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Playing within the lines: An intermedial analysis of Newspapers and Arthur's journal in *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

Campina Grande - PB
2026

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Playing within the lines: An intermedial analysis of Newspapers and Arthur's journal in *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

This Undergraduate Thesis is a partial fulfillment of the requirements for conclusion of the course Letras – Língua Inglesa (Lic) – D of Centro de Humanidades of Universidade Federal de Campina Grande (UFCG).

Advisor: Prof. Dr. Clara Matheus Nogueira.

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GIOVANNA SANTIAGO LUNA

PLAYING WITHIN THE LINES: AN INTERMEDIAL ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPERS AND ARTHUR'S JOURNAL IN *RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2'*.

Monografia apresentada ao Curso de Licenciatura em Letras - Língua Inglesa do Centro de Humanidades da Universidade Federal de Campina Grande (UFCG), como requisito parcial para conclusão do curso.

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2026

To my Mom and my sister.

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“[T]o write a work of genius is almost always a feat of prodigious difficulty. Everything is against the likelihood that it will come from the writer's mind whole and entire. Generally material circumstances are against it. Dogs will bark; people will interrupt; money must be made; health will break down.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

RESUMO

Intermidialidade é o estudo que se propõe a investigar a relação entre mídias. Os videogames, ao longo dos anos, se concretizaram como uma mídia que adapta, referência e mistura diferentes mídias. Dessa maneira, o objetivo desta pesquisa é analisar as relações intermidiáticas presentes no jogo *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018), especificamente os jornais e o diário de Arthur Morgan. A fim de compreender como jogos digitais interagem com outras mídias, este trabalho baseia-se nas abordagens teóricas propostas por Elleström (2021) e Rajewsky (2005). O corpus de pesquisa consiste em recortes de alguns jornais do jogo, além de fragmentos do diário do protagonista. Em relação à metodologia, esta pesquisa segue uma abordagem qualitativa, comparativa e interpretativa de aspectos específicos, como layout, modo de escrita, convenções e discurso. Ademais, a análise irá cobrir a funções do jornal e do diário na narrativa, e como esses meios remetem a mídias do século dezenove. A partir disso, seguindo uma metodologia intermidiática, esta pesquisa mostra como itens pequenos, colocados em um jogo extenso e complexo, podem contribuir para a diegese de um videogame de faroeste, e que estes elementos inseridos podem ter funções: uma referência intermidiática, um item colecionável no jogo e desenvolvimento narrativo.

Palavras-chave: *Red Dead Redemption 2*; Intermidialidade; Referência Intermidiática; Diário.

ABSTRACT

Intermediality is a field of study that investigates the relationships between media. An example of media mixing and interacting are videogames, which, over the years, has established itself as a format that can adapt, reference and combine different media. Hence, the goal of this research is to analyze intermedial relations found in *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018), specifically the newspapers and Arthur Morgan's journal. In order to understand how videogames interact with other media, the present study draws, mainly, on Elleström (2021) and Rajewsky (2005) theoretical approaches to intermediality. The corpus consists of selected in-game textual media: newspaper issues and specific diary excerpts. In regard to methodology, this work follows an interpretative and qualitative approach, through an (comparative) investigation of particular aspects, such as layout, form of writing, conventions, and discourse. All the while navigating the function that these devices play, comparing the ways in which they are able to evoke nineteenth century media. Following an intermedial methodology, this research shows how seemingly small items can contribute to a game's diegesis of the western genre, while being an intermedial reference, gameplay prop and helping the narrative's developments.

Key-words: *Red Dead Redemption 2*; Intermediality; Journal; Newspaper.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Intermediality examines the relationship of media, how they interact, reference, combine and influence one another (Rajewsky, 2005). Through it, it is possible to see how media products are in constant dialogue, it shows how supposedly different media have similarities, as a result, intermedial studies are also known as the branch that explores the crossing of borders between media. Having that in mind, the current state of technological advancements have allowed for more increasingly complex media relationships. As is the case with the production of videogames, which have become more and more elaborate games as the years go by. Nowadays, games feature a plethora of elements and media formats, ranging from photorealistic graphics, compelling narratives, and puzzles. Videogames go well beyond beating levels, and they have become a fertile ground for Intermedial studies due to these multifaceted productions. Over the years, videogames have combined, referenced and mixed with various kinds of media, ranging to soundtrack, cinematics, puzzles, game mechanics, and so on. That being said, for the past decades there has been one noteworthy developer when talking about complex and multilayered games: Rockstar Games. Over its history, Rockstar has not only released iconic game franchises, such as *Grand Theft Auto*, but while releasing said games, the company has inspired a lot of debates as with its most recent game *Red Dead Redemption 2* (RDR2) (2018). In the gaming world, it is known that Rockstar has an immense attention to detail even though their games are of tremendous scale. In this work, I use Intermedial Studies' framework in order to investigate two seemingly small diegetic elements in RDR2, the in-game newspapers and diary.

This thesis argues that the journal and newspapers are more than just collectable items for a player to gather, rather, I argue that they are sophisticated intermedial references that propel the narrative, and help to build the characterization of nineteenth century U.S. through mediating substances. With the goal of analyzing said constituents, I use intermediality framework to comprehend how media intersect with one another, and how supposedly different genres (videogames, newspapers and journals) can dialogue with each other. Furthermore, I investigate the roles played by the newspapers and the journal in the story, understanding how they function in the game, as well as what is their purpose in the story and how its presence affects its fictional world.

The corpus for this analysis was collected in the story campaign of RDR2, and consists of selected issues from the newspapers available throughout the game, as well as

particular excerpts from Arthur Morgan's journal. These clippings and fragments will then be analyzed in respect to the layout in which it is displayed, how the newspaper is structured, the calligraphy, the content (in relation to the narrative), and the discourse behind it. To further comprehend the intricacies of said elements, there will also be used nineteenth century newspapers and diary fiction, in order to compare how those digital props from RDR2 drew inspiration and evokes nineteenth century media. In relation to the RDR2's newspapers, they are single page publications that are made available after the player concludes certain missions. The coverage made in these newspapers are, mainly, news reports from the outcomes of major occurrences in the game, but it also features articles about particular events that do not necessarily involve the player. Whereas, the journal adds the dimension of being a format that allows for the main character to express his voice and recount the story in his perspective, and it also works as a compendium for the game's environment.

Despite not being the main focus of the game, the reasoning behind the choice of these research objects is due to the fact that they are prime examples of intermedial references. Ultimately, they help to construct the overall diegesis of the game, and are indeed important to the story. Also, while being a very specific component to the story, we can also see how much inspiration the game took from actual nineteenth century media, how much it was adopted and reimagined for the fictional world of RDR2.

The main objective of this study is to ascertain how the intermedial references are made in RDR2, how their constituents are organized, and how it all adds up in the world building process and narrative. Hence, this research will adopt an interpretative and qualitative approach in regard to the items aforementioned, in the narrative contexts in which they are found. In summary, the analysis will go over their specific objectives on how these objects are related to gameplay, narrative and intermedial reference. Furthermore, a few questions to guide this research: How are these intermedial relations established? How did RDR2 adapt the format to the genre's conventions at that time? What is the role that they play? And what do they contribute to the western genre?

For the theoretical framework, this analysis follows Lars Ellëstrom's approach of intermediality, developed in his work *Beyond Media Borders: volume 1* (2021). More specifically, his definition of media products, categorization via media modalities (spatio-temporal, sensorial, material and semiotic), mediation and representation. In addition to that, Irina Rajewsky's (2005) concepts of intermedial relations will also be used to understand the media relations in RDR2. By using her theory on media combination, media transposition, and intermedial reference, we will be able to perceive how seemingly different

media can interact by borrowing certain characteristics, while also adapting to its own specificities.

Having these goals in mind, the following section discusses how the game is structured, and features a brief summary of the story of RDR2 and its predecessor. It also highlights the process of development for RDR2, and goes over some of the behind the scenes aspects, such as the duration of the development stage and the working conditions and creative inspiration for making the game. Lastly, this section goes over some of the adaptations, the western genre, and references made by the game to other types of media. Section three features most of the theoretical discussion, introducing basic definitions that are integral to the study of intermediality, while also locating which branch of intermediality will be discussed and used in this research. Afterwards, section four is dedicated to the analysis of the newspapers and the journal.

2. Red Dead Redemption 2

2.1 Research and Development

Developed by Rockstar Games and launched on 26 of October 2018, eight years after the debut of *Red Dead Redemption* (*RDR*), Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2) works as a prequel of the first game. That is, the events that occurred in the latter release tells what happened before those narrated in the series first instalment. RDR2's development began shortly after the release of RDR, and because of its complexity, the production lasted for seven years. The final product engrossed a script of 2.000 pages, with over 2.000 days of motion-capture, which overall required 1.200 actors, with 700 of them having some sort of dialogue (Goldberg, 2018). One of the reasons for this large number of extras is due to the fact that each of the non-playable characters (NPCs) are as unique as they can be in a game of such scale. Most NPCs have voice lines and particular facial scans[1]. This diversification results in encounters with NPCs that seem as though the player is meeting different people, consequently, this feature makes player's interaction with NPCs the encounters the player has seem unique

RDR2 takes on itself a lot of references mixed with originality and character, the reason why the game has been described as a hallmark in narrative storytelling, world building, sound design and video production. Its story follows Arthur Morgan, a brute outlaw who is weary about the expansion of 'civilization' into the west. He is a white male, and his main apparatus is violence and brute force. However, a fundamental shift occurs in his life, after he contracts tuberculosis while beating a man who took a loan from his gang. Morgan then goes on a journey reflecting and trying to redeem himself from his past sins and mistakes. At the end, he watches as his beloved gang falls apart due to internal conflicts. RDR2 is devised in six chapters (played as Arthur Morgan) plus two epilogues (played as John Marston), which are titled: Chapter 1 - Colter , Chapter 2 - Horseshoe Overlook , Chapter 3 - Clemens Point, Chapter 4 - Shady Belle, Chapter 5 - Guarma, Chapter 6 - Beaver Hollow and Epilogue 1 and 2 (played as John Marston). The story is situated a few decades after the American Civil war, and the player is immersed in the aftermath of said conflict. The

[1] Facial scans and motion capture are strategies used by (film, game and animation) studios to extract every glimpse of expression from actors to bring their performance into the digital medium, it is usually associated with photorealistic media like James Cameron's *Avatar*; in recent years this approach has become more widely accessible with the creation of softwares such as MetaHuman animator, which allow for an affordable alternative in character design through facial scanning.

game touches on topics of slavery, immigration, diversity, white supremacy, female suffrage, internal political conflicts, and many others.

As aforementioned, this video game is a prequel to *Red Dead Redemption* (2010), which follows the path of John Marston, a former outlaw who was a member of the notorious Van Der Linde Gang. In that game, Marston has long abandoned a life of crime, and decided to settle with his family and live a lawful life in 1910 rural US. In spite of that, his past eventually catches onto him and his family, in the form of agent Edgar Ross, who is tasked with the mission of eliminating the remaining outlaws, which are still roaming free. He coerces Marston into hunting his former gang mates, in exchange for his freedom and for being acquitted of his past crimes. Scared for his family safety, he eventually embarks in this adventure, where he finds the remaining members of the Van Der Linde gang (that have long parted ways), killing them in a gruesome conflict.

At the end of John's quest, he finds his former mentor and leader, Dutch Van Der Linde, their confrontation is both bloody and emotional, with both sides reminiscing about their past together, and criticizing each other's present. The conflict ends with Dutch's demise, and John is finally able to return to his family. Once he reaches his farm, agent Ross ambushes him and violates their agreement. After another bloodshed, when both Abigail (John's wife) and Jack (their teenage son) narrowly manage to flee. This war ends with Ross and his colleagues murdering John in his homestead. After this chapter, there is a time jump of a couple of years, and Jack is now a grown man seeking revenge against agent Ross, who is now retired. Finally, after a classic western gun duel, Jack prevails, and his revenge is concluded.

Expanding over 15 years of gaming history it is no surprise that RDR2 (2018) has been the focus of various academic studies throughout the years, not only because of its compelling and well thought narrative, but also the game in itself has a complex setting (in terms of length and detail), as well as the context in which the game was developed. For instance, Hammar (2023) and Wright (2021; 2023) have researched Rockstar Games and the behind the scenes of the videogame industry. It should be acknowledged that other kinds of research have been made from all levels of academia, such as two undergraduate final papers, *The Evolution of the Western Genre and the Introduction of Video Games to a Persistent Mythos* (O'Sullivan, 2024), which highlights the influence of artistic production in the game's design, and Šprem's (2024), which discusses how Arthur Morgan fits in the western cowboy outlaw and in the western hero archetype.

