htm>.

<sup>83</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 38<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, February 15, 2005, <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/38-1/1105b.htm>.

<sup>84</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 38<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, February 15, 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission des affaires sociales*, 36<sup>e</sup> Législature, 1<sup>re</sup> Session, February 13, 2001 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cas-36-1/journal-debats/CAS-010213.html>.

violent<sup>86</sup>, or even sexist<sup>87</sup> persisted into this period, the main concern with games was how to further the success brought on by Ubisoft. By the summer of 2005, there was a shortage of video game labour, and Jean Charest of the Quebec Liberals accused the in-place Parti Quebecois government of ignoring this trend and called for action.<sup>88</sup> The House of Commons adopted a quiet stance regarding games and the industry during this period as well. Video games were brought up rarely but when they were, the discourse mirrored the multitude of reactions to games seen in provincial assemblies.

It appears evident in this period that the Liberals had strayed from sitting on the fence regarding video games, to become fully committed to self-regulation and tax credits for the industry. The Conservatives and NDP continued to be hesitant or antagonistic towards games but with the Liberals in control of Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia Legislative Assemblies, and the House of Commons for much of the early 2000s, video games had allies in the government during much of this period. In Ontario, the Liberals would stay in power for the remainder of the decade and into the next with their support of the industry, culminating when they brought in Ubisoft Toronto.

### **Courting a Giant: Ontario's Push for Ubisoft Toronto**

Planting Ubisoft in Montreal back in 1997 took a rogue lobbyist working behind the backs of the Legislative Assembly before the studio would arrive in the city. A little over a decade later, the extent to which the Liberal government went to bring in their own

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<sup>86</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission de l'aménagement du territoire*, 36<sup>e</sup> Législature, 1<sup>re</sup> Session, November 3, 2000 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cat-36-1/journal-debats/CAT-001103.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de la Commission des affaires sociales*, 37<sup>e</sup> Législature, 1<sup>re</sup> Session, April 7, 2005 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cas-37-1/journal-debats/CAS-050407.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Canada, Quebec, *Journal des débats de l'Assemblée nationale*, 37<sup>e</sup> Législature, 1<sup>re</sup> Session, June 13, 2005 (Quebec City, Canada), <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/assemblee-nationale/37-1/journal-debats/20050613/2795.html>.

studio from Ubisoft, highlights the change with which video games were regarded.

Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government courted Ubisoft for several years before agreeing to give the French publisher 263 million dollars over 10 years in exchange for the promise of creating 800 jobs over the same period. The government worked diligently and at huge expense to bring an anchor studio to Toronto.

The chapter on industry already examined the burgeoning indie game scene in Toronto by the early 2000s but the city had been hoping to bring in a prime studio for many years. When Koei established a studio in Toronto in 2005, its arrival was praised in Assembly debates as a sign of bringing jobs and expanding the industry.<sup>89</sup> Other medium-sized studios had come in during the early 2000s but none that came with the same pedigree or size that Ubisoft offered. Bringing in Ubisoft was crucial to expanding the industry. Premier Dalton McGuinty acknowledged the weight of acquiring an Ubisoft studio into Toronto, stating “this is an anchor investment, you have to think of it in terms kind of like landing an auto assembly plant... it will catapult us a great distance forward.”<sup>90</sup> In the wake of Ubisoft, the province also increased its tax incentives package to 35% of employee salaries for third party developers and 40% for independent developers, up from 25% and 35%<sup>91</sup>, giving Ontario the most competitive tax incentives for game developers in the country. It was evident the province had become committed to working with video games in Ontario and, in particular, Metropolitan Toronto

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<sup>89</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, October 27, 2005 (Toronto, Canada), <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/38-2/1011.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> Canadian Press, “Video Game Maker Ubisoft to Set Up in Toronto, Creating 800 Jobs Over 10 Years,” *CP24* July 6, 2009, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.cp24.com/video-game-maker-ubisoft-to-set-up-in-toronto-creating-800-jobs-over-10-years-1.414231>.

<sup>91</sup> Jenkins, “Ontario Boosts Tax Breaks For 2009.”

