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Master of Science Interactive Digital Media

Title: Experience vs. Observation: The Pilgrimage Experience in Video Games and Other Interactive Media

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Abstract

This paper has an aim to explore spiritual experience of pilgrimage in a range of interactive media. A particular focus is given to a question about video games, whether they as media can provide the user pilgrimage alike experience in comparison to pilgrimage described in other forms of media. The thesis starts with the analysis of travel themes in different media, beginning with photography in its early ages and going over to moving image, video games and virtual reality. Case studies for three games that are often associated with spirituality are being presented in this thesis. The pilgrimage journey as a specific quest is defined in a context of the greater human experience, applied onto user experience in a range of media.

Following that, the paper discusses European pilgrimage in films, analysing two examples, *The Milky Way* by Luis Buñuel from 1969 and the more recent film *The Way* by Emilio Estevez from 2010 - both about pilgrims on the road to Camino de Santiago in the North of Spain. The particular attention in this section of the work is given to the spectator's experience of pilgrimage in the moving image.

There have been some discussions among researchers and journalists, and more often among game reviewers, whether an interactive medium can provide a spiritual experience to the user or the participant. Therefore, the paper looks closer into other forms of media, such as interactive installations and virtual reality and offers a few case studies with particular examples of spiritual journeys.

New media give users new experiences, in video games players are not left with an option just to observe the travel on the road, they are invited or even forced to participate, in order to achieve the proper spiritual experience. Very much like in the critically acclaimed game *Journey* (2012) created by thatgamecompany for PlayStation 3, which in a very short time became one of the most downloadable PlayStation Network games of all times and is used as one of the case studies for this paper.

The journey of the character in this game is often described by reviewers as a religious, or even a pilgrimage travel. The game shows the balance between observation and participation for the user. A personal user experience by the author of this paper as well as a range of reviews of *Journey* are used in this thesis to describe and provide evidence for a particular unique spiritual journey that can be achieved by a video game.