Numbers and statistics do prove, to some extent, that the game was a commercial success, regarding sales and overall game critique, and it helped to push the narrative that Rockstar is constantly shaking the public's idea of what videogames can afford as a medium (Wright, 2021). When it was first launched for consoles XBOX and PS4, RDR2 received overall positive appraisal from both critics and the general public. Currently, its Metacritic[2] score sits at 97, and it is also the top choice for best game for PS4 on the website. Additionally, one of the main compliments found about the game is its photorealism. In a review by The Guardian, Keza MacDonald (2018) states that "These characters are rendered believable by technology that makes them look and move like real people, actors giving excellent performances with unexpected range, and writing that probes at their weaknesses and preoccupations." MacDonald's review is almost seven years old, as old as the game itself, and even after seven years since its release, RDR2 is still acquiesced as a beautiful game to play. With its "open world[3]" being complimented by its complexity, length, beauty and meticulousness. Meaning that a player can at any time venture on exploring all the regions and places the game has to offer. Each region and biome has an astonishing attention to detail in the fictional world of RDR2 (2018). This fastidiousness in creating an intricate game is highlighted by the fact that the creators researched and consumed books, films and historical registers that worked as prime reference in the game's development[4] (Goldberg, 2018). Historical research is not new in game development, since there have been plenty of popular historical games throughout the years, and each, in their own way, can bring a (new) point of view of events or periods in history.

In the least, when creating historically based games, developers are expected to research architecture, music, clothes, props (swords, armor, food, vehicles, books, etc.). It is important to note that "With a game a historian can engage research questions and incorporate primary and secondary source evidence, explore historical themes and make historical arguments." (Spring, 2015, p. 208). What ends up happening, especially in big companies like Rockstar, is that games tend to prioritize choices based on marketability and statistics (trying to answer the question 'what will be more lucrative').

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[2] Source: https://www.metacritic.com/game/red-dead-redemption-2/ ; Accessed on 8 August 2025

[3] "In video games, an open world is a virtual world in which the player can approach objectives freely, as opposed to a world with more linear and structured gameplay." Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_world#cite_note-cvg_history2-2

[4] "Dan says for research he consumed "hundreds" of books and films, "but nothing contemporary. I don't want to be accused of stealing ideas." He mentions Dickens, Henry James, Keats, Émile Zola, and "Arthur Conan Doyle, who just has great sections about America, you know, like a brilliant thing about union disputes in Pennsylvania and a brilliant thing about Mormons in Utah. But there's no greater character in the history of literature than [*David Copperfield*'s] Uriah Heep," he says." (Goldberg, 2018)

The sheer number of employees[5] tasked in the game's development already marks RDR2 as a behemoth in game making terms. Furthermore, one has to mention that video games are made for computers[6], therefore the immense number of lines of script might seem meager compared to the thousands of lines of codes and computer programming work that was done in RDR2. Although these numbers might seem impressive, the development of RDR2 as a Rockstar Games production has been through a lot of criticism, even before its release. Over the years the company has gained a reputation of having brutally long work hours and having a strong 'crunch culture', which basically meant that some developers, whilst making this particular game, worked over fifty hours weekly to meet deadlines (Hammar, 2023). In *Inside Rockstar games' culture of crunch* (2018), Jason Schreier interviews various former and current Rockstar Games employees, he then goes over some of the working conditions and expectations laid on the game's development:

> In the final year of development on *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the upcoming Western game, the top directors decided to add black bars to the top and bottom of every non-interactive cutscene in hopes of making those scenes feel more cinematic, like an old-school cowboy film. Everyone agreed it was the right creative move, but there was a catch: It would add weeks of work to many people's schedules. [...] they would have to crunch, putting in extra nights and weekends in order to redo these scenes and deal with the rest of the massive workload that was ahead of them. Would the black bars prove to be worth it?

That is, according to the employees interviewed, creativity and new ideas came at a cost. On the one hand, there is a the possibility of enhancing a playthrough, giving an already complex game a different aspect ratio during scene, going from 16:9 to 2.39:1 or 2.35:1, the same aspect ratio[7] found in modern westerns, such as *Django Unchained* and *Killers Of The Flower Moon*, as well as old westerners like *Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid*, and *A Fistful of Dollars*. However, just as there are logistical problems in last minute changes in a film, for example, in videogame development there are just as many obstacles when doing last minute adjustments. In fact, when the whole world is digital, there are various layers (programming, art development, animation, special effects) that compose a single scene. Consequently, seemingly small changes may take up days, or weeks, of work. Ultimately, the responsibility

[5] RDR2 and Red Dead Online Credits: https://www.rockstargames.com/reddeadonline/thankyou
[6] When I say computers I mean everything in the likes of XBOX, PS4 or PS5, and personal computers (PCs).
[7] "The ratio of frame width to frame height is called the aspect ratio. For example, an image that is twice as wide as it is high is said to be in a 2:1 ratio. Thomas Edison, Lumière, and other early film inventors set the proportions at approximately four by three, yielding an aspect ratio of 1.33:1". (Bordwell, Thompson, Smith, 2020, p. 181)

falls on the developers to somehow make it work, in an already packed schedule with an intense and demanding workload.

Although, as Schreier (2018) later points out, this was not an opinion shared by all the workers, some believed that creating these highly complex games were fulfilling (despite the long hours), others have described the development process as being very arduous and taxing. As a co-founder, and former creative director, of Rockstar Games, Dan Houser has given an interview about the working condition in RDR2 development: "[Houser] has spoken emotionally about how hard he and the company's teams — ten across the globe, from California to India — work. 'That was shit,' he says. '*This* was the hardest.'" (Goldberg, 2018). As previously mentioned, RDR2's crew members are quite numerous, containing people from all over the world. However, the workers' treatment varies a lot depending on their nationalities. The leniency of labour laws and "cheap" labor might just allow for a company to push harder in some countries, where long hours and worker's exploitation can be overlooked. Therefore, it is important to highlight that,

> the games industry follows contemporary global capitalist production networks that exploit the environments and workers in the periphery, while circulating capital toward the core economies. Although Rockstar does not similarly rely on material extractions to produce cheap electronic hardware the way that manufacturers like Nintendo, Sony, Microsoft, Apple, and Samsung do, they still rely on outsourced labor in "cheaper" markets such as India. (Hammar, 2023, p. 156-157)

Considering that, what Rockstar does is what major companies nowadays tend to do when developing a product, which makes the bluntness of Houser's statement a bit disquieting. Therefore, the public's response to the interview was far from positive. The controversial piece for Vulture, and a considerable amount of stories about the working conditions, paint a quite disturbing picture of RDR2 and the gaming industry. One cannot help but wonder about the overworked and exploited developers that are the backbone of this multi-billion dollar industry. Since its release, RDR2 and Rockstar Games have been through a lot of scrutiny. As a result of the major backlash received, regarding its treatment of developers, the company made major changes. Reportedly, in later years, Rockstar has tried to diminish its 'frat house' culture and crunch culture as well (Schreier, 2020).

2.2. Historical elements and playthrough

When it comes to RDR2, it is possible to see the thought laid by the developers when creating the scenery, clothes, characters, and architecture. Considering that, RDR2 draws heavily on US geography, and each of the fictional states in the game is inspired by some regions of late nineteenth century United States. A very clear influence on the design of the locations were influential cities of that time, like New Orleans. In RDR2, it is equivalent to the city of Saint Denis:

Image 1 - Mid-nineteenth century painting of New Orleans port



Source: *Port City of New Orleans* by Adrien Persac; Available at <https://64parishes.org/entry/antebellum-louisiana>

Image 2 - Screenshot from Saint Denis' port



Source: *Red Dead Redemption 2*, 2018.

The painting *Port City of New Orleans* was made by French American artist Marie Adrien Persac (1823-1873), whose artistic endeavors included cartography, painting, photographing and, later, art teaching[8]. Though the painting chosen for this comparison was made a couple of years before the American Civil War, it is important to note that his work (along with many other painters of that time) are one of the best historical registers of the city of New Orleans. Through this painting, it is possible to distinguish (and hypothesize) how the port was organized, how some of the factories were distributed around the city, and we can see how industrialization was really starting to affect the city's infrastructure.

Although the painting was made in 1858, and RDR2 takes place in 1899, the painting and the screenshot taken from the game have some similarities, such as the chimneys in the horizon and the docking area sprinkled with trading ships. On the right hand side of the screenshot, there is a building that is somewhat similar to the one in the painting, with the blue roof and white wall. On that account, one of the claims one could make about historical games, such as RDR2, is that they work as interpretations of the past, that is, they "make arguments about how social or cultural systems work in the world – or how they could work" (Bogost, 2008, Apud Spring 2015, p. 208). Being that so, the word 'interpretation' must not be ignored, since developers must not only research a particular period of time, but must make deliberations on what to put or leave out in a game (Wright, 2021). Therefore, what developers do is that

> They create gameplay scenarios and options that correspond with or reflect these interpretive decisions, but which also reflect considerations of a game's commercial viability, the conventions of the game's genre, and the hardware and software available to them at the time. (Wright, 2021, p. 6)

In other words, there is a lot more to making videogames than simply writing a compelling story and creating levels for a player to beat. The final product is a concatenation of multiple areas (programming, marketing, management, creative departments, and so on) working with each other to create something that is economically feasible and aesthetically compelling.

That being said, in a game that has been extensively attributed the idea of being 'alive', the player can perceive and play through some of the intricacies present in the United States during the nineteenth century. Because of the open world aspect, the player is free to

[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Adrien_Persac

roam around the map, discovering various events and species of animals or plants. Hence, it is ultimately the player's choice to venture on exploring the world of the game.

Image 3 - Map of RDR2



Source: https://rdr2map.com/, Accessed on 20 April 2025

Throughout the missions and side quests, it is possible for a player to investigate how cities differed in population density, houses and establishments arrangement. As mentioned before, the city of Saint Denis makes reference to New Orleans, that being said, by merely walking through the city, one can find themselves in a rich neighborhood with carefully crafted houses, policemen everywhere, and paved streets. On the other hand, if one goes towards the middle of the city, where the commercial area is located (near the port), one will find a denser population, marked by great diversification of Chinese, Spanish, French and English speaking people. In the city's outskirts one will find a lot of simpler houses inhabited by poor people, with its streets barely paved or not paved at all, and smaller and faded houses.

Image 4 - Neighborhood from Saint Denis



Source: *Red Dead Redemption 2*, 2018.

2.3. Westerners: tributes, allusions and narrative.

Besides historical records and bibliographical research, RDR2 is constantly paying homage to classic Western films, where many fans of the genre can perceive allusions and borrowing from filmic productions (O'Sullivan, 2024). The most blatant examples being the second train heist mission, which is almost a replica of the scene in *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007).

Image 5 - Second train Heist RDR2



Source: *Red Dead Redemption 2*, 2018.

Image 6 - Jesse James' train robbery scene



Source: DOMINIK, A. *The assassination of Jesse James by the coward Robert Ford*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2007.

In the film, as the train is reaching Jesse James' blockade, the train lights pass through the trees, illuminating the danger. The light reveals the covered faces of the robbers, and as the train comes closer to the ambush the music starts to swell. The noise of the squealing train brakes and the soundtrack start to merge, creating an acute and piercing shrill. As the sound builds up to a crescendo, the anticipation is palpable, and danger lingers in the air. As the train comes to a halt, we see Jesse James standing on top of a pile of rubbish waiting for his prey. In comparison, RDR2 plays the train scene almost exactly frame by frame, there are the gang members hiding behind trees, the sounds are quite similar and the noise coming from the train overlap with the soundtrack, making it one of the most overt references in the game. The allusion is undeniable and instantly recognizable to those who cherish the western genre, making it so that the player feels as though they are the protagonist of a classic wild west story.

Besides modern references, there are also various nods to classic Hollywood westerns and classic American literature. For the purpose of this section the main takeaway will be the references made regarding plot, setting, characters and the historical context. In one of the chapters of the game, the story makes a reference to the main plot of *A Fistful of Dollars*, and (arguably) also *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A major theme that appears throughout all of the works aforementioned, is that all these stories have a violent family feud that sweeps the protagonist right in the midst of it all. In the film, Rojos, who is part of an illegal rum

selling scheme, owns half of the city. On the other side, there are the Baxters, the ones that operate the local law enforcement. Similarly, RDR2 features two families, the Braithwaites and the Grays, who are, respectively, illegal moonshiners and the law enforcement. Additionally, the protagonists in both stories (Joe and Arthur Morgan) are compelled, each having their own motives, to deceive and scam both families, using their conflict as a veil to hide their true intentions, which is to rob them of their fortunes. As to the similarities to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the most prominent feature is the setting and the representation of the social structure of slavery in the nineteenth century, although they represent different periods of US history, each in their own manner portrays the plantations and slavery that was prevalent in the American south. Besides family grievances, there is a small story line that follows two lovers from feuding families in a Romeo and Juliet-esque way. Just like in Twain's story, in RDR2 there are two naive young adults that elope in order to run away from their families years long unresolved conflict. In both stories, they are helped by the main character, who passes on their notes and letters. Ultimately, in all the stories previously mentioned, the family feud ends in a debacle, with neither side winning the war, and all that is left is the main character and the population that lived around those rich families.

