

# Quick Draws, Duels, and Tombstones:

## Exploring the Intermediality of *Red Dead Redemption 2* and the Ludic Western

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## Introduction

The Western is, perhaps, one of the most iconic genres. It is difficult to imagine anyone who wouldn't be able to identify the Western on iconography alone. Images of cowboy hats, six-shooters, boots with spurs, dingy saloons, and dusty towns with tumbleweeds all immediately evoke thoughts of frontier America.

At the height of its popularity, the Western film was the single-most produced type of film, in Hollywood (Lusted, 2003a). While it has not reached the same levels of popularity, the Western is still ingrained in the public consciousness, sometimes topping the charts again. Such as with Quentin Tarantino's 2012 film *Django Unchained*, a critical and financial success.

Then, in the last six months, the Western has had perhaps its biggest resurgence in popularity since the Golden Age of Hollywood. As Rockstar Entertainment's video game *Red Dead Redemption 2* released. Its launch was marked by, among other things, having the *biggest opening weekend in the history of entertainment*, grossing more in its launch weekend than *any video game, film, book, or album* yet released (Hassan, 2018). Then, in December 2018, amateur rapper Lil Nas X released hip hop-country song *Old Town Road* onto YouTube. In the video, Lil Nas X raps about "Cowboy hats from Gucci" to a country-fused beat, while accompanying footage of *Red Dead Redemption 2* plays. This "modern Western song", the work of a teenaged amateur rapper, influenced by the recently released game, would become a surprise hit and *break the record for most streams in a single week* (Kim, 2019).

This massive renewed interest in the Western inspired me to examine *Red Dead Redemption 2*, and the "video game Western" (henceforth ludic Western). I was specifically interested in how *Red Dead Redemption 2*, as ludic Western, characterizes an old genre in a relatively new medium. And how these both share and differ from the rich film history of the Western. Therefore, my thesis statement is:

*To explore the genre of the "ludic Western" and its intermediality regarding the Western film genre. To do this, I will analyze several components of Red Dead Redemption 2 via a formal game analysis, and thereafter assess the intermediality of these elements via the Ludophile Intermedial Framework. Finally, the findings of these will be used to discuss the intermediality of Red Dead Redemption 2, and their implications for the "ludic Western" genre.*

The paper is structured in three distinct sections: Methodology, Analyses, and Discussion. Each section builds upon information presented in the prior to form a conclusion, with the goal of describing *Red Dead Redemption 2*'s intermediality, and its implications for the ludic Western.

## Presentation of Red Dead Redemption 2

Red Dead Redemption 2 is a video game developed by Rockstar Games, released for the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One consoles on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The game is primarily set in 1899, United States. The player controls Arthur Morgan, a senior member of the Van Der Linde outlaw gang, on the run from the law after a robbery gone awry. The game is open-world, spanning several fictional states and cities that represent sections of the real US (such as the West, South, North and Midwest). The game can be played in either first- or third person perspective.

The game is highly similar to Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto* franchise in several aspects. The player, is for the most part, free to do as they please, such as progressing the critical path (by completing main missions), completing secondary missions (called "stranger missions"), or partaking in tertiary activities such as hunting, fishing, gambling, drinking, chasing bounties, visiting a cinema or theater, shopping, robbing, doing chores, finding collectables, and more.

Central to the game is shooting and horse-riding. Most conflicts are solved by shooting, beating or cutting enemies with a variety of era-appropriate weaponry. Traversing the world is most often done on horseback. The player can acquire different horses and bond with them over time.

The game's main narrative takes place across six large chapters and a 2-part epilogue. At the core of the story is the increasing civilizing of the West, and Arthur Morgan's attempts at reconciling his unethical behavior with his conscience. And while doing this, trying to manage the extreme tensions in the gang, along with growing paranoia and delusions of the gang leader, Dutch. Different conflicts are in focus throughout the story, such as a child kidnapping, a town with two feuding families, and the plights of Native Americans. Concurrent with these sub-stories, the law enforcement pressure on the gang increases as more and more members die. Ultimately, Arthur Morgan's story ends in chapter 6 where, depending on player actions, he finds his redemption or dies as a self-admitted wicked person. The two-part epilogue picks up years later (in 1907) and follows fellow ex-gang member and *Red Dead Redemption 1* protagonist John Marston, as he both seeks to legitimize himself as a law-abiding farmer, please his increasingly frustrated wife, and avenge his fallen comrades.

## Methodology, theory, and genre

To analyze and evaluate the *Red Dead Redemption 2*'s (henceforth also RDR2) intermedial properties between it and the film Western, two different methods for analysis will be used. First, to closely examine the details and nuances of the video game mechanics, a formal game analysis (developed by Lankoski & Bjork) will be conducted on certain game mechanics. After the analysis, the findings will be used in conjunction with an analysis through Ida Jørgensen's ludophile intermedial framework (2015). Her framework is designed for analysis of the relationships between different modalities and dimensions of media products across media.

### Intermediality

Before addressing the methodology of this paper, a brief aside on the concept of intermediality and its usage in this context will be presented, as it is somewhat a pre-requisite to understanding Jørgensen's framework. The notion of intermediality (or "interarts studies") as a perspective from which to analyze media products has been gaining traction around the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Arvidson, Askander, Bruhn, & Führer, 2016). Intermediality is not rooted in one specific text or notion. Instead, it can broadly be viewed as a development of interdisciplinary studies. Questions of intermediality have long been considered in different fields, such as film studies regarding the adaptation of literary sources to a new medium, but it is only somewhat recently these questions have manifested themselves in an exclusive approach to arts- and media studies (Arvidson et al., 2016).

Intermediality is exclusive from other cross-media approaches such as transmedial relation, multimedia discourse and mixed-media discourse. Where these perspectives process transposition, juxtaposition and combination respectively, the process of intermediality is one of union/fusion between modalities of media (Clüver, 2016). In other words, intermediality, as the name implies, regards modes' persistence or adaptations across (inter) media, and how these media interact with each other.