When Ubisoft Montreal was announced in the House of Commons in 1997, veiled language was used to describe the studio, calling it a multimedia project and a software company. With Ubisoft Toronto, there was no secret that the company would create games. When Laurel Broten described what the studio would bring to the city, she said, “this cutting-edge studio will not only produce some of the best-selling video games, but will create high-quality jobs in the new knowledge economy.”<sup>92</sup> The language used demonstrates the reversal of video game sentiments over the last thirty years. The economic factor is apparent is the anticipation of creating quality jobs as the key reason that Ubisoft was brought in but as well, the ethos of Broten’s speech suggests that having a studio that creates best-selling games is something to be exciting about. Less than 20 years earlier, games were identified as objects rife with violent message and now the fact that Toronto owned a studio that will make some of the best games was a source of optimism and excitement.

## **Conclusion**

The government reactions to video games are reflective of the moral panic surrounding video games in Canada. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were select moments where specific games were considered too violent for audiences. In the late 1980s the rhetoric was heavier, laying claim that video games were overall too violent. This was also where the earliest forms of game regulations came in the form of arcade restrictions. By the 1990s with the rise of console gaming, the culture of violence arguments reached an all time highs yet games managed to escape unscathed. In the

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<sup>92</sup> Canada, Ontario, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario Debates*, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, September 23, 2009 (Toronto, Canada), <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/39-1/1164.htm>.



1990s were also the first indications of cooperation between the video game industry and government offices as EA Canada and Ubisoft Montreal became key pillars in the fights to create creative industries in major Canadian cities. By the early 2000s, a noticeable change had occurred in the country and game companies became lobbyists, effectively able to gain political power. By the time Ubisoft Toronto came in 2009, the video game industry had become a powerful and useful tool for government members in creating industry and gaining popular support.

When looking at the media's reaction to video games, it is clear that a cultural shift had occurred, bringing video games into mainstream Canadian culture, which is another important reason why video games became accepted in the Parliaments. As the economic influence of the Canadian video game industry grew and members began realizing that some of the most successful companies in their regions made video games, it became much less important to stifle them and more important to grow the industry and as a result create new jobs, many high-paying with sustainability. This was seen in the pride exhibited by provincial assemblies on EA Canada and the Ubisoft studios but also in the way that the Quebec government reacted to games when trying to enact Bill 101. The cultural status of games changed drastically from the 1970s until the first decade of the new millennium, having grown from objects of sadistic influence to a medium with the ability to influence mass groups of people.

It should not be forgotten that the video game content freedom that exists in Canada today was not a certainty when looking back at the history of Canadian government response. Political fortune in the case of Elizabeth Witmer's Bill and the Video Games Act of British Columbia, kept video games a self-regulated medium

although pushes for regulation were there and came close to becoming legislation. As of now, Canada is one of the most uncensored video game countries in the world. Even extreme cases of game censorship like of *South Park: The Stick of Truth*, which was censored in much of Europe and Australia, are generally available to Canadian players in their original states.<sup>93</sup>

The Government has had a large role to play in the video game industry but also in its status as a cultural product in Canada. With many provinces now introducing competitive tax incentives for game studios, the relaxing anti-video game rhetoric, and the continued self-regulation of the industry, the government has helped maintain Canada as one of the most accepting and influential video game countries in the world. As in the media, attacks on video games from the government are not gone forever. Governments around the world are still debating how to deal with them, but the arrival of Ubisoft has launched a new outlook toward the video game industry. Games are seemingly perceived as something different now; accepted, and in some cases beloved, in the government and larger Canadian society.

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<sup>93</sup> Jason Schreier, “*South Park: The Stick of Truth* Is Censored Outside Of North America,” *Kotaku* February 25, 2014, accessed July 21, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/south-park-the-stick-of-truth-is-censored-outside-of-a-1530528203>.

## **Conclusion: Your Princess is in Another Castle**

This thesis has explored the history of video games in Canada, showing how video games went from a small industry, child's hobby, and a source scorn, to a powerful economic sector, cultural influence, and source of government investment. The change took place over several decades with a number of peaks and valleys. The video game crash of the early 1980s, the video game violence hunt of the early 1990s, and Columbine all brought with it scares of video games never grabbing hold in Canada yet through all this, Canada has become one of the largest video game consumer and producer nations in the world.