3. INTERMEDIALITY

For the purpose of this work it is imperative that the analysis goes over not only the genre of a video game, the setting, the characters or gameplay, to get to that we firstly must consider video games for what it is, a media form. Hence, the use of intermediality theory for the analysis of RDR2, but what is intermediality? Over the years there have been various debates and conceptualizations regarding the definition of intermediality, depending on the discipline, one may find different interpretations and use of intermediality theory. The plasticity of the concept of intermedially allows for a varied number of areas[9] to engage and research it through different approaches. For example, "media studies, literary studies, sociology, film studies, art history" (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 44) are fields in which intermediality is utilized but not in the same manner or object of study. Thus, as a consequence of the interdisciplinarity aspect that is imbued in the intermediality field, one way to describe intermediality is as "an umbrella-term" (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 44), as Rajewsky puts it:

> In this sense, intermediality may serve foremost as a generic term for all those phenomena that (as indicated by the prefix *inter*) in some way take place *between* media. "Intermedial" therefore designates those configurations which have to do with crossing borders between media, and which thereby can be differentiated from *intra*medial phenomenon as well as from *trans*medial phenomena (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 46)

Essentially, it draws a lot from the *interart* school of thought, but instead of only focusing on the conventional arts (i.e. theater, sculpture, painting) intermediality encompasses both aesthetic (music, film, literature) and non-aesthetic forms (letter of recommendation, road signs, a water bill) (Bruhn, 2016). However, it is important to note that intermediality is not the substitute to interart studies, on the contrary, when analyzing art, intermediality is often sourcing a lot of the concepts and discussions from interart studies, as is the case with the concepts of "the arts of time and the arts of space" (Elleström, 2021, p. 4). Rather than being a replacement, intermediality arises in order to allow for a greater emphasis on the "materiality and mediality of artistic practices and of cultural practices in general" (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 44). And by doing so, intermediality studies grant a far wider scope of research that goes beyond traditional artistic production, and the justification for this would be the fact that both conventional art and ordinary day-to-day communication "depend on mediating

[9] "A variety of critical approaches make use of the concept, the specific object of these approaches is each time defined differently, and each time intermediality is associated with different attributes and delimitations" (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 44).

substances" (Elleström, 2021, p. 4). This shift somewhat changed the way researchers dealt with new oncoming methods of creating art (mainly from the digital world), and the high ground held by traditional art now became leveled with every other media (Elleström, 2021, p. 4). In other words, intermedial studies are not concerned with which form of art or communication is best or better than its counterparts, rather it is about exploring the uniqueness and affordances of media types. For instance, a legal contract is a written media product. Because of its need to be long lasting and serve as record for the legal context, written media is much better suited for keeping account on things, more fitting for the purpose than the (unrecorded) human voice. Naturally, the ephemerality of the human voice alone is incapable of withstanding the passage of time, which is something quite important, since, depending on the contract, the agreement made can expand years or decades. Which means that written media is better suited for the legal context. In sum, one way of looking through intermedial studies is regarding the fact that "media are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between media differences that is founded on media similarities." (Elleström, 2021, p. 5). Therefore, intermediality can vary through both a collective and singular approach, meaning that most conceptualizations and general theory is developed looking at media and communication as a whole, while also scrutinizing specific texts (in the broad sense of the word) and phenomena (Clüver, 2011).

Moreover, the *inter* prefix causes misunderstandings. Given the fact that intermediality is a discipline that researches the 'crossing of borders' in media, there may be an inclination to believe on a division of some sorts, and intermediality studies would tie diametrically opposed ends, which would mean that there are two sides in which art resides, mixed or not mixed (Bruhn, 2016). In reality, intermediality studies argues that there is no such thing as pure or autonomous art form, as W.J.T Mitchell famously has declared, in his much quoted statement, "All media are [...] mixed media" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 257). Mitchell argues that mixedness is an unavoidable aspect in any media product. Nowadays, it is evident how different media are constantly interacting. Looking at the current state of social media, it is possible to see how most apps allow for a constellation of media interacting with one another, since the vast majority of digital platforms have written and audiovisual elements. Besides the delimitations of the virtual world, one can also find a diversity in how these media are employed by its users, in the sense that a person can share their daily life via a subtitled video, or a digital poem, release a music video, or publish an illustrated opinion article, all in the same platform. As long as there is a need to communicate and a way to do it, the process of

communication, or rather, the message, is inseparable from the instrument, or conduit through which it conveys meaning (Bruhn, 2016).

Considering that media (not just films, TV, books and other forms of entertainment, but also conversation, advertisement, letters, etc) play a great part in our everyday life, a question arises: what exactly is media? Much has been debated throughout the years, but for the purpose of this text it is possible to narrow it to "that which mediates for and between humans a (meaningful) sign (or a combination of signs) with the aid of suitable transmitters across temporal and/or spatial distances." (Bohn, Müller, Ruppert, 1988, p. 10 Apud Clüver, 2011, p. 10). Beyond the digital realm, media plays an enormous role that is essential in all human communication, as Elleström points out:

> All human beings use media, whether in the form of gestures, speech, news programmes, websites, music, advertisements or traffic signs. The collaboration of all these media is essential for living, learning and sharing experiences. Understanding mediality is one of the keys to understanding meaning-making in human interaction, whether directly through the capacities of our bodies or with the aid of traditional or modern external devices (Elleström, 2021, p. 4)

That being the case, media is an ubiquitous aspect in our daily lives, that works under different contexts and functions. In *Beyond Media Borders* (2021), Elleström postulates that, for human communication to be effective, it needs to have essential components that are mutually dependent, and if any of them are taken away the communication ceases to be. He calls these elements "entities of communication and their interrelations" (Elleström, 2021, p. 10), and explains that there are three indispensable entities, which are: "1. Something being transferred; 2. Two separate places between which transfer occurs; 3. An intermediate stage that makes the transfer possible" (Elleström, 2021, p. 10). The first is related to the "meaning" that is exchanged, but in order for this to take place there needs to be an addresser and an addressee, or in other words, for the "meaning" to be interpreted (instead of calling it message, Elleström prefers to call it 'cognitive import[10]') there needs to be a place of interpretation, which is the "perceiver's mind" (Elleström, 2021, p. 12). Last but not least, the third element is what Elleström calls 'media product[11]' which is "the intermedial stage that enables the transfer of cognitive import from a producer's to a perceiver's mind" (Elleström, 2021, p. 13). A takeaway from this would be that communication is straightforward endeavor,

[10] "The cognitive import transfer is not a material transfer but a mental transfer aided by materiality"(Elleström, 2021, p. 19)

[11] "This means that the producer's mind may, for instance, use either non-bodly matter (say, paper) or her own body and its immediate extensions (moving arms and sound produced by the vocal chords) to realise media products such as printed texts, gestures and speech."(Elleström, 2021, p. 13)

where an utterance goes from person A to person B, through speech, writing, drawing and so on, without any given trouble, but in art or in daily conversations, for example, things are far from direct. Communication is far from perfectly clear, understandable or even intelligible. Background noise, poor printing work, or misunderstandings are just a few examples that interfere with the reception of a media product. Beyond materialistic interferences, a major element that is at play in any form of media is interpretation, and it obviously influences how a text is received. What someone means might not be what another has in mind when they come in contact with it. Because of the fact that:

> senders and receivers may very well have divergent interpretative agendas—the unstable interpretative status of any text being a well-established fact—not to mention that the purpose of art and literature is often to blur the very communicative messages a media product apparently sends. (Bruhn, 2016, p. 18)

Ultimately, what comes before anything is interpretation, but not just in the sense of what something means, but rather what it is. Consciously or not, our senses work as the frontline for interpretation. For one to understand a novel, there not only has to be knowledge of the language in which it was written, but there are several other aspects to account that go well beyond the words in a page (like the thickness of a book, the genre, the author, the foreword, the cover, the smell of the book, etc). Overall, for a media product to be understood there needs to be an acknowledgment from our senses, and for the perceiver to take in any kind of message there needs to be a recognition of the media per se:

> Interpretation should be understood as all kinds of mental activities that somehow make sense of the sensory output [...] Nevertheless, the type, quality and form of the sensory input provided by the media product, and actually taken in by the perceiver's sense organs, are crucial for the interpretation formed by the perceiver's mind (Elleström, 2021, p. 18-19)

Interpretation is heavily dependent on the message's support, and the media product choice ultimately influences the perceiver's perception. A hand written letter has a different effect than a text message received on a cellphone; watching a movie screen and then reading the same story being told on a book[12] (or the other way around). We are quick to notice that media products naturally have attributes that differ from one another and allow for different things to be told in different ways. Hence, when some scholars argue that media products are not

[12] Cinema has usually been described as a visual medium, and indeed, but watching a film embarks more than just "visual" perception, there is obviously music and dialogue in a grand majority of them, but it is interesting to see that between film and books, film is the one that often takes on the most visualness. As if we did not use our eyes to glide over a page and go over every word, and image.

neutral, it means that our understanding of a message is indissociable from the media which carries it (Bruhn, 2016; Elleström, 2021). Yet, hardly ever do we notice it, because "[i]f we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic" (Shklovsky, 1988, p. 19). As intermedial studies take this process of automatic perception as a point of departure, it becomes possible to apprehend the work of art (or the message) as a whole, drawing attention to the material, modal, and medial conditions that shape meaning. A media product's mediating capacity is just as relevant to works of art as the message itself.

3.1 Modalities, mediation and representation

When analysing media products through an intermedial approach, it might sound daunting to bring together such diverse media products. How can a researcher in the same discipline analyze a medieval poem and a video essay uploaded on YouTube? For intermediality studies to cover such a wide range of media products there have been useful categorisations made throughout the years, to help researchers follow a certain methodology. In this work, the method of choice is Elleström's model for analyzing media products. His proposal for categorization is to lay out basic traits that are common in all media products, and he does this by establishing that all media products have traits that can be put into four irreducible categories, which he calls media modalities. In this sense, by using this framework it is possible to see that:

> basic media differences and media similarities can be pinpointed. Crucial divergences and fundamental parallels can be highlighted among all conceivable sorts of media—existing and yet to be devised—which provides a firm ground for understanding, describing and interpreting the most elementary media interrelations. (Elleström, 2021, p.47)

The modalities are called material, spatiotemporal, sensorial and semiotic modality. Hence, it is important to note that

> all conceivable media products are a result of a particular and specific constellation of these four modalities. Consequently, multimodality is a characteristic of any conceivable mediality.[...] The point is that the mixed character of the texts is also a

> fact in texts that have traditionally have been considered monomedial. (Bruhn, 2016, p. 20-21)

These modalities are indispensable categories ingrained by all media products, and it is worth noting that there is no hierarchy between them, rather they all work in conjunction with each other in a media product. Additionally, even though these modalities work in unison to 'deliver' the 'meaning' from the producer to the perceiver, the modes are either presemiotic or semiotic, an aspect that will be discussed further on.

The first modality to be introduced is the material modality, and it concerns mediation, or rather the display of a media product. The material modality can be described as the material quality that allows for a perceiver to receive a message, that can be achieved through organic or inorganic matter. An applause, for example, is an organic media product, whereas a construction sign is an inorganic media product (Bruhn, 2016). It is very easy to notice the material modality being quite an important factor for someone to perceive a message, being the physicality of it an attribute that allows perceivers to use our senses to touch, smell, taste, observe and listen to a media product. As Ellëstrom highlights

> All media products are material, or more broadly physical, which makes them perceptible and hence accessible to the perceiver's mind in various ways. As described in physics, there are different states of matter, four of which are relevant for everyday life: a media product may be solid or in the form of a liquid, gas or plasma. (Elleström, 2021, p. 47)

Since all media products need to have a material quality, then, whatever the media product may be, it must occupy a certain space for a specific duration of time. Which brings us to the next point, the spatiotemporal modality; it consists of four dimensions: "width, height, depth and time" (Elleström, 2021, p. 48). If the material modality is about what a media product is made of (rock, sound waves, paper, metal), the spatiotemporal is a further detailed analysis of the physical attributes in a media product. The spatial aspect of this modality emphasizes the dimensionality of it, considering whether the media product is a two dimensional painting, three dimensional sculpture, sound waves occupying space, or the dancer's body. In addition, the space that a media product occupies can vary over a certain amount of time, either because of its properties or deliberate showcasing. For instance, an ice sculpture or the candy sculpture "Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A)" (1991) are composed of different materials, but they both are changed by their environments (respectively by the temperature and the visitors eating the candy), and if you see them in different time increments there is a chance you might not see them at all, because if enough time has passed,

the ice has melted and all the candy has been collected. Beyond these sculptures that are affected by the passage of time, some media products also have beginnings and ends, like a play, a film, a commercial, or a book and so on, whereas other kinds of media products are 'stuck in time', or rather they just exist, like photos, or some sculptures (Ellestrom, 2021).

In conjunction with the spatiotemporal modality there is the sensorial modality. How else could we perceive a media product if not through our senses? Therefore, according to Elleström, the five main modes of sensorial modality are seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, and smelling (Ellestrom, 2021). Despite the fact that to perceive a media product there needs to be an acknowledgement from our senses, there are media products that do not necessarily warrant the use of all of them at once. For example, when coming across a stop sign, we usually only look at it (because of its function and the context in which it is situated) or even touch it, but we seldom taste it, listen to it or even smell it. Whilst reading a book we use most of our senses, sight to read the words printed, we use our hands to hold and pass the pages, sometimes we smell the book, but usually we do not taste it.