SCHEMA OF WORD-IMAGE RELATIONS	transmedial relation [relation transmédiALE]	multimedia discourse [discours multimédiaL]	mixed-media discourse [discours mixte]	intermedial discourse [discours synchrétique]
distinctiveness [séparabilité]	+	+	+	–
coherence/self-sufficiency	+	+	–	–
polytextuality	+	–	–	–
simultaneous production	–	–	+	+
simultaneous reception	–	+	+	+
process	transposition	juxtaposition	combination	union/fusion
schematized text-image relation	text > image image > text	image   text	image + texte	i t m e a x g t e
examples	ekphrasis art criticism photonovel	emblem illustrated book painting & title	poster comic strip postage stamp	typography calligramme concrete poetry

Figure 1, Schema of word-image relations across transmedia, multimedia, mixed-media and intermedia by Claus Clüver (2016: 26), based partially on Leo Hoek's observations

Intermediality as an approach for analysis is malleable. How one approaches the intermedial aspects of a text (or a genre) is contextual and based on the objective of the study. This allows for the development and use of different intermedial frameworks such as Jørgensen's Ludophile Intermedial Framework (which will be detailed in the methodology). Intermediality as a term throughout the paper (and the thesis statement), will be used to describe the "union/fusion" of modalities across media. Though it could be beneficial, there will be no explicit quantification of intermedial properties or "degrees of intermediality". Each case thereof is highly individual, and nuances would be lost when attempting to quantify this. Therefore, the paper is highly qualitative and will (only) deeply analyze three different gameplay components of *Red Dead Redemption 2*. In replacement of a general quantification, each proposed case of intermediality will be analyzed qualitatively. However, in the discussion, examples from other video games will be alluded to. It should be noted these are *not* based on deep analysis and will only be treated in a broad and somewhat generalizing manner.

### Methodology – Formal game analysis

Due to the formal game analysis' in-depth nature, it is advisable to have as specific a focus as possible. Analyzing a game as large and deep as the entirety of RDR2 is entirely unfeasible for a paper of this length. Therefore, a few specific mechanics of the game have been chosen for analysis. They have been chosen based on their perceived relation to the Western and potential for aiding in answering the thesis statement. They are **Dead Eye**, **duels**, and **gravesite collectables**.

The choice of these three elements is not meant to imply that they are the only subjects in RDR2 that would be fitting for intermedial analysis regarding Western films. Other elements could equally apply and this will briefly be discussed later in the paper.

Lankoski and Bjork's formal game analysis is modeled after formal analysis tools of many different disciplines, such as art criticism, archeology, and literature- and film analysis. It is presented as a fundamental or underlying method of analysis that lends itself well to further analyses (Lankoski, Björk, & Stirling, 2015). Formal game analyses can furthermore be used in a wide variety of contexts and studies.

The formal game analysis is conducted by closely examining the "primitives" of a game – these are the "basic types of building blocks of games". Primitives consist of different categories: Components, actions, and goals (with each having their own sub-categories). Conducting a formal game analysis is a matter of discriminating primitives and describing them completely (Lankoski et al., 2015). For the three analyses, most elements Lankoski & Björk mentioned will be touched upon. This includes: Agents, components, component actions and goals. Some primitives will be excluded from analysis due to perceived irrelevance to the intermedial analysis. Their exclusion will briefly be mentioned during the analysis.

The quality of a formal analysis is based on its reliability and validity – or how consistently and accurately other researchers identify the same properties of the primitives as the analysis found. Ideally, a researcher ensures this through verification. That was not feasible for this paper, so the reliability and validity of the analysis cannot be asserted conclusively.

### Methodology – A Ludophile Intermedial Framework

After the formal game analyses have been conducted, the findings will be examined with Jørgensen's Ludophile Intermedial Framework. This framework is based on both Elleström's intermedial framework and Grabarczyk and Aarseth's "meta-ontology of games". Elleström's framework serves as the base of the new framework while the addition of Grabarczyk and Aarseth's meta-ontology adds a ludic dimension.

Dimension	Modality	Description
Basic	Structural	The structural elements of a media-product, their function, operation and organization
	Material	Latent material interface of the media-product
	Semiotic	The ways the media-products presents itself as meaningful
	Mental	The ways in which all other basic aspects are perceived and cognitively processed
Qualified		How a group of media-products are qualified as one distinct medium
Technical		The technical object(s) that realize(s) the basic aspect of the media-product

*Figure 2, A Ludophile Intermedial Framework (from Jørgensen, 2018, p.6)*

The concept of dimensions and their modalities is taken from Lars Elleström's intermedial framework which distinguished between three dimensions (basic, qualified, and technical) and four modalities of the basic dimension (material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic) (Elleström, 2010). Jørgensen's framework deviates from Elleström's by going beyond the sensorial modality, with Grabarczyk and Aarseth's notion of "mental layer", which regards the perception and cognitive processing of a media object by the receiver. Likewise, the structural modality is a modification of Elleström's spatiotemporal modality to include Grabarczyk and Aarseth's notion of "code mechanics" and "economics" in addition to time and space (Jørgensen, 2018).

The formal game analyses' function in the study is to provide extensive and detailed empirical data to facilitate analysis with Jørgensen's framework. It can specifically provide information to aid in the analysis of the technical dimension, along with the structural-, material-, and semiotic modalities. The formal game analyses (at least how they are handled in this paper) cannot be used to make determinations regarding the qualified dimension or the mental modality, as these rely on data that goes beyond the formal analysis. The analysis' structure will follow Jørgensen's own example case of *FRAMED* (2018, p. 7-9).



## Defining genre

A casual or intuitive approach to genre is acceptable in most circumstances, but when a situation requires an analytical or precise perspective these approaches may in the act exclusionary or limiting to research.

This is a subject on which there is often “considerable theoretical disagreement” (Chandler, 2014: 1). Perspectives on genre range from being focused on the definitional, prototypical, familial, being focused on reader-orientation, and even to Marxist perspectives revolving around genres as reproductions of dominant ideology (Chandler, 2014).

Which perspective one takes is often based on what one needs to study. For this paper, the epistemology of genre is not close the subject matter. It is determined that forming a relevant characterization of the Western is best done by examining academic literature that specifically explore the Western. Thus, a framework for defining or characterizing genre will not be used, nor will a specific approach to genre. Certain characteristics of the Western genre will be specifically highlighted mostly because of their perceived relation to gameplay elements in RDR2. Therefore, the characterization of the Western genre should *not* be considered a complete definition. Instead, it is to be viewed as a fragmentation of a large body, based on relevance to the thesis.