The first chapter outlined the birth and growth of the video game industry in Canada showing that it emerged as a sign the creative economy and the accompanying pool of labour that came with it. The second chapter showed the cultural aspect of video games, marking its trajectory from the late 1970s arcades to the powerful mainstream consumer market that exists today. The final chapter marked video games place in the government circles, as politicians slowly gravitated towards pro-video game agendas once the industry's value was apparent by the turn of the millennium. Alone, each chapter shows but one part of the video game story, while together they display the growing influence that the medium has had over every facet of Canadian life.

The work on video game and Canadian history is by no means complete. While the research has yielded important conclusions, it has also raised new questions. For the industry, the period before DSI is still mostly obscure and incomplete. This period alone could likely fill a work the size of this thesis, covering the early stages of the video game industry and the entrepreneurial nature that came along with starting these early studios.

In the political realm, the creative economy was explored through the video game industry but its overall policy regarding this sector and how different political parties have dealt with the technological and knowledge industries throughout their administrations would provide plenty to an overall lacking understand of the government's stance on these industries.

This paper did not address the cultural and consumer aspect regarding the gendering of video gamers in Canada and the even greater worldwide gaming scene. The last few years, especially highlighted by the GamerGate scandal, have brought to light that the industry, media, and its overall culture have been largely unforgiving to females. A number of articles written in Canada have attempted to show that whether intentional or not, video games have been intentionally designed for male audiences. While this may be more than just an issue for a historical paper to decipher, it cannot be stressed enough that this is perhaps the biggest issue surrounding video games today and it is deserving of academic attention at all levels.

40 years after articles initially emerged in Canadian newspapers and the government was first aware of the video game *Death Race*, video games in Canada have grown into an aspect of Canadian culture. The Canadian video game industry is the third largest in the world. Canadians produce world-renowned games like *Fifa*, *Splinter Cell*, *Mass Effect*, and *Assassin's Creed*. As well, Canadians love to play games and are one of the top consuming nations of video games. Games become national crazes in Canada, where the *Pokémon* game series and *Minecraft* are the must have toys for children and *Grand Theft Auto* and *Fallout* are leisurely ways for adults to spend their pastimes. Meanwhile, the government has largely left games alone, allowing the ESRB to judge

games and regulate who can buy them based on content. Beyond that, the government at this time is putting millions of dollars into tax incentives for the games industry, as it has become a crucial aspect of Canada's growing knowledge economy.

Video games have become a major part of Canadian life and over time it will appear more frequently in the academic realm. One indisputable aspect this thesis has shown is that video games and their consumers have matured and grown up, and a time will come shortly (if it has not already occurred) where most of the population in this country will be unable to remember a time when video games were not a major consumer icon and even fewer will remember a time when video games were not the largest cultural medium in the nation.

Stories of John, the child begging his parents for video games in the 1970s, who grew up to produce them will only become more prevalent as time passes. The generation of gamers born in the late 1980s and early 1990s are in their 20s now and this will both reflect the nature of games in the private and public spheres. It is difficult to tell what challenges and changes video games will face in the coming years. Mobile gaming, playing online, the emerging indie development scene, virtual reality, and cloud gaming are current issues facing games today but there will be more in the coming years. Despite all this, video games continue to be a big draw in Canada and games designed in the country have ever escalating entertainment value, and that is something to be excited about.