At last the semiotic modality, but first what is semiotics? In short, it can be described as:

> The scientific study of the properties of signalling systems, whether natural or artificial. In its oldest sense, it refers to the study within philosophy of sign and symbol systems in general (also known as semiotic, semeiotics, semiology, semasiology, semeiology, significs). In this approach, linguistic, psychological, philosophical and sociological characteristics of communicative systems are studied together. [...] Particularly in Europe, semiotic (or semiological) analysis has developed as part of an attempt to analyse all aspects of communication as systems of signals (semiotic systems), such as music, eating, clothes and dance, as well as language. (Crystal, 2008, p. 431)

In the field of intermediality, semiotics is often applied in order to understand human communication, allowing it for a greater scope of research. As mentioned previously, it can be various types and forms of communication not just the arts, but also the media we use in our daily lives (recipes, traffic signs, alarms, smells[13]). Indeed, authors such as Lars Elleström use semiotics as base for intermedial studies, more specifically Charles S. Pierce's study of signs. In sum, Pierce argued that signs, or as he called it representaments (words, drawings, photos, etc), are used in order to represent something (feelings, objects, natural phenomenon, etc) to someone (an interpretant) (Elleström, 2021). He argues that human beings develop and create (arbitrary) signs in order to communicate with the world around us. Take language for

[13] Smells can be used as signs, or media products. Whenever a person uses a gas stove, the gas being used has been odorized, since natural gas is odorless and colorless, there are few ways in which we can detect a gas leak, one of the most effective is through the air. Therefore, gas companies started to add odors to it in order to prevent a dangerous scenario. Hence, the unpleasant smell of leaking gas works as a sign for us to interpret that there is a dangerous substance in the air.

instance, where a word in itself has no underlying meaning to what it represents. There is no correlation between the word ‘whale’ and a marine mammal. In other words:

> The mediated sensory configurations of a media product do not transfer any cognitive import until the perceiver’s mind comprehends them as signs. [...] The world at large is meaningless in itself; its significance is the result of interpreting minds—perceiving and conceiving subjects situated in social circumstances—attributing import to state of affairs, actions, occurrences, natural objects and artefacts. (Elleström, 2021 p. 50)

After this brief explanation on semiotics, we return to the semiotic modality. Once it is clear to see that signs do not ‘hold’ any meaning in themselves, we can see that media products also do not fundamentally have any meaning. As mentioned beforehand, the meaning comes from the *interpretants*, which includes both senders and receivers, since to send a sign (for example a head nod) both the sender and perceiver need to have a shared understanding of what the sign is and what it signifies. Therefore, the semiotic modality is imbued in every media product, but for it to be interpreted it needs the acknowledgement from our senses. Consequently, all of the modalities are deeply intertwined with each other, making it so that removing even one of them the media product does not transmit anything.

It is worth recalling something that was briefly mentioned in the few opening paragraphs of this section, more specifically, the division between the presemiotic (material, spatiotemporal and sensorial) and semiotic modalities. This division is very much tied to the notion of mediation and representation postulated by Elleström, where “The presemiotic media modes concern the fundamentals of mediation, which is to say that they are necessary conditions for any media product to be realised in the outer world by a technical medium of display, and hence for any communication to be brought about.” (Elleström, 2021, p. 47). In this sense, mediation is when we listen to a sound, smell, touch or see something, in other words, it is our perception of things (that in themselves do not carry or have any intrinsic meaning). The meaning comes from our own cognition and experience, in Elleström’s words “To say that a media product represents something is to say that it triggers a certain type of interpretation” (Elleström, 2021, p.39). If mediation is presemiotic, representation is the semiotic process of ascribing meaning in the process of communication. Consequently, all media products are the result of this representation process, or rather “all media products represent in various ways as soon as sense is attributed to them; or, in other words, when they are attributed sense, they become media products.” (Elleström, 2021, p. 40). In short, the material, spatiotemporal, sensorial modalities are presemiotic and are tied to the notion of

mediation.; It is only through mediating substances that the semiosis process is triggered and interpretation is at play.

3.2. Crossing borders

After briefly going through some of the more specific attributes of media products, such as the elements that constitute it and enable us to understand it as such, we must be reminded that media products are not made in a vacuum. Rather, they are the result of a constellation of other works that came before and were categorized as a certain medium. Hence, "the position from which a medium is regarded must take into account the network of surrounding media which defines what is considered a medium" (Neitzel, 2015, p. 586). However, more often than not the delimitations of what is a medium can be blurred, since media products are often crossing and overlapping each other in some capacity: verbal spoken communication is often accompanied by gestures; literature is filled with descriptions of how something tasted, how someone looked, what something smelled like; films have written elements; opera has librettos, instrumental music, acting, dancing, and singing. The point that should be reemphasized again is that there is no "pure" media product, regardless if they are paintings, music, road signs, etc. What is considered a medium is entirely dependent on other mediums. Whether due to the fact a medium is dependent on other media to occur, or due to the need for other kinds of media to exist to differentiate itself from it.

Considering that a media product can articulate various media, and, recalling once again, "all media is mixed", it is worth establishing in a formal manner the ways in which media crosses over, more specifically how some intermedial phenomena occur. For that purpose, Rajewsky (2005) provides three subcategories of analysis of intermedial relations, they are "medial transposition", "media combination" and "intermedial references". In short, "medial transposition" is a "production-oriented, 'genetic' conception of intermediality" (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 51). This category concerns the way in which a medium is transformed into another. The most common example is that of film adaptations, from novel to the big screen. But there are various ways in which this transformation can occur. For instance, from literature to food sculpture. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* there is the wedding of Emma, the main character, in the depiction of the event Flaubert describes the wedding cake that was made for the occasion in the following manner:

> It started off at the base with a square of blue cardboard representing a temple with porticoes and colonnades, with stucco statuettes all round it in recesses studded with gilt paper stars; on the second layer was a castle-keep in Savoy cake, surrounded by tiny fortifications in angelica, almonds, raisins and quarters of orange; and finally, on the uppermost platform, which was a green meadow with rocks, pools of jam and boats of nutshell, stood a little Cupid, poised on a chocolate swing whose uprights had two real rosebuds for knobs at the top. (Flaubert, 1997, p. 41-42)

Beyond this excerpt being one of the most famous descriptions in all of Flaubert's work, it proved to be quite a challenge to bring such an egregious image to life. To undertake in this adaptation seemed impossible, until professor Jenniver Yee from the University of Oxford took this challenge further, and with the help of a local bakery, made their own version of Madame Bovary's cake, transforming what was once written to a eatable food sculpture:

Image 7 - Madame Bovary's cake



Source:https://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/oxford-polyglot/2021-22/2/making-madame-bovarys-wedding-cake.

Moreover, in contrast to "medial transposition", when there is a change from one medium to another, in "intermedial references" the medium is "fixed" and it is through its own possibilities and limitations that the intermedial quality comes to be (Rajewsky, 2005), as Rajewsky argues:

> Intermedial references are thus to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product's overall signification: the media product uses its own media-specific means, either to refer to a specific, individual work produced in another medium (i.e., what in the German tradition is called Einzelreferenz "individual reference"), or to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre) or to another medium *qua* system (Systemreferenz, "system of reference) (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 53)

Revisiting the example of Flaubert's cake description, that whole account of what the cake looked like can be described as a form of *ekphrasis*, which is a form of intermedial reference, in other terms, it is a description of a visual entity. Flaubert evokes, through (written) language, a distinct visual element.

Lastly, and perhaps the most important category for this work, comes "media combination", which, as the name suggests, is when two or more media forms are combined (Rajewsky, 2005). One of the reasons for a greater emphasis on this category of intermedial relations is due to video games being a prime example of media combination, but besides that, mostly because a huge number of media products combine different media together. Such as films, television programmes, most of the digital space (social media, blogs, etc.), opera (ibid); these are all types of media combinations, or "to use other terminology, so-called multimedia, mixed media, and intermedia." (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 51). As to mixed media and multimedia they are phenomena within the media combination category, and they both can account for different types of media combination. Since multimedia texts have the ability to separate media forms from the combined texts and retain coherence and meaning, whereas mixed media are texts that cannot separate media forms without compromising the comprehension and overall meaning of a media product (Clüver, 2011).

Video games are an easy fit in all of these categories aforementioned. Firstly, media transformation: for over 20 years films and games have seen numerous adaptations either from video games to film (i.e. *Resident Evil* game turned film franchise in the early 2000s) or the other way around (*Dune* books were adapted to a film, then it was adapted again and became the video game *Dune: Awakening*).

Secondly, as technology advances and greater processing powers allow complex forms of video games to be made, the possibility of implementing a plethora of intermedial references in video games has been a recurring phenomenon in game development. Where video games using their own interface to make intermedial references; In *Minecraft,* a user can make their own version of a notebook:

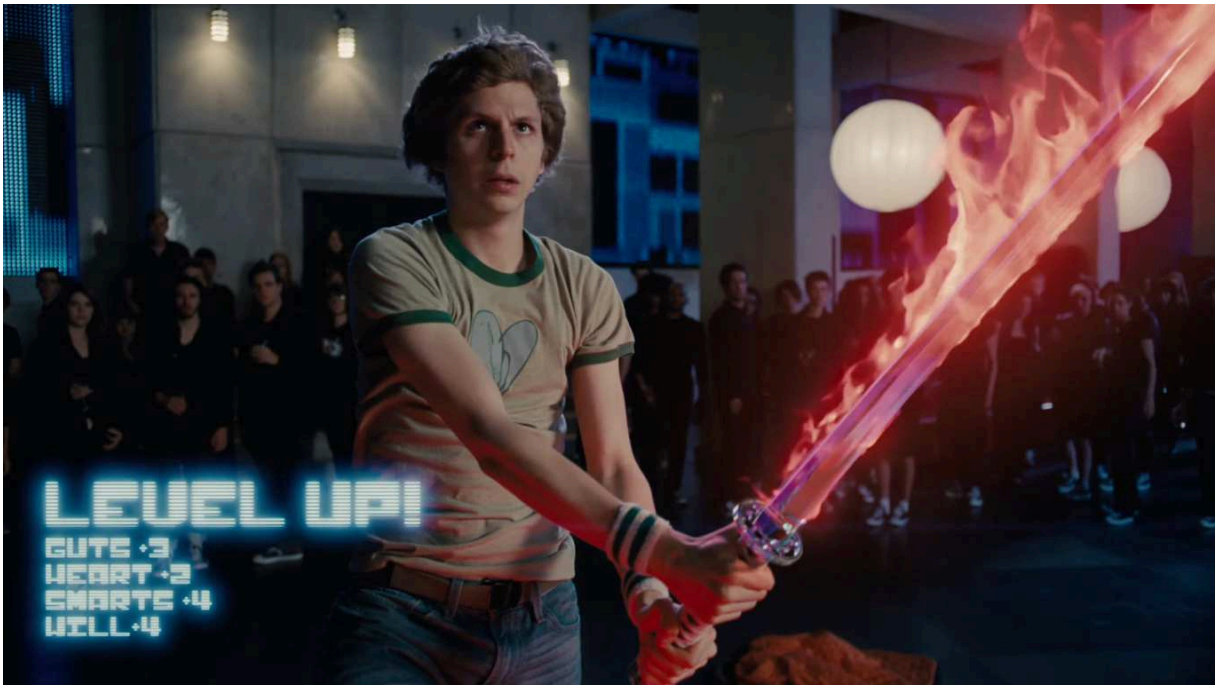
Image 8 - Notebook in minecraft



Source: https://www.minecraft.net/pt-br/article/book-and-quill

Additionally, since video games are very prevalent in pop culture and internet discourse, other media products often make intermedial references to video games. Such is the case with the film *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010), which throughout its whole duration uses distinct elements of video game media (i.e. levels, rewards after defeating an enemy, rules and player statistics).

Image 9 - Scene from *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010)



Source: *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010).

In regard to media combination, video games are deeply embedded with other media, whether through audio (soundtrack and sound effects), visual elements (for example, written media) and even sensorial, either through a controller, keyboard, mouse or any other physical object that allows for us to play a game. Some of these media can be removed and not affect the gameplay, whereas other combinations (i.e. tactile) are essential for the overall sustainability of these media products, and if excluded it makes the games unplayable.

4. NEWSPAPERS AND DIARY FICTION IN RDR2

Western civilization in the nineteenth century was marked by rapid economical, technological, and social change. Additionally, the nineteenth century was the stage of various aftermaths of notorious events that had taken place just decades before, such as the French Revolution and the United States' independence, to name a few. In light of these events, the United States, during this period of time, had its fair share of tumultuous and hectic domestic incidents, marked by conflict, civil war and, later, industrialization. With the aim to analyze a media product that heavily references the nineteenth century, it is worth discussing what are the scenarios referenced by the objects that will be later adapted for RDR2.

Keeping this in mind, the following sections will be dedicated to analyzing and interpreting the ways in which RDR2 represented newspapers and a journal in game. How they adapted them to the gaming format and added them to the fiction world. For us to understand how RDR2 did this, we first must understand these textual genres themselves. How were newspapers produced at the time? How were they written? What kind of reception had this media product? Alongside newspapers, the other format that will be investigated is the diary (fiction) format. In order to do that, section 4.1 and 4.2 will deal with not only how these categories of written media came to be, but also their functions and how they were implemented in RDR2.

4.1 Newspapers

Newspapers have been around for quite some time, arguably since the seventeenth century, but its conventions and the whole genre itself has changed and transformed massively since then. In the nineteenth century, specifically, newspapers underwent a revolution that altered the format so drastically that it influenced how this medium would be consumed for the years to come. In order to comprehend how newspapers underwent such a drastic transformation, we first need to understand what it is that can be considered "news".