## What makes a western?

The simple approach of defining a genre per its iconography or listing “general characteristics” is likely one of the more common methods of classifying a film as a Western or not. Does it have cowboys? Does it take place in Frontier America? While this approach is likely sufficient for a casual approach to film classification, it does present its own issues. As Gledhill put it: “To take a genre such as the 'western', analyze it, and list its principal characteristics, is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films which are 'westerns'. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the 'principal characteristics' which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated.” (Gledhill, 1985: 39, via Chandler, 2014: 2).

There is a general agreement that, at the core of the Western, lies the myth (myth is here used in a Barthesian sense) (Wright, 1977). The West has, historically, been embroiled in different kinds of myths, even during its existence. The most prominent possibly being Manifest Destiny, the belief that white European settlers were divinely ordained by their Christian god to take the lands from the indigenous people (by peace- or forceful means) (Wright, 1977). Other prevalent myths perpetuated by Western films are those of the “Wild West”, “civilization against freedom”, and individuality (Lusted, 2003b). In reality, the West was relatively peaceful and absolutely *not* free for the non-white or non-male populaces. These myths have become central to Western stories for over a century now. Some works glorify and seek to perpetuate these (mostly the Golden Age of Hollywood films), whilst others, like the revisionist Westerns, examine the myths critically.

Another characteristic is the myth or archetype of “the Westerner” or “mysterious gunslinger”. The Westerner is rooted in the myth-building by way of folk tales and -songs of larger-than-life Western persons such as Billy the Kid and Jesse James (Mitchell, 1996). The westerner is often a gruff, mysterious, masculine, stone cold in demeanor, and without moral dilemmas. He has extreme quick draw abilities, often being able to kill several opponents before they can clear leather, and even when facing difficulties, is rarely outright intimidated (Coyne, 1998). The portrayal of the archetype depends highly on the sub-genre. Spaghetti Westerns, for example, would often have the Westerner be pragmatic, sometimes bordering on malicious, where Golden Age era films would have the Westerner be morally upstanding (Mitchell, 1996). Revisionist Westerns such as Clint Eastwood’s (as of yet) final, *Unforgiven* (1992), a revisionist Western which subverts the mythic archetype by contrasting the “legendary and mysterious outlaw” with the mundane reality (Cloutier, 2012).

The importance of the Westerner for the analysis is his skill with guns. The Westerner drawing his gun and killing enemies swiftly is a trope of many (but far from all) Western films, comparable to the Samurai drawing his sword. Samurai and Western films are somewhat related. Legendary Western film director Sam Peckinpah, once commented “*I’d like to be able to make a Western like Kurosawa makes Westerns*” (Winkler, 1985: 535). This purview is similar to the notion that Westerns don’t even have to take place in the American West. *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) is a common example of a Western that, in spite of severe differences from “typical” Westerns, is still considered a Western by many scholars (Gordon, 1978). Though not all scholars agree with this classification for the film (Altman, 1984).

Violence is also a natural attribute of the Western film. For example, conflicts often being solved by a duel. Film scholar Philip French noted, contrary to comparable violent genres (such as the Gangster film), the Western often emphasizes the passing of a life. As French writes: “Good or bad, a Westerner is entitled to a Christian burial and his passing is marked. That life may be easily taken does not mean that it is cheap and of no significance.” (French, 2005: 74) (“A Westerner” here is not to be confused with “The Westerner” archetype). This importance is highlighted by the number of Westerns that end at a gravesite. Such as *True Grit* (2008), *High Plains Drifter* (1973), and *Unforgiven* (1992).

The Western is built upon several myths of life in frontier America, and the people therein. Surrounding these myths are themes of violence, religion, freedom, and masculinity. And depicting these themes are icons, and tropes of confident men who can walk the talk, have formidable skills with the revolver, are not afraid to resolve issues with an invitation to a duel, yet also treat death with a certain significance.

Additional specific aspects of Westerns will be brought up in the analyses (such as the art-style of the Spaghetti Western).

## Analyses

### Component analyses of Red Dead Redemption 2 mechanics

Red Dead Redemption 2 is an expansive and detailed game. This does not make a formal analysis of gameplay impossible, but it does place responsibility on the researcher to limit and specify exactly which segments of the game are up for analysis. If components are “game design atoms” (Brathwaite and Schreiber, via Lankoski et al., 2015: 25), RDR2 could be considered a universe.

The first mechanic subject for analysis is the Dead Eye system.

### Dead Eye system

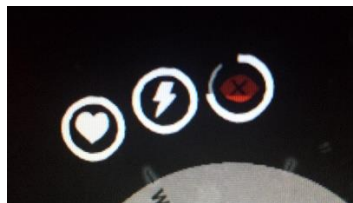


*Figure 3, Red Dead Redemption 2 with player engaged in Dead Eye, having marked three people's heads (illustrated by small red X'es).*

Briefly put, the Dead Eye mechanic is a feature of RDR2 (and its two predecessors). Dead Eye functions as a special power with limited use and a recharge based on kills. Dead Eye can be accessed most when the player is aiming a weapon and presses the right stick down. When entering Dead Eye, time slows down dramatically, a sepia filter is applied, sound is slurred, and the player can manually target and mark agents up until the number of bullets the weapon has. When the fire button is pressed, the player character will then hit every mark with extreme accuracy and swiftness, often being able to kill several enemy agents before they retaliate. Weapons also automatically and instantly reload upon using Dead Eye, so initiating Dead Eye with, e.g., one bullet in a revolver immediately restores the five missing bullets.

There are several components that affect Dead Eye directly: *Dead Eye core*, *-meter*, and *-level*, and *weapon*. “Affect directly” in this case means that these are the only active components when Dead Eye is activated (if we presume Dead Eye is activated in a vacuum, free from agents). Of course, in general play these components can’t be separated from other components that directly affect them. The Dead Eye core is affected by the *hunger* and *tiredness* components, *level* is affected by the *experience gain* and so on. The last-mentioned components will not be part of the analysis, as they don’t appear to be wholly relevant to the intermedial analysis.