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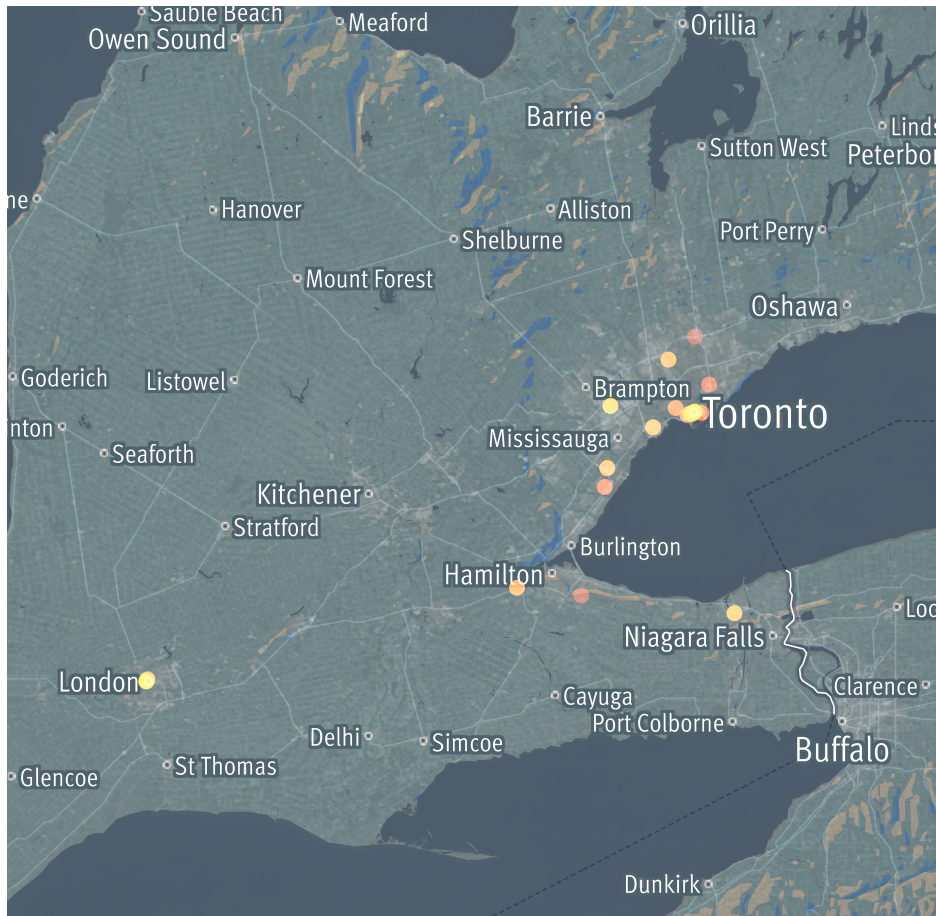
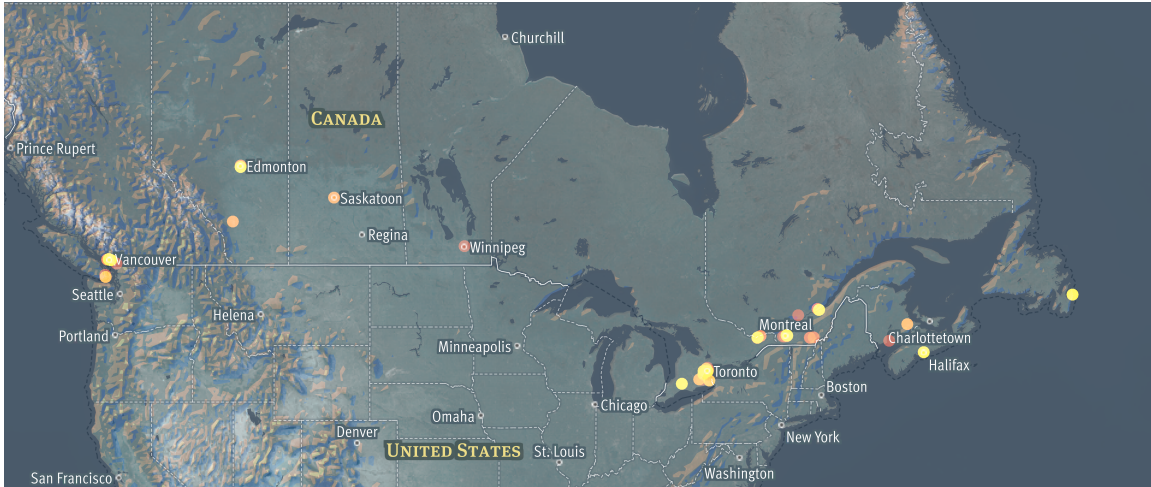