Gerald J. Baldasty, in his work *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, argues that "News is a malleable compound, a synthesis of interests. [...] First, and foremost, news depends upon the relationship of the newspaper (or, more broadly, the media) with other institutions, interests, or groups in society." (Baldasty, 1992, p. 144) Therefore,

what was news in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was something different from what we understand today. Firstly, newspapers were not made (initially) to commercialize information, rather they were made by political parties to reach (potential) voters (Rubery, 2009; Baldasty, 1992). Hence, in the antebellum[14], the main target demographic of newspapers was the elites, since they were the ones who could more actively engage in politics, but, more importantly, they were the ones who could afford it.

When newspapers had a partisan role, they were not cheap, and a great percentage of the population could not afford to purchase it regularly. One of the reasons for the hefty price was the fact that making a newspaper was far more laborious in the early nineteenth century than later on. Also, it is relevant to mention that due to technological limitations, the production of newspaper issues only were made available every week or so (Rubery, 2009). But what has changed? What made newspapers "an item that few could afford to an item a few could afford to be without" (Rubery, 2009, p. 4)? Rubery (2009) answers this question by highlighting four decisive factors: technological advancement, which allowed faster and large-scale printing, the increase in literacy and leisure time, urban growth, and affordability. The latter being of tremendous importance, because what ultimately made newspapers affordable to the greater public was the advent of advertisement. Advertisement transformed the political based newspaper that targeted voters into a newspaper, which was independent of political affiliation, and made for consumers (Baldasty, 1992). In other words, "What was the precise nature of the changes in nineteenth century newspapers? In many ways, what figures most prominently in all newspapers is the growth of news as a commodity, as a commercial product to be shaped, packaged and marketed with a constant eye to profit" (Baldasty, 1992, p. 139).

Around the mid-nineteenth century, news had become not only a vehicle for local and international reports, but it also laid the stage for a new industrialized driven world order with advertisement of industrialized products. It became clear that advertisers not only were there to give financial support for newspaper companies, but they would also come to shape how news would be reported (Baldasty, 1992). Ultimately, because newspapers depended heavily on sponsors, the new era of newspapers started to appeal to a greater number of people, not just the elites, but also women and the working class. Published texts began to be shortened, easily digestible and eye-catching; it also featured a variety of content, e.g. scandals, sports, fictional stories, scientific discoveries (Rubery, 2009). All this effort had the intent of reaching

[14] Antebellum is the name given to the period of time prior to the American civil war.

as big of an audience as possible, so that any kind advertisers would be compelled to sponsor a newspaper. Hence, newspapers had two audiences: readers and advertisers (Badalsty, 1992).

Image 10 - *The Evening World* front page.



FINAL RESULTS EDITION

The Evening World.

"Circulation Books Open to All."

NEW YORK, MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1905.

PRICE ONE CENT.

LATEST NEWS OF THE DAY

To Tow Ocean Liner.

Must Have Milk Permits.

Venezuelan Scarf Worse.

Against Railroads.

Trolley Ran Into Store.

Woman Burned to Death.

REJANE IS DEFEATED IN DIVORCE COURT

Husband of French Actress Wins in Counter-suit Brought by Him.

SHE BEGAN THE ACTION.

But Judges Decide Against Her in Granting the Final Decree.

RECALLS HYDE DINNER.

TWO YEARS IN SING SING FOR "JOE" CAHILL

Former Assemblyman Sentenced To-Day for Election Fraud.

GUILTY OF PERJURY.

Jury Convicted Him Last Week and Judge Crane Sustained the Verdict.

FRIEND OF M'CARREN.

MAGNATES WILL DISCUSS HIGH BALLS TO-MORROW.

LATEST NEWS OF ALL SPORTS

CORRIGAN ATTENDS CITY PARK RACES

The Trifler 8 to 1 Shot, Upsets Talent in Third Race.

WIFE OF BIKE WINNER ROOT DEFENDS MONEY WITH GUN

Other Six-Day Riders Want Share for Combining to Help Root Win Garden Race from Bedells.

RYAN READY NOW TO DISCLOSE ALL ABOUT HARRIMAN

Probably Will Be Recalled To-Morrow to Reply to Questions He Refused to Answer About Purchase of Equitable.

HIS LAWYER SUMMONED FOR TALK WITH JEROME.

Home Life Company Taken Up by the Committee—Has No "Yellow Dog" Funds, but President Ide Admits Rebating.

GOT M'CALL'S AID IN PROVIDENT LIFE

President Scott Tells How Hailey Looted Company and Killed Himself.

PROBERS TAKE UP HOME LIFE CO.

Source: https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/

Image 11 - *The Mount Morris Enterprise* front page.


THE MOUNT MORRIS ENTERPRISE.
Boston Clothing House
SUMMER CLOTHING.
Been Waiting For...
Ready - Made - Suits.
Derbys & Straw Hats.
Gent's Furnishings
MERCHANT TAILOR.
AT BEUERLEIN'S.
Be in the Swim
FRED BEUERLEIN.
ROYAL BAKING POWDER
WM. MATE, BLACKSMITH.
PURE ICE
Livery Stable.

Source: https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/

The images 10 and 11 are from two distinct newspapers from New York, respectively *The Evening World* and *The Mount Morris Enterprise*. They both illustrate how, despite editorial differences, newspapers followed similar patterns. Stories had catchy headlines and smaller fonts for the issues covered, whereas advertisers vary in font size and format. In *The Evening World*, the front page was filled with all kinds of stories, showcasing the need to capture the interest of varied social groups, hence the short format in order to accommodate the diversification of content. Whereas, in *The Mount Morris Enterprise*, it is intriguing to see that advertising made up for half of the entire front page. Some newspapers at that time went even further, and the sponsored content took up almost the entire front page.

Furthermore, a few questions arise with the overwhelming popularity of newspapers: How did it make its way into fiction? What prompted artists to use it in their work? And why do we keep referencing it? Considering that newspapers were now widely accessible, and

were part of the daily routine of millions of people around the world, there are a few reasons as to why they appear in fiction. First, it would be familiarity. Seeing that readers were well acquainted with the newspaper genre, and with how the press constructed its stories, it would only make sense that "the novel's own formal devices in many instances have been shaped in response to competing media" (Rubery, 2009, p.4). Another reason for using newspapers in stories would be to use the format to further develop a fictional world. By using news the author would be able to connect distant (either geographically or temporally) events onto the narrative, through a documentary format that is known by the public (Rubery, 2009). Thus, newspapers add a layer of realism into narratives and show "how the supposedly impersonal news can directly affect the emotional lives of its readers." (Rubery, 2009, p. 13).

Additionally, it is worth mentioning how some written media, in the nineteenth century, made intermedial references to periodicals:

> We might encounter in the pages of a Victorian novel a verbatim news report, a narrator's paraphrase of this report, or even a dramatized scene of reading in which a character apprehends the report before our eyes. Each of these scenarios entails an appropriate orientation from the novel's own reader. At one pole, a facsimile of the news story bids the audience's familiarity with newspaper conventions to supply a character's reaction in the absence of authorial commentary; at the other pole, we are bystanders before a spectacle in which access to a newspaper's content emerges solely from the theatrical response of its imagined reader. (Rubery, 2009, p. 13)

There are other reasons and ways in which authors would employ the newspaper format in their fiction, but it goes beyond the scope of this research.

As it was discussed previously, in section 3.2, the representation of newspapers can be classified as an intermedial reference. Therefore, when RDR2 features it, it does so by using its own media specific traits, hence the newspaper is not really a newspaper, rather, it evokes the media newspaper (Rajewsky, 2005). And RDR2 makes intermedial references to this media type in intriguing ways.

Firstly, RDR2 has three newspapers that amass a total of fourteen issues: *New Hanover Gazette*, *Blackwater Ledger* and *Saint Denis Times Tribune*. Each representing a region's press coverage in RDR2.

Image 12 - *Blackwater Ledger* header n. 62.



Source: https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

Image 13 - *New Hanover Gazette* header n. 30.



Source: https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

Image 14 - *Saint Denis Times Tribune* header n.52.



Source: https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

Secondly, the character movement, which is integral for the reference, make RDR2 intermedial referencing peculiar. The only way to get a newspaper is to move the character around the map, and have the player find the newspaper vendor (which is usually a teenager boy) and buy it from them. It is only after acquiring the newspapers that they can be read. Some intermedial references to newspapers do not bother to show the act of buying, checking if the vendor is still available[15] and spending in-game money to pay for it. Third, any intermedial reference has limitations, and RDR2 is no different. Newspapers are a kind of physical media, which involves some sort of manual work of the reader, in RDR2 the user is

[15] The vendors in RDR2 work at specific times, they are not always available at particular times of the day.

constrained to the screen and the controller. Additionally, in RDR2 its length is limited, when compared to the multiple pages of conventional newspapers. In fact, the periodicals featured in the game have only a single (front) page:

Image 15 - The *Blackwater Ledger* n.62.

BLACKWATER LEDGER

VOLUME XCVIII — THE VOICE OF WEST ELIZABETH AND BEYOND — 1899– NO. 62

ONLY 25 and GRAY?

ONLY 22 and BALD?

Ask for J.J. McCLURE HAIR TONIC from your Druggist.

BUBONIC PLAGUE SPREADS

ARRIVING SHIPS QUARANTINED.

An epidemic of bubonic plague has broken out in India and Hong Kong and spread to our troops in the Philippines. Several soldiers have died in Manila of what was called "a loathsome disease."

Despite the best efforts in sanitary science to stamp it out, the plague appears to have resurfaced in this country. In New York and Saint Denis, victims of plague were confirmed, and vessels arriving were given the choice of a doctor visiting each ship or turning around.

Any bodies suspected of death from the disease should be immediately burned, even if the cause of expiry is not confirmed as bubonic plague by bacteriological examination.

WAR BREAKS OUT IN PHILIPPINES

INSURRECTION AGAINST UNITED STATES GROWS.

THEY WILL BE TAUGHT THE HUMANITY OF CONQUERORS.

The First Philippine Republic has effectively declared war on the United States, objecting to the Treaty of Paris in which the U.S. took possession of the Philippines from Spain after the Spanish-American War. American Naval forces have bombarded the city of Iloilo after the first shots were fired.

The War Department expects the cessation of hostilities to happen quickly as the American military force is strong and the Filipinos are armed mostly with bolo knives, spears, bows and other hand crafted weapons. American occupation of the archipelago has been contentious; however, military officials are planning a humanitarian campaign after hostilities cease.

DEVOURED BY COUGARS.

FAMISHED ANIMALS MAKE MEN PREY.

Out of the west comes an appalling story of the fate of two prospectors who were attacked by a pride of famished mountain lions. Due to extreme cold and snowstorms last season, cougars in the area have been made desperate from hunger. The prospectors had begun working when a band of cougars emerged and attacked, led by an albino male. Trappers later came across the spot and reported only a few bones were left.

The prospectors' names were D. Crag and J.E. Peters. A trapper in the area says he has worked there for 15 years and has not seen so many furious animals driven to madness by starvation.



TRAIN ROBBED

PITCHED BATTLE LEAVES MANY DEAD.

OUTLAWS SEND TRAIN ON DRIVERLESS JOURNEY.

OWNED BY LEWTICUS CORNWALL.

A private train owned by the railroad, sugar and oil magnate Leviticus Cornwall was robbed in broad daylight by masked outlaws. Headed North towards the Grizzlies, the outlaws boarded and stopped the train shortly after it had departed from West Elizabeth. Initial cables sent as of printing time indicate the bloody takeover occurred in order to steal railroad bonds from the personal car of Mr. Cornwall.

Shortly after the robbery, the train was set in motion without a driver or crew, barreling dangerously through the area at a high rate of speed. The train was eventually brought to a stop by engineers and lawmen north of Annesburg, who reported a scene of violent struggle and bloody carnage on board.

Some engineers and guards from the train survived the slaughter but were too startled to report much information of value to authorities.

BLACKWATER LOCKED DOWN

BANK BOAT HEIST LARGEST ROBBERY IN YEARS.

DUTCH'S BOYS ACCUSED. BOUNTIES PLACED.

FURNISHES A SENSATION AMONG RESIDENTS.

After a bloody shootout that resulted in the seizure of a large quantity of banknotes being shipped by boat, Pinkerton agency officials have restricted access to the town of Blackwater while a massive manhunt is underway.

MONEY BELIEVED STASHED BY OUTLAWS.

Officials issued bounties on the heads of Dutch van der Linde and his gang, commonly known as Dutch's boys. Banks looked to shipping assets via boat as a more reliable means of transportation impervious to thieves. The deadly attack resulted in the loss of $150,000 – the largest robbery in recent years. Authorities believe that the men may have stashed the money in Blackwater before fleeing. Reports indicate that many are searching high and low for the stash, upending public spaces and neighbors' gardens.

Residents of Blackwater view the lockdown with contempt. Businesses which depend on shipments of dry goods, sundries, and catalogue sales complain the Pinkertons have caused an unnecessary burden to life and welfare.

BLIZZARD AFTERMATH IN GRIZZLIES

SNOWMELT WORRIES THOSE IN FLOOD PRONE AREA.

A series of late spring snowstorms rendered the Grizzlies impassable in May, catching many unprepared, having used most of their winter provisions. The snow, often measuring feet in many areas, is unusual this late in the season. Reports from riders who have recently encountered the area say that respite is finally in sight.