The Dead Eye core and meter can be slightly confusing, so an illustration below has been added.



*Figure 4, Red Dead Redemption 2 cores and meters*

The player has three main statuses, Health, Stamina and Dead Eye. Each of these has a core and meter. The meter functions like health- and stamina meters in most games. When the player character loses health, exerts himself or uses Dead Eye, the meter surrounding the respective logo will start to drain. Refilling these is automatic except Dead Eye, which has to be done by landing difficult shots (such as head-shots). But refilling comes at the cost of the core. The core is determined by how filled the center icon is. As can be seen below, both the health and stamina meters and cores are entirely full (and level 10). But the Dead Eye meter is not entirely filled, and the Dead Eye core is low, indicated by the low fill and red color. Cores are filled by sleeping or ingesting provisions (in the case of Dead Eye, often alcohol and tobacco). Briefly put: Meters measure the amount of a resource you have, the cores indicate your ability to recharge said resource.

Dead Eye as a component is (generally) without any formal, obligatory or non-obligatory goals. It can instead be described as a tool used to achieve goals. A goal could be to kill all enemy agents in an area or kill an animal agent with a skillful shot, to which Dead Eye would be useful due to its slow-motion mechanic and pin-point mark accuracy. Dead Eye is also sometimes used in conjunction with the game’s missions or challenges, where Dead Eye will be activated for the player, and the player must resolve the situation in Dead Eye. This happens, for instance, in duels. Of which Dead Eye is a core pillar.

## Duels



*Figure 5, Red Dead Redemption 2, image of a duel in pre-draw*

Duels is in this case an umbrella term for a specific mechanic wherein the player character is in a stand-off with an agent. There are 11 different duels throughout the game. Some duels are contained as part of the main narrative missions, others are part of optional stranger missions and, lastly, some can occur in the open world as “chance encounters”.

Duels are either started automatically (at the end of a cut-scene), or by accepting a challenge and moving into the pre-determined area. Duels are very short, being less than 20 seconds in length, ending by either:

- The opposing agent dying
- The player incapacitating the opposing agent (e.g. leg-shots)
- The player disarming the opposing agent (shooting their weapon out of their hand)
- The player being killed
- Both the player and agent being killed

The difficulty of duels is heightened by the fact that the first shot from the enemy is guaranteed lethal. This is in deviation to the normal game-state where the player (depending on their health level) can take several bullets before dying. The opposing agents are also much quicker draws than agents normally are in the open world, where the player (when using Dead Eye) has ample time to kill enemies before they can unholster

their weapon. The lethality of duels is highlighted by the fact that after the duel, if the opposing agent is still hostile (as some are after a leg-shot or similar), lethality is decreased to its regular level again.

Duels add another layer of strategic choice in the draw itself. Upon drawing, Dead Eye will activate, but it's not the exact same as the general case of Dead Eye described previously. To draw, the player must *lightly* hold the R2/RT button while a circular outline is filled (see picture above, bottom right). The player is free to draw the gun at any moment by fully pressing R2/RT. The more of the outline is filled, the slower Dead Eye will be and subsequently the opposing agent. But the longer the player waits to fill the circle, the larger the risk of the opposing agent drawing his gun and having an advantage is. Thus, duels include an element of risk/reward which is not present with Dead Eye, where the player can activate it at will with no recourse.

The goal of duels varies depending on their context. Chance encounter duels don't have any explicit goals and allow the player to kill, incapacitate or disarm the opposing agent (to differing reactions). Duels as part of narratives often carry the requirement of ensuring the opponent survives the stand-off. An optional "alive only" bounty hunt requires this, for example. These differ from the chance encounter duels in that failure (failing to keep the target alive or dying) is followed by a game over screen where the player must try again and succeed to proceed.

The duel mechanic in the mission We Loved Once and True II (an optional section of the main narrative) features the duel mechanic contextualized by an attempt to prevent a suicide, by shooting a gun held to the head of a suicidal agent. This is the only narrative recontextualization of the goal of a duel where the opposing agent must be saved from themselves.

Other variations in duels occur as part of an optional side narrative, wherein the player must track down and interview legendary gunslingers, most of whom turn to hostility when met. Here, duels are functionally the same, but with added difficulty. Without the prior knowledge or indication, some of the duelists will perform maneuvers to subvert player expectations of where they're placed. Instead of standing still, they will, upon draw, crouch down or move to the side adding an extra layer of difficulty to the duel component. The player's only action remains killing the opposing agent (or retrying).



### Graves collectable

Red Dead Redemption 2 features several “collectables”. Collectables is in this case understood to be a form of mission or challenge where the goal is to collect or find a certain number of items, often with a reward at the end. Among the collectables RDR2 features are dreamcatchers, wall markings, and dinosaur bones. Most of these are triggered by starting the appropriate stranger missions, but some are available from the start.

This analysis concerns itself with the grave collectable.

The grave collectable is very simple. If the player finds an appropriate grave component and moves close to it, the interface will prompt the player to hold a button to “inspect”. Once this has been done, the player character stands by the grave for a few seconds. The grave is thereafter marked on the map and upon the next journal update (upon sleeping or traveling), the player character will have drawn the graves in his journal. After this has been done, the player can do no other action with the grave.



*Figure 6, player character standing at an uncollected grave site*

The only components of this collectable are the graves, and the only player action possible is holding down the button when prompted. While agents may be present around the grave, they have no influence on the mechanic at all. Nor is there any recontextualizing or subversion of expectation when collecting the graves at any point.

The graves differ from other collectables, however. Unlike those, the graves are directly linked to the main narrative, as the graves are of the player characters’ fallen comrades (other collectables are usually linked to

a side-story). Also, unlike other collectables, the number of graves to collect increases with the progression of the main narrative, as more comrades die. Therefore, the grave collectable is only possible to complete at the epilogue chapter.

The formal goal of the graves is to find all nine of them. This goal is only obligatory for players who want to achieve 100% completion of the game. Any other content in the game (such as stranger missions or the main narrative) is available without having to find a single grave. Graves are also linked to the PlayStation Trophy / Xbox Achievement “Paying Respects”, perhaps creating a non-obligatory goal for “achievement hunters”.