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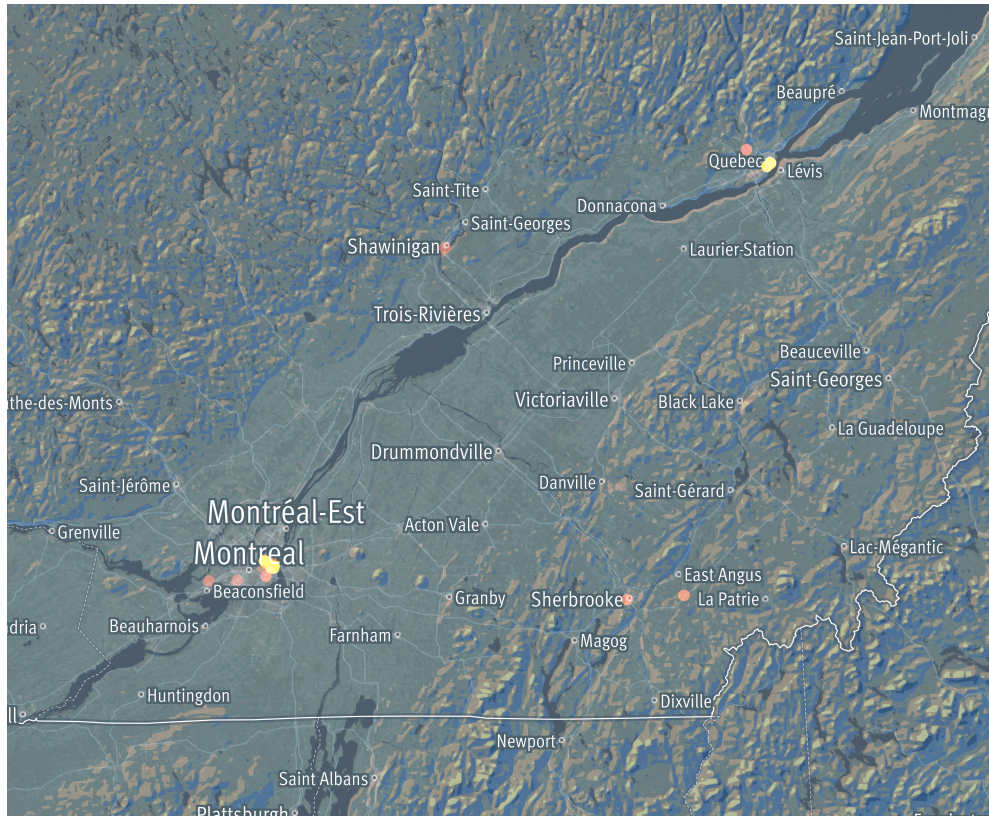
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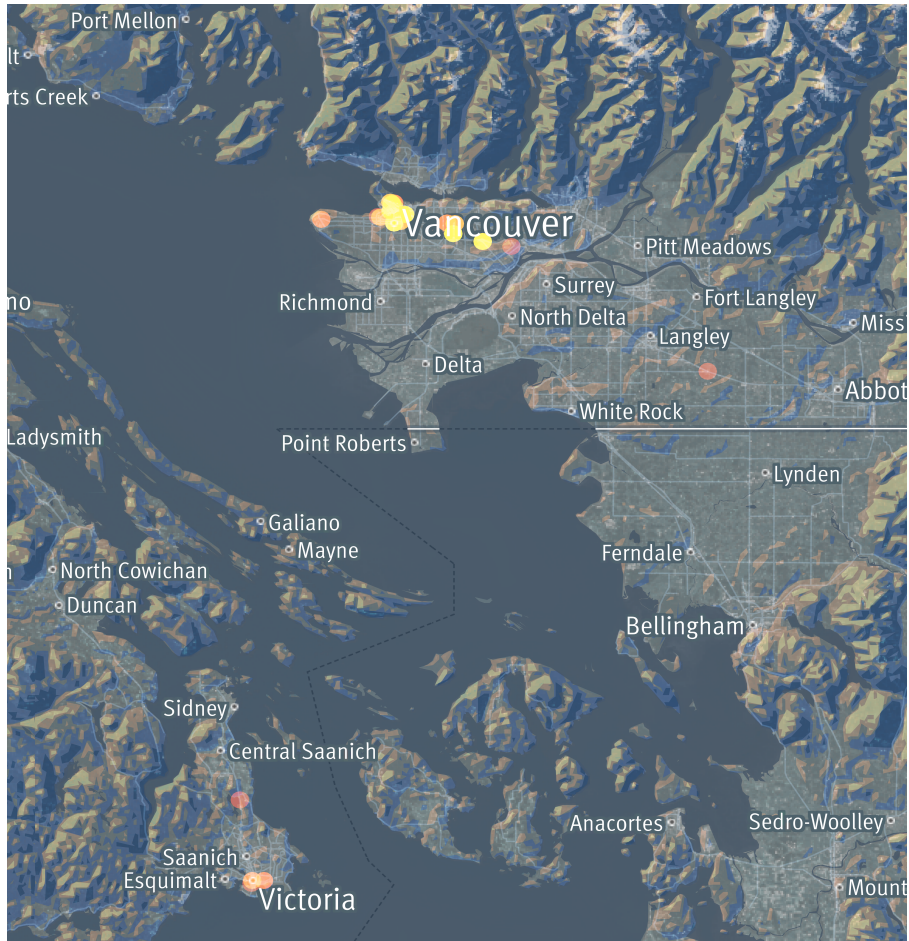