The snowmelt is coming quickly with the seasonable warmth, which worries many that rivers downstream will swell and burst their banks, as happened in the late spring snowstorms of '83. Planting season is also reportedly delayed as many areas are too muddy for work animals to work a plow.

FAMILY MURDERED

LAND OF THE LAWLESS.

Highway robbery and murder have become a daily affair once more to those traveling near Tall Trees, Hennigan's Stead, Armadillo or Tumbleweed.

Huntington Schrader and his wife and two boys were traveling by wagon when they were held up by heavily armed bandits, believed to be members of the notorious Del Lobo gang. Mr. Schrader opened fire and the shorter of the bandits was soon a corpse. But the taller one, worked into desperation by the death of his companion, found his mark and Mr. Schrader was soon a corpse too. His wife Isabella stood her ground and fired at the bandits until they fled. Her younger son Isaac had been hit in the incident and soon bled to death.

Travelers are warned to avoid the areas as incidents of violence, thievery and murder are increasing faster than law enforcement can pursue them.

TWENTY-ONE DEAD IN ATTACKS

BANKS AND STAGES HELD AT GUNPOINT.

COLM O'DRISCOLL, A MAN WITH A BLOODY RECORD.

BELOVED PASTOR AMONG DEAD.

Reverend Alex H. Hughes was shot and killed for voicing his concern for the safety of the women on board a stagecoach destined for West Elizabeth. The shameful tragedy is part of widespread disorder led by notorious outlaw Colm O'Driscoll and his gang.

Multiple stagecoaches and shipments have been robbed by the O'Driscoll gang across New Hanover and West Elizabeth. Banks in the region are also said to be on caution as a number have been held up.

Not satisfied with the riches of their plunder, the members of the O'Driscoll gang are reported to delight in torture and bloodshed as part of their escapades, and have left widows and widowers in their wake.

Travelers are encouraged to be aware and armed, especially in the area of Big Valley, where the gang is reported to have taken a large ranch as a base of operations, leaving the family and ranch hands dead.

HERESY

RELIGIOUS SECT RECRUITING.

CITIZENS OF VALENTINE PROTEST.

CLAIM CHELONIANS COMMIT BLASPHEMY.

The evils of Chelonianism are still flourishing. It is now practiced openly and this newspaper believes it is a menace to all our liberty. Christian citizens of Valentine gathered at a church last Saturday to protest what they and any sensibly minded people consider a blasphemy in their midst.

The Chelonians have been actively recruiting young men. While the U.S. continues to debate the recent statehood of Utah over the Mormon question, Valentine wrestles with its own homegrown religious movement. They claim the true Bible was handed down 100 years ago "to our great prophet from above." Local religious leaders warn this blasphemy threatens the future of the region and indeed the country.

The Chelonians hold the turtle to be sacred and consider them ancient holy animals to never be harmed. Protesters were seen holding signs with a turtle that had been crossed out.

MEXICAN BORDER DISPUTE INTENSIFIES

SOLDIERS BLOCK PASSAGE.

PRESIDENT CALLS FOR SEVERING TIES.

Not since General Francisco Ramirez Torres seized the presidency of Mexico in the bloody coup of 1876 have relations been so strained with the U.S. Among heightened tensions, General Torres has placed troops along the border to deny entry to prospectors, cattle ranchers and renegade bands of Indians who have taken to raiding of Mexican settlements. In retaliation, with an isolationist tone, President Macalister has called for a ban on trade with Mexico.

He said the U.S. has provided resources over the years, including help in ending the Apache Wars ten years ago, and received little in return except hostility.

ENJOY THE FINEST MILLICENTS CIGARETTES



Only the FINEST TOBACCO goes into Millicents' Cigarettes making them the MILDEST AND PUREST. 9 out of 10 Doctors and their families SMOKE MILLICENTS. Try a Millicents once and you will SMOKE THEM FOREVER.

A SEARCH FOR ANCIENT BONES

DINOSAUR HUNT CONTINUES.

NEW HANOVER HAILED AS "A GEOLOGICAL WONDERLAND".

Hailing New Hanover as a "Geological Wonderland", amateur paleontologist Deborah McGuinness is in on the hunt, excavating several sites in the state. As fossils pour in from the Grizzlies, McGuinness asserts that an undiscovered species of dinosaur, which she claims could fly, swim and walk, once inhabited the region in the prehistoric ages.

Labeling the elusive creature a Totalisaurus, she has devoted her life's work to unearthing the remains of the ancient animal, despite geologists saying no evidence exists in the established fossil record. Several universities have rejected her work, saying Ms. McGuinness would be better suited to writing fiction than searching for dinosaurs.

ABUNDANCE IS THE DULLEST DESIRE

Dr. CRAWFORDS NERVE LIVER and BRAIN TABLETS

TO INCREASE AND FORTIFY HEALTH

NERVE, LIVER & BRAIN TABLETS

The Plague of Children.

PIN WORMS

All children have worms, which causes pain and issues with the charcter jon. It is an easy remedy to be rid of them.

DR. SIMPKIN'S WORM SYRUP

It removes worms quickly without undue sickness and distress to the child. The appetite is restored and the Liver and Bowels are regulated once again.

Children adore the taste and pleasurable feeling as it works in miracle.

..... ALL DEALERS SELL IT .....

SIMPKINS MEDICAL COMPANY.

Hartford, Connecticut

Hackett Co.

Nasal, Ear and Abscess Syringe



KEEP YOUR LIVER LIVING!

If your Liver Lives, YOU Live
If your Liver Gets Sick, YOU Die

Keep your liver healthy by taking DR. CRAWFORD'S NERVE, LIVER AND BRAIN TABLETS. It Works.

They will initially make you feel sick but that is the poison leaving your system.

For sale from your druggist. Ask for it.

It's a living medicine that is for the special treatment and all-round care of the diseases that affect disturbances of the liver.

ARE YOU EVER DEPRESSED?

A depression of the spirits wears your mood and those around you. Have you ever taken notice how the world appears brighter when your mood is not dour? When you are suffering from nervous disorder, weakness, or lack of energy, it is natural that you be rid of this.

There is only one way to carry poisonous materials from your body, and that is by drinking

AT SODA FOUNTS NATIONWIDE Festa

The refreshing brain-food that refreshes no matter the season.

Gives glucose, health and vigour to young and old.

Settles the stomach and the nerves.

The only healthy beverage that can be taken after spoiling at other eateries

BOBBIN AND PRESSERS SEWING MACHINES

Every Woman should OWN and OPERATE a Sewing Machine and Bobbin & Pressers is the BEST QUALITY in production to date.

" IT WILL "

Hem, Braid, Bind, Seam, Fell, Ruffle, Tuck, Gather or Hemstitch.

ASK FOR IT BY NAME.

NADGER & SONS



MARBLES

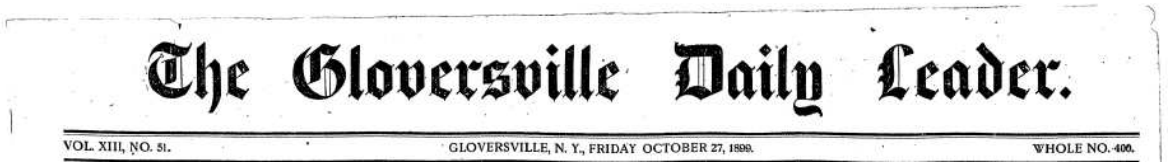
Every young boy's dream.

Nine fancy colors, the finest set of agate marbles, mixed with real rainbows.

Source: https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

Layout wise, the newspaper in RDR2 has plenty of similarities. The header, which has the name of the newspaper, the number and volume is alike. Following is a comparison from *The Gloversville Daily Leader*, another New York newspaper that was published in 1899:

Image 16 - *The Gloversville Daily Leader*.


The Gloversville Daily Leader.

VOL. XIII, NO. 51. GLOVERSVILLE, N. Y., FRIDAY OCTOBER 27, 1899. WHOLE NO. 400.

Source: https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=tdl18991027-01&e=------189-en-20--1--txt-txIN-1899+newspaper---------

Image 17 - *Saint Denis Times Tribune* n.51.


Lanik Electric Co. FUEL & SUPPLY. LANIK ELECTRICAL CO., SAINT DENIS.

Saint Denis Times Tribune

READ THE SAINT DENIS TIMES TRIBUNE AND KEEP POSTED. ONE DOLLAR PER ANNUM.

1899— VOLUME LXVII. NO 51. SHINING THE TRUTH AND LIGHT SINCE 1832

Source: https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

Moreover, issues were brought alongside advertising, and RDR2 also has clearly been inspired by actual nineteenth century advertising, and some of the products "advertised" in RDR2 are actually purchasable in the game, e.g. the cocaine gum, hair pomade, kentucky bourbon, horse salve, hair tonic:

Image 18 - Side to side comparison (left *The Gloversville Daily Leader*; right: *Saint Denis Times Tribune* n.51)



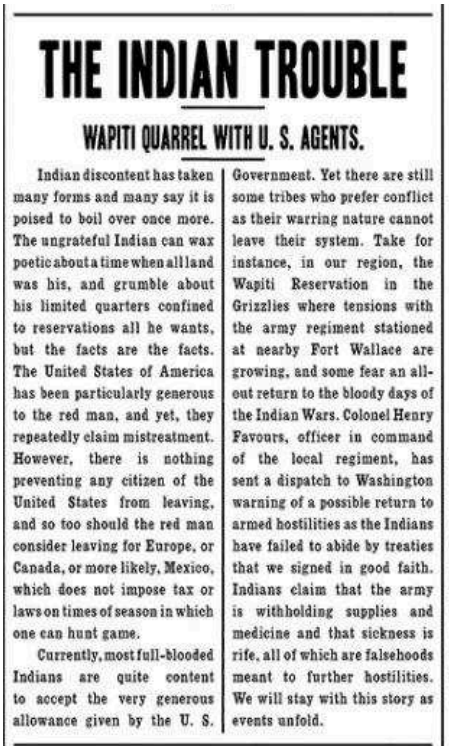
Source: https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=tdl18991027-01.1.5&e=------189-en-20--1--txt-txIN-1899+newspaper--------- ; https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

In regard to the content of the newspapers, RDR2 plays around with a distinct variety: crime reports, which are given a greater emphasis on the top of the page, are illustrated and related to Van Der Linde gang; international news, using real events but with fictitious names; scientific discoveries (at times they are ads disguised as news); civil unrest; social commentary (e.g. 'the woman problem' or eugenics); economy, on the effects of industrialization; and military propaganda. All this comes to show that developers tried to replicate not only the format (diverse news, advertisements, headlines, and so on), but it was also an attempt to make the story world feel alive, by addressing events that go beyond the immediate story. Overall, in comparison to nineteenth century newspapers, RDR2's intermedial references are aesthetically similar, their topics were varied and alike in discourse of what was being said at that time.

Still, one may ask, what is the purpose of adding three kinds of newspapers? How does it add to the narrative? It is worth reminding that newspapers are (historical) registers, and as a player is expected to play hours and hours, the in-game newspapers might serve as an account of some of the major and minor events in the narrative. Moreover, as the player and Arthur Morgan have a point of view in said events, it is interesting to see other ways of looking at the same thing. Hence, the press coverage on the robberies, bloodshed and violence that the gang leaves behind is reported through a different discourse than that of the main character. The journalistic coverage does not sympathize with Arthur and his affiliation with crime, rather they denounce the killing, and they commend law enforcement's efforts at capturing the notorious gang. Therefore, the newspapers add another narrative voice. Consequently, Arthur and the player are confronted by how other people see them and their actions, either in a positive or negative light.

For instance, in chapter four, titled 'Saint Denis', Arthur comes across Rain Falls, a native american chief, who recruits his services to help him defend the Wapiti Reservation from oil companies and the United States Army persecution of their people and land. Arthur hears from the chief that the government and private companies have been harassing their community, imposing treaties that are being constantly violated. He also learns that the United States Army is withholding medicine that is essential to the well being of the community. Through this storyline, Arthur can see the dilemma of indigenous people, how they stand their ground and resist the state's constant persecution. After seeing the reality faced by Rain Falls' community, he then embraces their cause and helps the chief in any way he can, while also prioritizing his gang's needs. However, as it was mentioned previously, the newspapers in RDR2 serve as another point of view from the same event. The newspapers are a voice of a dominant pro-profit discourse and defend specific interests. Thus, the press in RDR2 makes sure to ally themselves against the native american resistance. Here is how RDR2 portrays the press' coverage of said events:

Image 19 - *New Hanover Gazette* nº 32.



THE INDIAN TROUBLE

WAPITI QUARREL WITH U. S. AGENTS.

Indian discontent has taken many forms and many say it is poised to boil over once more. The ungrateful Indian can wax poetic about a time when all land was his, and grumble about his limited quarters confined to reservations all he wants, but the facts are the facts. The United States of America has been particularly generous to the red man, and yet, they repeatedly claim mistreatment. However, there is nothing preventing any citizen of the United States from leaving, and so too should the red man consider leaving for Europe, or Canada, or more likely, Mexico, which does not impose tax or laws on times of season in which one can hunt game.