One of the interesting aspects of the grave collectable is its difficulty. As mentioned, the grave collectable goal is not started by any mission, or even explicitly at all. Functionally, they are the same as the dreamcatchers, but under the “Total completion” section of the menu interface, the dreamcatchers will be listed even if the player has not found any, indicating to a player that dreamcatchers in the game have a certain importance. Graves are only represented as “unknown collectable” until the first is found by the player.

This means that players are in *no way* informed of this collectable prior to finding one. This makes it *extremely* difficult to complete without a guide or other external help (perhaps virtually impossible), since the map is very large, the graves are never shown, and there is no way to visually identify which graves are collectable components, and which are just part of the scenery.

Only one of the graves is relevant after its been “collected”. As the player reaches 100% completion (which can be a variable task depending on the order of the player’s journey, e.g. ending with collecting the last Dreamcatcher), the screen will immediately fade to black, and the player will be teleported to the final grave. A short cutscene will play where the player character remarks “It’s been quite a journey my friend” to the grave. There is still no player action to do with the grave after the scene is over.



## Intermedial analysis of Red Dead Redemption 2

In this section of the paper, the descriptions of the Western along with the component analyses of (elements of) Red Dead Redemption 2 will be analyzed using Jørgensen's Ludophile Intermedial Framework. As mentioned, the component analyses weren't modified to include player experience or cognition. Therefore, the *mental* modality of Jørgensen's framework will not be included in the analysis. Likewise, the qualified dimension, which regards distinctions between media will not be examined, as it isn't relevant to the thesis statement. It should also be noted Western films are in this analysis presumed to be "2D" films with sound. There are Western films made prior to the invention of sound in film, and Western films made in 3D, but due to their fringe nature they will not be considered.

The analysis will be structured similarly to Jørgensen's example (2018: 7-9), with each dimension and modality being analyzed independently of the others, starting with the technical dimension.

### Technical dimension

Westerns and *Red Dead Redemption 2* differ on how they produce images. The Western is, as films are, essentially digital or analogue recordings of actual (staged) events (CGI notwithstanding), edited, in a specific order and manner to construct a whole. This is then relayed via a digital or analogue playback device. RDR2 consists, for the most part, of programming code that realizes the game as an interactive real-time 3D render, powered by the processing and graphical capabilities of the Xbox one or PS4. This simulative nature allows for variations in the output on the screen. The simulation, (very) broadly speaking, has two general variables at play: The run-times of the video game software (coupled with the console hardware to execute these), and the player's interaction, which is embodied by the controller.

### Basic material modality

The basic material modalities of both *Red Dead Redemption 2* and western films are highly comparable. Excluding the controllers, both share most material modes. They are both audiovisual works, presented on a two-dimensional surface (the screen), emitting soundwaves from speakers. The difference then, lies in the interaction modes of the video game. Interaction mode is a term coined by Andreas Gregersen, which describes the coupling between player and technology (Gregersen, 2011). The intermediality of interaction modes could itself be a paper, and I will not delve too deeply into it in this analysis. Suffice to say, for the most part, I consider that the interaction mode (as it is presented here) can not wholly be considered a "union/fusion" (as Leo Hoek put it) of intermedial properties. The controllers, as they are used, are more related to video game genres and structures, rather than an intermedial adaptation of a film genre. As Gregersen puts it: "Digital game genres imply structured embodied activity" (Gregersen, 2011: 1). The use of the controllers and their layouts, in my opinion, are more related to the genre of "shooter", as they share

many similarities with other video game shooters - such as the control-scheme of modern shooters: e.g. L2/LT to aim, R2/RT to shoot.

#### Basic structural modality

Dead Eye can be argued to be a ludic interpretation of a structure of the Western, the Westerner's superhuman quick draw abilities. Dead Eye allows the player to achieve the exact same trick-shots (such as disarms or "hat-shots") as the Westerner in a film would do. The structural mode of Dead Eye differs from the Westerner's shooting abilities, however.

In the Western film, the Westerner usually engages in quick draw with ease. The action is portrayed as a natural extension of the Westerner, no different than if he were to talk, walk, drink or smoke. There is rarely any specific demarcation or change in structure when the Westerner engages in quick draw. Contrarily, Dead Eye is clearly demarcated and is a different structural mode from the rest of the game. When the player is engaged in Dead Eye a bright sepia filter is overlaid, the tempo of the game is slowed, sound is slurred and a ticking noise is heard. It is immediately visible to a player that Dead Eye is enabled.

As explained, quick draws, stand-offs and duels have a prominent role in the identity of the Western. And as mentioned, these appear in *Red Dead Redemption 2*, but their structural modes are different as well. The main difference is the temporal element. In Westerns, duels are often shown in real-time with the actual draw typically being very short. In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, due to the time-slowness mechanisms of Dead Eye, the draw itself is in about equal length to the pre-draw. The different temporal structures achieve different results. In the Western film, the emphasis primarily seems to be heightening suspense in the pre-draw. In (this) ludic Western, the slowed tempo facilitates strategic choice for the player that, given a relatively normal reaction time, would be impossible to purposefully achieve with a real-time tempo. The player can specifically target sections of their opponent that can alter the outcome of the duel.

The outcome of the duel is not just a matter of strategic convenience, but also what kind of narrative the player wishes for. The player can ensure their character, Arthur Morgan (or John Marston) exemplifies the "honorable" Westerner who seeks to mitigate loss of life when possible. Or the neutral or "dishonorable" Westerner, who has no qualms taking a life for his own amusement. This could be further examined with analysis of the honor system.

Dead Eye structurally deviates in other ways. As mentioned, the Westerner's quick draw abilities are often portrayed as being performed casually. Dead Eye, instead, is a resource on par with the stamina and health of the player character. In this case the Dead Eye meter and core can be viewed as a quantification of an intangible "resource" the Westerner uses when quick drawing (e.g. "focus" or similar). Perhaps that is why

the provisions typically used for regeneration of the Dead Eye meter and core are often also found in the hands of the Westerner; hard liquor and tobacco. This design choice could imply that indulging in the vices of the Westerner is a pre-requisite to shooting as him (even at the cost of health and stamina which tobacco and liquor incur in the game).