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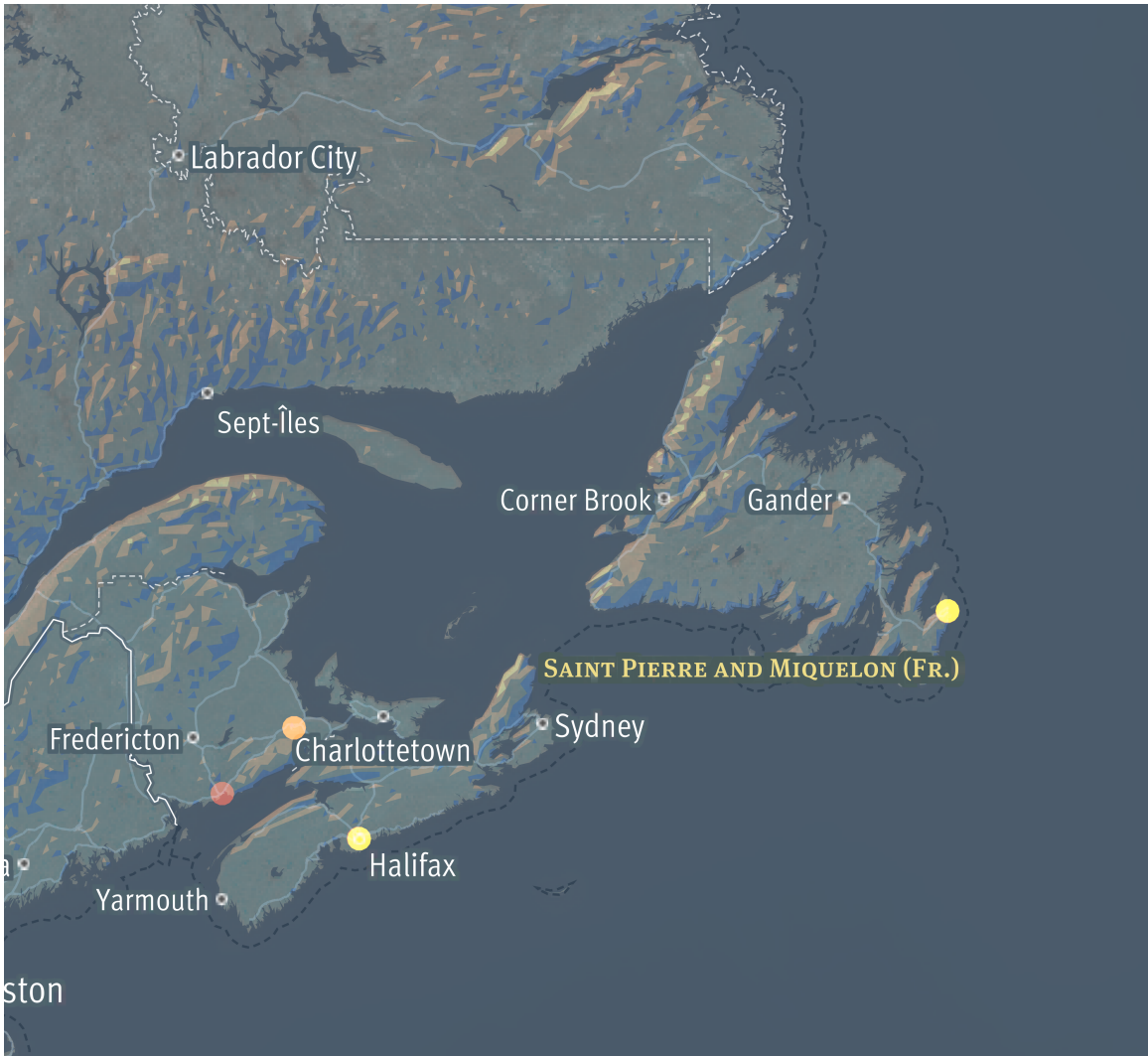
## Appendix A: Maps from Canada Games Dataset