Currently, most full-blooded Indians are quite content to accept the very generous allowance given by the U. S. Government. Yet there are still some tribes who prefer conflict as their warring nature cannot leave their system. Take for instance, in our region, the Wapiti Reservation in the Grizzlies where tensions with the army regiment stationed at nearby Fort Wallace are growing, and some fear an all-out return to the bloody days of the Indian Wars. Colonel Henry Favours, officer in command of the local regiment, has sent a dispatch to Washington warning of a possible return to armed hostilities as the Indians have failed to abide by treaties that we signed in good faith. Indians claim that the army is withholding supplies and medicine and that sickness is rife, all of which are falsehoods meant to further hostilities. We will stay with this story as events unfold.

16

Source: https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

Another function of the RDR2's newspapers is recognition. The Van der Linde gang embodies the discourse of being righteous, living free and being proud of what they do (despite the harm they cause). The crimes and acts they commit are justified in their eyes, and having the press putting them at the front page is to them a remarkable achievement, which highlights their efforts and makes them proud of their cause. This can be highlighted by the fact that Arthur keeps a copy of a newspaper from his first robbery in his personal belongings.

RDR2 newspapers also encompass another type of intermedial reference, the individual intermedial reference, which is when a media references a particular work that was

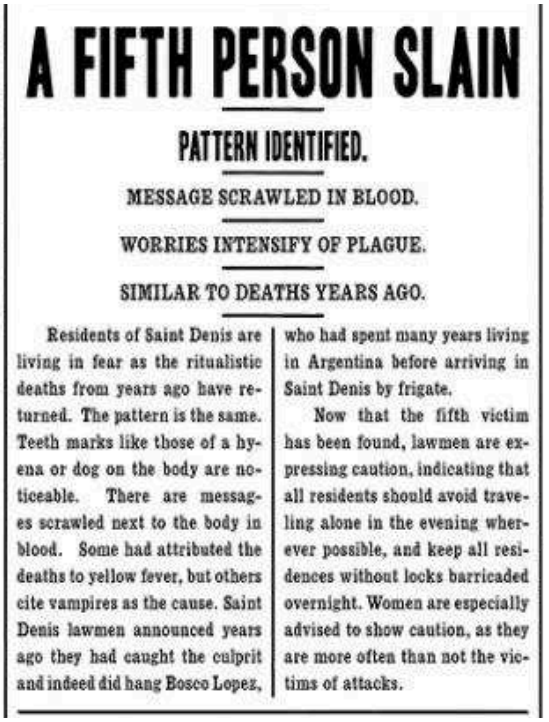
[16] Transcription: "Indian discontent has taken many forms and many say it is poised to boil over once more. The ungrateful Indian can wax poetic about a time when all land was his, and grumble about his limited quarters confined to reservations all he wants, but the facts are the facts. The United States of America has been particularly generous to the red man, and yet, they repeatedly claim mistreatment. However there is nothing preventing any citizen of the United States from leaving, and so too should the red med consider leaving for Europe, or Canada, or more likely, Mexico, which does not impose tax or laws on times of season in which one can hunt game. Currently, most full-blooded Indians are quite content to accept the very generous allowance given by the U.S. Government. Yet there are still some tribes who prefer conflict as their warring nature cannot leave their system. Take for instance, in our region, the Wapiti Reservation in the Grizzlies where tensions with the army regiment stationed nearby Fort Wallace are growing, and some fear an all-out return to the bloody days of the Indian Wars. Colonel Henry Favours, officer in command of the local regiment, has sent a dispatch to Washington warning of possible returns to armed hostilities as the Indians have failed to abide by treaties that were signed in good faith. Indians claim that the army is withholding supplies and medicine and that sickness is rife, all of which are falsehoods meant to further hostilities. We will stay with this story as events unfold."

made in a different medium (Rajewsky, 2005, p. 53). Since the nineteenth century was filled with emblematic works of fiction, and as it was mentioned in section 2.3, RDR2 is constantly referencing and paying homage to iconic westerns, it also does so with literature. In the gothic classic *Dracula*, Bram Stoker uses epistolary method to create suspense, he does so by fragmenting the narrative through different narrators (Mina and Jonathan Harker, Dr. Seward, Van Helsing and Lucy Westenra). Besides them, the author also adds newspaper fragments to the story. He employs them as a way of connecting the events in the narrative through a timeline, in which *The Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Westminster Gazette* are important to the story. Through newspapers, Stoker includes an impersonal voice, different from the other participants' accounts, which are emotionally attached to the events. Here is an example of how the author made this intermedial reference:

> *THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE,* 25 SEPTEMBER
>
> A HAMPSTEAD MYSTERY
>
> The neighborhood of Hampstead is just at present exercised with a series of events which seem to run on lines parallel to those of what was known to the writers of the headlines as 'The Kensington Horror', or 'The stabbing woman', or 'The Woman in Black'. During the past two or three days several cases have occurred of young children straying from home or neglecting to return from their playing on the Heath. In all these cases the children were too young to give any properly intelligible account of themselves, but the consensus of their excuses is that they had been with a 'bloofer lady'. (Stoker, 2003, pp. 188-189)

Now here is how RDR2 referenced this narrative device:

Image 20 - *New Hanover Gazette* n.30.



A FIFTH PERSON SLAIN

PATTERN IDENTIFIED.

MESSAGE SCRAWLED IN BLOOD.

WORRIES INTENSIFY OF PLAGUE.

SIMILAR TO DEATHS YEARS AGO.

Residents of Saint Denis are living in fear as the ritualistic deaths from years ago have returned. The pattern is the same. Teeth marks like those of a hyena or dog on the body are noticeable. There are messages scrawled next to the body in blood. Some had attributed the deaths to yellow fever, but others cite vampires as the cause. Saint Denis lawmen announced years ago they had caught the culprit and indeed did hang Bosco Lopez, who had spent many years living in Argentina before arriving in Saint Denis by frigate.

Now that the fifth victim has been found, lawmen are expressing caution, indicating that all residents should avoid traveling alone in the evening wherever possible, and keep all residences without locks barricaded overnight. Women are especially advised to show caution, as they are more often than not the victims of attacks.

[17]

Source: https://www.tumblr.com/scarfacemarston/640692894432378880/every-newspaper-part-1-long-post

Furthermore, this excerpt also works as a hint, since there is indeed a vampire (by the name of Nosferatu) terrorizing Saint Denis' residents. If the player chooses to uncover the mystery they will, in fact, confront the creature. Thus, this excerpt alone works as evidence of how RDR2 makes an individual intermedial reference to Stoker's *Dracula*. This level of detail demonstrates how RDR2's newspapers are more than just gameplay props.

4.2 Arthur's Journal

Journaling has been a habit of various kinds of people over the centuries, e.g, chroniclers, travellers, pilgrims, creators, prisoners, writers, confessors (Duyfhuizen, 1986, p. 172). Simultaneously, reading other people's personal diaries has also been a recurring

[17] Transcription: "Residents of Saint Denis are living in fear as the ritualistic deaths from years ago have returned. The pattern is the same. Teeth marks like those of a hyena or dog on the body are noticeable. There are messages scrawled next to the body in blood. Some have attributed the death to yellow fever, but others cite vampires as the cause. Saint Denis lawmen announced years ago they had caught the culprit and indeed did hang Bosco Lopez, who had spent many years living in Argentina before arriving in Saint Denis by frigate. Now that the fifth victim has been found, lawmen are expressing caution, indicating that all residents should avoid travelling alone in the evening wherever possible, and keep all residences without locks barricaded overnight. Women are specially advised to show caution, as they are more often than not the victims of the attacks."

phenomenon, especially from well-known figures (e.g. Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Leonardo Da Vinci, Darwin). Before analysing how RDR2 features a journal, we must understand the notion of diary fiction, which is embedded in the making of a fictional character's journal.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, a literary device was starting to be heavily favoured by authors: the epistolary method. This approach was used, most notably, by Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719. However, it only would be around the turn of the century where authors would start using devices such as letters and diaries more often. Yet, why would authors begin to use this literary device? Lorna Martens, in her work *The Diary Novel*, explains the genesis of said method:

> The epistolary novel, with its "writing to the moment" or emphasis on the present, introduced a kind of first-person narrative that did not depend on the notion of the conversion or the retrospective temporality that distinguished both autobiography and picaresque fiction. The epistolary novel was the structural ancestor of the diary novel. It initiated a line of development in narrative technique that the diary novel continued, and its conventions exerted a persistent influence on diary novels. The obvious difference between letters and diaries as we think of them today is that letters are destined for a recipient, whereas diaries are private. Yet one need think only of the "dear diary" convention to realize to what extent intimate diary keeping was influenced by letter writing. (Martens, 1985, p.56)

In light of her explanation, there needs to be a clear distinction to be made, between diary novels and diary fiction. According to Abbott, "The diary novel requires a loose confederation of repeatable elements that accompany the device of the diary; diary fiction requires simply the device itself." (Abbott, 1984, p. 15). Hence, in RDR2, Arthur's journal falls under the diary fiction category, since the narrative is not restrained to the diary format.

Moreover, considering that diary fiction comes from actual personal diaries (Duyfhuizen, 1986), much like how epistolary novels come from letter writing culture, it is worth giving a proper definition of 'diary' that encompasses both real and fictional works:

> Today we think of the diary as a periodically kept, secret, or at least private notebook in which the diarist writes down anything ranging from intimate details or introspective self-assessments to descriptions of the events of his day, random observations or apergus, outbursts of anger, aphorisms, drafts for poems, or even quotations. (Martens, 1985, p. 3)

It is important to note that Arthur's diary stands in the same manner as the newspapers in the game, they are not actual diaries, rather they evoke the diary fiction format and adapt it to the game. That being said, how does said diary work? Do players manually type? Or does

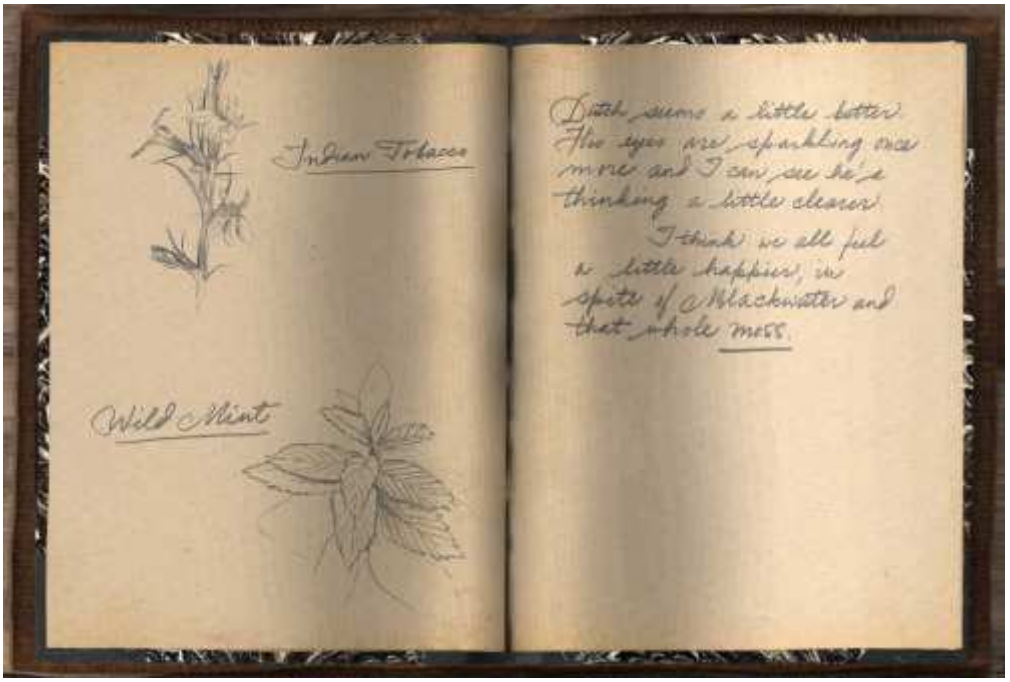
the player have an over-the-shoulder look at what is being written? Is it just prose, or are there other elements as well?

First of all, it is not entirely up to the player choosing the moments that Arthur writes in his journal. Since RDR2 is a videogame, it has its own mechanics for recording a diary entry. The "writing" in the game is automatic. In other words, the game does all the journaling. As the story develops and players venture on the map and discover new events, people, and locations, the game notifies the player that a new entry has been made by Arthur. Secondly, Arthur's journal has three ways of registering an entry, in two of them the player is not restricted, but the other is limited in certain ways.

These restrictions are related to player agency, on whether they have the ability to choose what to do: ignore the notification that a new diary entry has been made or to look at the diary immediately. Whereas the obligatory part of the diary the player is limited, with the player being unable to move the character, change camera angle and perform any action. Being cut-scenes, in which Arthur narrates small fragments of the diary entry, the player has to sit through Arthur's remarks. Hence, instead of playing, players become spectators. These specific moments where the player has to sit through are not long, since the game chooses specific passages from the journal, and they usually come at the beginning of a chapter. For instance, during the first chapter (Camp Colter), the first entry has a total of four pages, which tell the circumstances that led the Van der Linde gang to be in the mountains, but only the following is narrated: "We have been running for weeks. [...] We found shelter and have been resting here in some old abandoned mining town while we wait the thaw. [...] Hardly the spring I had been hoping for." (Rockstar Games, 2018). This is a pattern that is repeated throughout the whole game, and it has two functions: it ties the end of one chapter to the new, and it sets how Arthur is feeling, as a new phase begins.