The gravesite collectable can also be analyzed as an intermedial structure since, as noted, the (Christian) burial is important to the Western (French, 2005). Gravesites are the only collectible which do not reward the player in any way, besides counting towards 100% completion. The only direct result of visiting a grave is the quiet moment of remembrance. The ludic element of the grave collectable is the discovery and “collection” of the grave itself. In *Unforgiven*, for example, William Munny will visit his wife’s grave at the end, every time the film is seen. But in this ludic Western, visiting the graves of fallen comrades is an active effort the player must make, it is not guaranteed to happen in player’s own narrative of RDR2.

As mentioned, one of the graves reappears later in the game. When the player has achieved 100% completion (by doing whichever final task (s)he needed to finish), the screen will fade to black, and the player will be teleported to a specific grave. Thereupon the character, will remark “it’s been quite a journey my friend”. This is, itself, a trope of Westerns, many of which prominently feature grave sites in their endings. The structure of the Western story itself is subject to intermedial analysis.

In their 2003 paper A Multi-Dimensional Typology of Games, Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå define the “teleology” of games. Telology describes the final goal of the game, and a game can be either finite or infinite. RDR2 is, from a teleological standpoint an infinite game. The game itself has several teleologically finite aspects (such as the critical path, the stranger missions, collectables and so on), but the game itself technically never ends. Even after 100% completion, the player is still free to continually do as they please such as hunt, accumulate money, gamble, and so on.

As mentioned, the story of a film is linearly told, in the sense that the same order will always be followed and the result will always be the same. For *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the narrative of each player playing the game will *never* be the same. But the critical path (herein referring to the “main missions”) is largely the same for most players. What is interesting is how Rockstar handled the “ending” of the game.

The end of the story can often be assumed to be at the roll of the credits. Closing credits is itself an intermedial element borrowed from film and are a formal structure to mark the end of the motion picture. In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the closing credits don’t mark the end of the narrative. Not only because the game is teleologically infinite, but also because the “true Western ending” is not at the end of the epilogue, but when the player has completed the game 100%. The journey is explicitly not over before John stands at

the grave. This is an interesting clash of structural modalities, between *Red Dead Redemption 2* as an infinite video game, the medium of film and its “norms”, and the Western film genre.

*Red Dead Redemption 2* as a media product, theoretically has three different endings. From a video game theoretical perspective, the player is both producer and consumer of their narrative (Pearce, 2004). Therefore, the game’s narrative can only end when it’s no longer being produced, which happens to be when it is no longer consumed either. From a film structural perspective, *Red Dead Redemption 2* ends when the critical path has been traveled, the story of Arthur and John has been told, and the credits appear (this would likely be where the film ended, from a film-structural stand-point). From a typical Western-story structure, *Red Dead Redemption 2* is only over, when the player reaches 100% completion, the grave is visited, and the main character remarks what a journey it’s been. Two of these endings are distinctly intermedial properties of the film medium, while the first mentioned ending is inherent to the ludic medium.

#### Basic semiotic modality

The semiotic modality has a triadic framework under it, based on Elleström’s framework which itself loans the notion of semiotics from C.S. Peirce. This triad consists of *symbols*, *index*, and *icon*. The terminology used in this section will therefore also draw heavily upon C.S. Peirce’s terminology, along with brief usage of Saussure’s “signifier” and “signified”. This section will generally focus on the general graphics, signs, and interface.

*Red Dead Redemption 2*’s semiotic modality is *highly* similar to that of a “generic Western”. The graphical style of the game is photorealistic. Televisualism describes attempts to mimic television structures (as sports games often do), and illusionism describes realistic graphics to depict “nonrealistic content” (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2016: 142). The photorealism and the world the graphics draw are neither televisualistic or illusionistic, as it, for the most part, portrays a genuinely lifelike representation of late 1800s America, with a touch of inspiration from the American landscape paintings of the Hudson River School (Gies, 2018). The graphics and the world they portray are then close to iconic representations of the Western. The world, its characters, and items therein do not invoke connotations to the Western because they are indexical, or they “symbolize” the west, as the silhouette of a revolver might. Since the signifier (the graphics and the world they present) closely resembles the referent (1890s US), it is essentially an iconic representation of the West.

The interface itself is, however, primarily indexical. The mini-map, for example, is an indexical signified of the player’s location on the map, in a circle shape with north/east/south/west directions. The mini-map could be said to symbolize a compass – itself a symbol of navigation and direction.



Figure 7, mini-map in Red Dead Redemption 2. Yellow points are main story missions

The general menus of *Red Dead Redemption 2* feature a stylistic choice that, in many cases, closely resembles Spaghetti Western art (Spaghetti Western being a general term for European Western films made around Italy in the 1960s and -70s). They both emphasize a stylized approach that heavily focuses on warm colors and a (seemingly) crudely hand-drawn font.



Figure 8, 9, 10, RDR2 pause menu, Django (1966) movie poster, A Fistful of Dollars (1964) title sequence

The majority of the menu (figure 8) isn't inspired by Spaghetti Westerns, but is instead a representation of tintype photography, a method of developing photographs most widely used in the mid-1800s (Peres, 2007). The pause menu then features two distinctly different representations of the West. One is a stylistic

inspiration of art from Spaghetti Western films, while the other is a realistic recreation of photography of the time. This clash of art-styles can perhaps be considered a fitting metaphor for *Red Dead Redemption 2*. A game which features both a highly realistic simulation of 1890's America while having a critical path and gameplay elements so outrageous they would fit well in an action-packed Spaghetti Western film.

The state of Dead Eye includes, as mentioned, a sepia overlay. Sepia tint is the result of a certain process of toning, leading to an orange tint in what would otherwise have been a monochromatic photo (Peres, 2007). The prevalence of semiotic inspirations of tintype photo-development shows semiotic elements are highly intermedial. In these cases not with film, however, but photography. Due to the paper's focus on film these will not be touched upon heavily, but it is nonetheless interesting. It also raises the questions of which other media RDR2 may share intermedial properties – and whether these intermedial properties are also related to the “Western genre” of that media (as tintype and sepia photographs loosely are in the medium of photography).