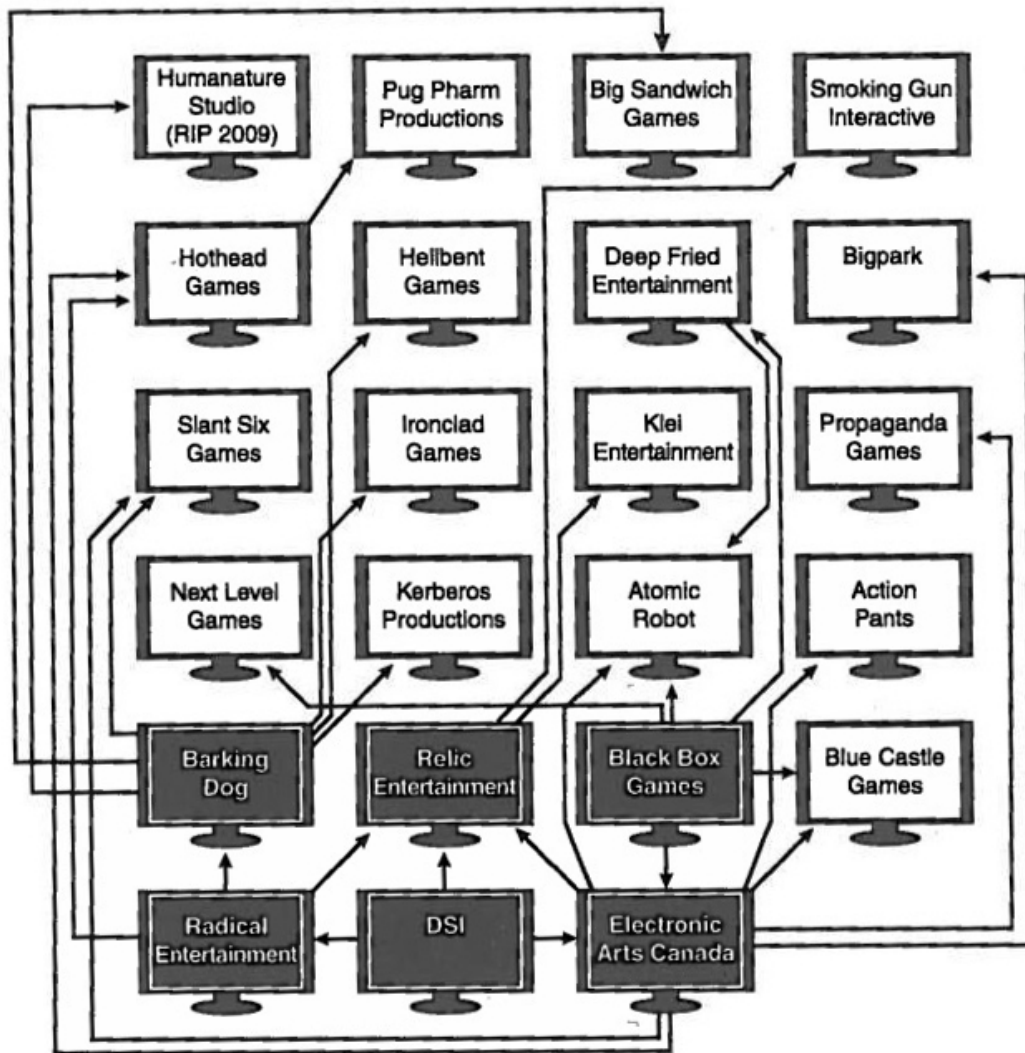








## Appendix B: Vancouver's Video Game Family Tree



Source: Redrawn from Kylo, 2009.

1

<sup>1</sup> Scanned from Barnes and Coe, "Vancouver as media cluster," 257.