Specifying a little further, the non-restrictive functions of the diary can be accrued to a compendium for the fauna and flora of the game (as well as sketches and drawings of other characters and surroundings) and as regular diary. Regular, here, is used in the sense of the main purpose of a diary (while not being an actual diary per se), which is an object that is used for conveying thoughts, emotions, narrating or reflecting on certain events.

Image 21 - Chapter 2 journal entry



Source:https://reddeadreference.tumblr.com/JournalA

Having that in mind, a diary (and the epistolary) method can play specific roles as a storytelling strategy, as Abbott highlights, they can have a memetic, a thematic and a temporal function (Abbott, 1984, p. 18). Much like the last section, which discussed how newspapers were used as a way to access the daily routine of readers at that time, diaries also added a layer of realism to a story and dimension to the character's relationship with himself, other characters, the world and events around him. Through these mundane things, authors could tap into most people's way of communication. However, if newspapers were impersonal, diaries are, supposedly, the most personal writing. This can be emphasized by the materiality and production method of each object: a diary features a person's unique handwriting, while newspapers have standardized fonts.

Considering the epistolary method and diary device, they are both said to be private and intimate, nevertheless, they are not personal in the same manner: a letter has a presumed reader, and this personal aspect also plays a part in a diary's authenticity. As Martens argues:

> The lack of a fictive reader suggests uninhibited self-expression, while the periodic time scheme makes possible an immediate and vivid presentation of the narrator's sentiments. But the same periodic time scheme prevents the diarist from predicting the future and thus also makes it exceptionally easy for an author to present a deluded or "unreliable" narrator-one whose insights are undermined by a dissenting second voice, such as the voice of the implied author, or the reader's common sense, or of dramatic irony in the plot. (Martens, 1985, p. 37)

In the way communication works, the information that will be transmitted is heavily influenced by the presence of a reader or listener. In real life, as well as in fiction, or, in our case, with Arthur's communication. Even though he is one of the oldest members of the gang, he does not express all he is feeling to those closest to him, and the closest thing to a listener, which is the player, only exists outside the realm of the game. That being said, the players' influence is not the same as a supposed reader/listener, and this should be taken into consideration. His journal is not only a device in which he can write down his feelings and thoughts, but in doing so he ultimately ends up painting a portrait of himself, its writer, who, much like Dorian Gray's, is hidden, only to be seen by us, the voyeurs (Duyfhuizen, 1986). To a certain extent, similarly to Oscar Wilde's novel, where the sins of Dorian Gray are materialized in a painting, Arthur's sins are materialized in the deterioration of his health, marked by a tuberculosis diagnosis. So, instead of an effigy, which showcases the perversion of his inner self, Arthur's journal is a written testament of his quest of redemption and search for identity and purpose.

However, considering that diaries usually recount events and reflect through a character point of view what happened, in RDR2, the player lives through almost every event that is registered in the diary[18]. And the reflections written on it usually come in the aftermath of hectic moments, such as robberies, confrontations (with the law or rivals) or missions. Therefore, since the player is living through these events, there are two perceptions at play: the players and Arthur's in his diary. Abbott emphasises on this possible division that comes in the retelling of events:

> Gérard Genette, in his discussion of "narration intercalée," speaks of the hero's possible division into two heroes, the one narrated and the other narrating [..] Thus, as we read, we are made simultaneously aware of two events, the event recorded and the event of recording. [...] The drama in this event is a function of the tensions in the mind that produces it—crises of honesty, deception, passion, as that mind reflects not only on itself (the hero in the recorded event) but on everyone and everything else. (Abbott, 1984, pp. 29-30)

Arthur's diary showcases his character beyond the action and conflict, it shows him the quietude of his meditation upon his actions. How, despite not verbalizing it, he is constantly judging himself, his actions and the gang's. Also, it allows us, the players, to not forget and be swayed by manipulation of characters, mainly Dutch.

[18] Once the player is acquainted with the diary in chapter one, they have access to what Arthur was doing prior to the Blackwater fiasco, which had them fleeing the law to the mountains.

On top of that, it is worth mentioning certain aspects that are not necessarily explicit, what kind of diarist is Arthur?

In the first paragraph of this section a few categories were laid out (chronicles, travellers, writers, prisoners, etc), but one stands out while reading RDR2's diary: confessor.

> The diary, moreover, enjoyed a distinct additional advantage over the confessional in that it established a record. It was both a written confession of sins before God and a mirror in which the confessor could review for himself those sins combined with all of his other deeds and thoughts. In his diary, the Puritan's life became inescapable. Thus, it allowed the communicant to determine the true character of his spiritual—in other words, his essential—existence. (Abbott, 1984, p.85)

Ultimately, Arthur's quest in RDR2 is to redeem himself from his wrongdoings, after he realizes he is terminally ill. Upon receiving his diagnosis, his diary becomes the place where he writes his pursuit of salvation. All the while, navigating a fragmented perception of himself and his values. Once he realizes that the robin hood complex that his mentor, Dutch Van der Linde, ingrained in his mind is not what the gang is following, the perception he has of himself is shattered. Such rupture from his core values is enough to fracture Arthur's identity, as he remarks in his journal: "I feel like I don't know nothing anymore. That whole life of certainties over. My whole code that I lived and killed by. Was it true? Or was there a bigger truth I was to dumb to ever see?" (Rockstar, 2018). Of course, this remark is not only about how Dutch's idealism turned to a harsh realism in Arthur's mind, but it is also dialogues about *fin de siècle* anxieties at the end of the nineteenth century:

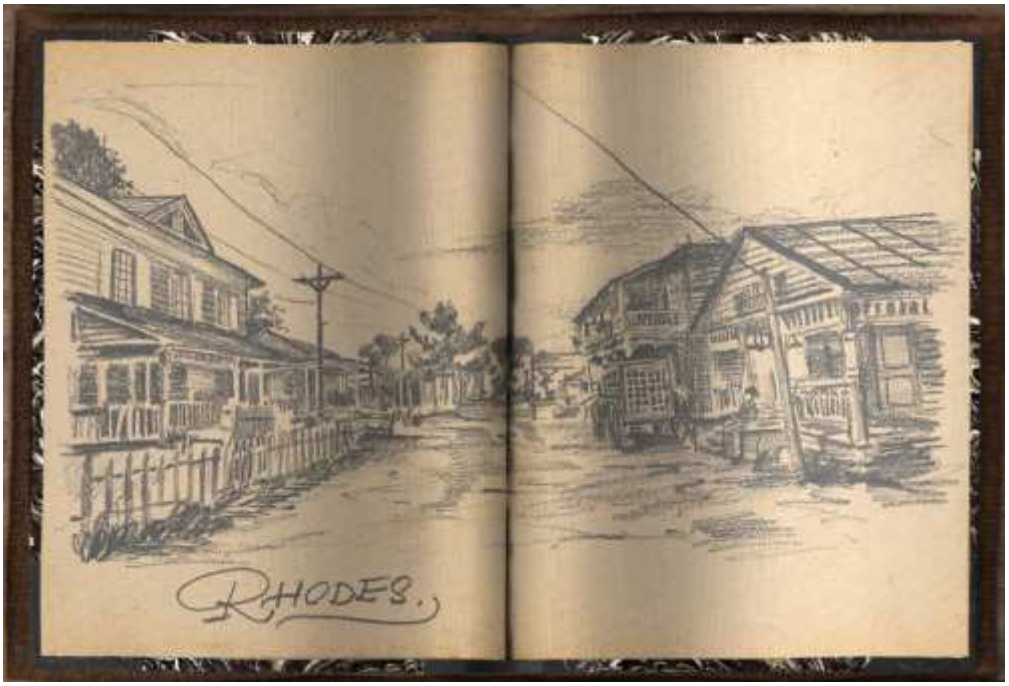
> The term 'fin de siècle' signifies themes of cultural decline. [...] The late Victorians were intensely aware of themselves as being modern, and yet a sense permeated culture that this modernity, while it had delivered improvements in standards of living, had also brought about forms of misery and deprivation worse even than those seen in the past; as witnessed, for example, in impoverished areas of London – at the time the most modern metropolis on the globe. The fin de siècle marked a period of transition from old to new, without the assurance that the future would bring continued enlightenment and improvement. (Margree, Randall, 2012, p. 217)

This comes to show that Arthur's identity is not just threatened by the ongoing conflict in the gang, but is also unsettled by the reality of the world around him: rapid growth, bustling urban centers, social rules and an indefinite future. He constantly remarks his revulsion of said environments, stating that "I cannot decide which I like less - the swamps or the city. Both are full off parasites, reptiles and slimes, but the swamp's prettier [...] We're a long way east of land we know and far from real open country" (Rockstar, 2018).

This theme of nostalgia is almost ubiquitous to the western genre, the yearning for a "simpler time" is a message that, regardless of the decade of production, is constantly being referred to. Usually, this sentimentality is marked by different discourses, most notably, regarding gender, uplifting a hegemonic view. Additionally, the *fin de siècle* also works as a complementary for the nineteenth century landscape of game, and resonates with much of what it was felt at that time.

In regard to Abbott's categories, another function of RDR2's diary is thematic, which highlights the fact that diaries are restrained to a single voice, its writer's. Where much like the epistolary method, diaries can be "the most direct material evidence for the inner life of their writers that exist" (Watt, 1959, p. 191), through which we hear a character's thoughts from the very story we are watching. Furthermore, a function that is embedded in journaling is temporality. There can be a sentiment of immediacy, which comes from the writer recording in a diary an event that has just occurred or is fresh in their memory; hence, what is being narrated diminishes the temporal interval of the event happening and the recording of it (Abbott, 1984). In other words, diaries and the epistolary method are able to "pass for the spontaneous transcription of the subjective reactions of the protagonists to the events as they occur" (Watt, 1959, p. 192). However, these recordings only happen if someone plays the game, otherwise, the story does not go forward, unless the player actively does the missions. Considering intermediality theory, the spatio-temporal modality of diary fiction is static, once it is written, it cannot be changed, in other forms of diary fiction (e.g. *Dracula*) the journal entries do not depend on the reader. Differently, the way Arthur's diary is constructed is entirely up for the player to curate it over a playthrough; there is no ubiquitous sequence of entries, as they are registered according to a players' movement and actions.

Image 22 - Sketch of the city of Rhodes in Arthur's Journal



Source: https://reddeadreference.tumblr.com/post/679518650635599872/journal-chapter-3-clemens-point

Consequently, journaling works as a gameplay mechanic, a narrative element and an intermedial reference, while also adding to character development and as a token for the player to remember what they did in the game, what their choices amounted to and what crossed their path.

5. CONCLUSION.

In many ways, RDR2 is a complex game, which involves storytelling, game design, acting, art and more. Given that, a game this big may have its subtleties overshadowed by the sheer number of elements that it has. Then, the goal of this thesis was to investigate some of these intricacies, more specifically, the newspapers and the journal found in RDR2, through the lens of intermedial studies. Therefore, the goal was to discuss how seemingly small items have an important role in a game's diegesis. In order to achieve this objective, some intermedial concepts were applied, such as Lars Elleström's (2021) notions of media products, modalities and mediation. With the addition of other authors, like Rajewsky (2005), Clüver (2011), Bruhn (2016) and Neitzel (2015).

For the corpus of this research, the first analysis of the in-game newspapers utilized four issues from all three newspapers, respectively, *Blackwater Ledger* n.62, *New Hanover Gazette* n.30 and 32 and *Saint Denis Times Tribune* n.52. In order to compare them to nineteenth century media, *The Evening World*, *The Mount Morris Enterprise* and *The Gloversville Daily Leader* were analyzed. The comparison shows that there are plenty of similarities between the two media forms (in-game newspapers and real life nineteenth century newspapers). Both of them featured numerous advertisements and some illustrations, they both had a similar layout of headline, main stories and other minor news segments. Contentwise the game's version proved to be diverse, ranging from certain topics which reverberated to what was published at that time, and the discourse employed by the in-game newspapers were in line with how some news were being reported in that period. In terms of intermedial relations, RDR2's newspapers had situations of intermedial references and media combination (Rajewsky, 2005, pp. 51-52). The media combination occurrence was found when the game took the written media format and incorporated it in the game. Moreover, the intermedial reference comes from the choice of adding newspapers to a videogame, and adopting its conventions, while being limited by its own format. Another particular case of intermedial reference was highlighted, as the game made a specific reference to a narrative device (newspaper clippings) used by Stoker's Dracula (2003).

Further, the journal analysis used excerpts and images from chapters one, two, three, four and six from the game. The intermedial analysis here investigated some of the borrowings of the diary fiction format and its adaptations to RDR2's gameplay. Since journals are personal items, the analysis went over how it was used to showcase its writer's character.

It was possible to see, through the journal, how the events of the game were being described and comprehended by the main character, and through it we could perceive their innermost thoughts and feelings. Hence, understanding their traits through a register that was curated over a playthrough. In regard to the role they each played for the western genre, they both played to the diegesis of the game, by materializing into media formats that were used in the nineteenth century.

In sum, this study showcases how the role played by textual media in this complex game should not be overseen, and how these elements can be investigated through intermedial studies' perspective. As for the limitations of this work, there are many other particular objects found in RDR2 that can be also analyzed, which can also be targeted in future intermedial studies. Moreover, while this thesis has a comparative aspect imbued in it, the chosen objects were fairly selective and small, further research could emphasize a larger variety of newspapers and journals.

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