## Discussion

### Intermediality of *Red Dead Redemption 2*

Based on the previous analyses, aspects of the intermediality of *Red Dead Redemption 2* and “ludic Westerns” can be discussed. To further facilitate this discussion, comparisons to other video game Westerns that included some of the same structures will briefly be brought up.

*Red Dead Redemption 2*, and the ludic Western in general, undoubtedly include intermedial elements, often heavily borrowing from film, throughout different modalities. The semiotic modality is likely the least surprising. Video game Westerns often use the same signs as filmic Westerns – especially the iconography which, including six-shooters, cowboys, and outlaws in frontier America, evokes Western associations with anyone. Interestingly, the Western associations persist across the interface of *Red Dead Redemption 2*. A direct semiotic inspiration can’t be drawn from the contents of film (as films typically don’t have interfaces, unless DVD’s and similar are counted). In this case, Rockstar opted to draw inspiration from both the art-style of Spaghetti Western title-sequences and posters, and historical photography from the era. Furthermore, the signs on the interface are often also period-appropriate. For example, the watch in the top left of the pause menu is in the form of a pocket-watch. The mini-map, too, features a hand-drawn style similar to maps of the era, and itself is clearly a symbol of a compass. This contrasts with, for example, Rockstar’s previous, highly similar, console game *Grand Theft Auto V* (2015), which features a functionally similar mini-map, but is instead stylized as a GPS – a modern symbol of navigation.



Figure 11, 12, *Red Dead Redemption 2* mini-map and *Grand Theft Auto V* mini-map

This could imply that, the ludic Western, at least semiotically, attempts to imitate the iconography and art-styles of the West or Western films, across both graphics, game-world and interface – even if the interface is functionally the same as in other ludic genres. This is not necessarily on its own rights a remarkable observation, but it is similar to the debate on iconographic genre definition (Chandler, 2014). The question

of definition per iconography is seemingly just as relevant for this newer medium, as it was for film over 50 years ago. Is a game a ludic Western if it simply adopts the iconography associated with the Western?

But the intermediality of this ludic Western is not just in its replication and adaptations of semiotics. In the structural aspect, each of the three analyzed elements have found to have clear intermedial properties to Western films.

Dead Eye, for example, is the use of a bullet-time mechanic coupled with a marking feature allowing the kind of quick draws that the archetypal Westerner would do. Slow-motion or “bullet-time” mechanics are hardly new for the medium. Most famously, *Max Payne* (2001) (coincidentally published by Rockstar Games for the PS2) had similar bullet-time mechanics. What separates Dead Eye from most of these is the mark system. The mark system allows for Dead Eye to incorporate both the superhuman quick draw of the Westerner while slowing the game. In practice, this results in a system where the player can carefully choose targets in slow-motion, and when all marks are placed, the player character fires his shots with comparable speed to the Westerner.

### The ludic Western as characterized by *Red Dead Redemption 2*

I have developed a small table that allows for the condensation of intermedial analyses’ findings. Furthermore, the table also serves as a convenient illustration of the intermediality of certain elements.

Trait	Film	Ludo	Modality
The intermedial trait/property in question	How it is portrayed in film	How it is portrayed ludically (ensure description of player action if it applies)	Which modality the two portrayals are best categorized as

Figure 13, the intermedial properties and portrayal table

From left to right the table measures the intermedial trait/property, the filmic portrayal of the element, the ludic portrayal of the element, and which modality the element belongs to. While the table is very simple and will leave out elements of nuance, I think it can serve very well as future reference for intermedial study. “Film” and “Ludo” can be switched out for any other medium and the principle is the same. If one were to make an intermedial analysis with more than two media, the table could easily be adapted to include more by simply adding a column. It should also be noted that the table is meant to serve as an illustrative supplement to intermedial analysis and *not* as a tool of analysis on its own merits.

Below, I have used the same table to illustrate the intermedial analysis conducted of certain elements of *Red Dead Redemption 2*. I have included an “appears in” addendum for the film portrayal. This is a choice at my discretion since, until now, most of the Western genre discussions and observations were primarily based on genre theory, without supplying concrete examples.



Trait	Film	Ludo (RDR2)	Modality
Quick Draw (shooting several opponents quickly)	Real-time, shifting camera angles Appears in: <i>A Fistful of Dollars</i> (1964) <i>3:10 To Yuma</i> (2007) <i>Butch Cassidy &amp; The Sundance Kid</i> (1969)	Dead Eye → Slow-motion, perspective stays with the player character (1 <sup>st</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> person), marking targets to shoot rapidly, sepia filter overlay	Structural
Duels	Real-time, shifting camera angles Appears in: <i>The Dollars Trilogy</i> (1964-1966) <i>The Quick and the Dead</i> (1995) <i>Silverado</i> (1985) <i>Once Upon a Time in The West</i> (1968)	Dead Eye → Slow-motion, third-person camera (placed behind player character, at hip-level). Marking targets to shoot, sepia filter overlay	Structural
(Importance of) Gravesites	Often at start/end of film/journey, relatively important to the plot Appears in: <i>True Grit</i> (2010) <i>Unforgiven</i> (1990) <i>The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly</i> (1966)	Collectable: difficult to find, ties into critical path, prerequisite for 100% completion. Recontextualized upon 100%, used as a “formal end” to the journey	Structural
Art-style	Posters & title sequences: Red, warm colors, “painted”, crude & capitalized hand drawn font Appears in: Spaghetti Western films, <i>The Dollars Trilogy</i> (1964-1966) <i>Django</i> (1966) <i>A Noose for Django</i> (1969)	Interface: Red, “painted”, crude & capitalized hand drawn font. Tintype photography recreations.	Semiotic
Technological format	Film or digital files executed by playback machines.	Graphical rendering & simulation of a programmed world, powered by console hardware (PS4, Xbox One).	Technical
Latent corporeal interface	Audiovisual, moving images on flat 2D surface.	Audiovisual, moving images on flat 2D surface, with interaction mode: PS4/X1 controller	Material

Figure 14, illustration of the analyses’ findings in a table

### Discussing other ludic Westerns

While this paper has only focused on *Red Dead Redemption 2* as a case study, other ludic Westerns have incorporated quick draw as well. The first *Call of Juarez* game, a linear first-person shooter, had specific moments in the narrative where the duel wielding main character, Ray, would stand off with several opponents. Here, slow-motion was also used, but instead of Dead Eye’s mark-system that allows for deliberate placement of shots, two reticles would appear from either side of the screen and would move horizontally towards the center of the screen where they would meet. Each reticle represented one of the two revolvers, and the challenge lies with the player being able to track both reticles while firing them at appropriate times. *Gun*, a Western third-person shooter from 2005, featured an explicit “Quick draw gauge” that, when filled, would allow the player to enter slow-motion, switch to a revolver (with unlimited ammo), and enter a first-person perspective.



Figure 15, 16, quick draw in *Gun* (2005) and *Call of Juarez* (2005), respectively.

The different approaches to quick draw lead to different outcomes. The challenge quick draw poses for the player is one of these variations. In *RDR2*, the primary challenge is management of the limited Dead Eye resource and strategic targeting. In *Call of Juarez*, the challenge is tracking two separate moving entities with correct timing. In *Gun*, the challenge is in filling the quick draw gauge (done by quick kills, scoring points), use quick draw, and kill as many enemies as possible before the unlimited ammo and slow-motion stops. This is the exact same Western structure, that all share the same foundation (slowed time) but vary slightly in the implementation.

Based on the deeper analysis of elements of *RDR2* and their intermediality, along with slight considerations to the few aforementioned Western themed games (*Gun* and the *Call of Juarez* series), I will now propose general characteristics as to what the ludic Western is:

- 1) The ludic Western is, like Western films, based on the myths of the Western
- 2) The ludic Western often shares structures with film Westerns, and sometimes incorporates these structures into the ludology.
- 3) The ludic Western's semiotics are often highly similar to the film Western's.
- 4) The ludic Western (shooter) often utilizes slow-motion as an effect to allow players to emulate the inhuman quick draw speeds of film and mythic gunslingers.

The characteristics are far from comprehensive, broad in their formulation and are in no doubt in conflict with at least a few Western-themed video games. Nonetheless, I feel they raise important points and questions towards the question of the ludic Western genre.

First and foremost is the affirmation that the ludic Western is, like Western films, rooted in the myth of the West. This can be either a continuation of the myth, such as *Call of Juarez* series, in which slaying Native

Americans is presented as righteous, and freedom, masculinity, and individuality are glorified. Or a revisionist work which approaches the myth more critically, such as RDR2, which shows the historically inhumane treatment of Native Americans and questions whether “the free West” ever really existed. I think this characteristic is the single most important of the ludic Western, as it may be for the film Western. Much the same way *Star Wars: A New Hope* can be considered a film Western, The *Call of Juarez* Western series’ third entry, *The Cartel* (2011), can be considered a ludic Western even if it doesn’t take place during the “old West”.

Second are the structural ties to the film Westerns. I think this is a natural extension of the first characteristic. If a work handles the myths of the West, it is very likely to also regard the structures used to present these myths. In the example cases, RDR2 not only includes but ludifies elements around gravesites, quick draws and duels. And as briefly shown with the other examples, several other ludic Westerns also include the structure of the quick draw.

The third are the semiotic ties to film Westerns. This is relatively self-explanatory. Most Western games heavily feature six-shooters, cowboys, saloons and other similar Western iconography, just as Western films often do. What is interesting is, as demonstrated, the ludic Western’s incorporation of Western-themed semiotics into the interface of the game. It is highly prevalent in RDR2 and I think analyses of further ludic Westerns would show most follow this characteristic. Functionally, as briefly exemplified with the RDR2 and GTAV comparison, is that in spite of Western-inspired interface, the expected function of it is generally unchanged (though RDR2’s mini-map looks like a compass, it functions just like GTAV’s “advanced” GPS).

The fourth and final point is perhaps the most interesting. I added the qualifier of “Western (shooter)” to avoid examples of, e.g. strategy-Westerns which don’t use real-time combat and would thus not implement a slow-motion mechanic (such as *Hard West* (2015)). Across a total of 8 shooter Western games (Red Dead series, Call of Juarez series and Gun), *every game* consistently featured a form of slow-motion mechanic. Shooters is one of the most popular and oft-produced genres in video game, and it’s a clear minority of these games that incorporate slow-motion. That is why it is interesting to me that such a large proportion of the (relatively few) Western shooters consistently use slow-motion shooting in their design. Which is why I have included it as a characteristic of the genre.

The four characteristics are my propositions for a working consideration of the ludic Western. As with any characteristics of a genre, they are far from all-encompassing and lack certain nuances. Nonetheless, based on the research conducted for this paper, I feel they are appropriate descriptors.

### Reflecting on methods

The biggest flaw in this research design, as briefly described in the methodology section, is the lack of verification for findings in the formal game analyses, thereby meaning the quality of the validity and reliability are uncertain. This can, in the worst case, be seriously detrimental to the conclusions, as not only would the formal game analyses be faulty, but the intermedial analysis and the following discussion would be based on faulty information. While this hypothetical scenario is possible, I am confident in the quality of the formal game analyses and the accuracy of their findings. Nevertheless, this paper should be peer-reviewed and verified before the implications of the findings should be considered seriously.

Another note of interest is the handling of Jørgensen's Intermedial Framework. True to its name, and as explained, it regards a media product's intermediality compared to another media (such as video game *FRAMED* with comic books). This paper technically doesn't regard a specific medium, but instead a *genre* of a medium. While this is not explicitly explained or condoned in Jørgensen's original text, I consider it defensible in the context of the framework. The slight change does not affect the framework or process in any way, only which media products are to be considered for the intermedial analysis. This, I thought, was more beneficial than a general approach, as it let me analyze, e.g., specific structures of the Western film genre which RDR2 directly emulate. It also served to narrow the focus of the thesis statement.

Finally, a debate can be had on the specific mechanics chosen for analysis. Three elements of a massive game will, naturally, only give a cursory view of RDR2's intermediality. There are many other elements that relate to the Western which could be looked at: Horses, gambling, robbing, honor, cattle ranching, hunting, nature, the plot, and so on.

### Potential future research

This paper, should its findings be verified, could have several implications for future research. I will discuss a few of them now.

First, I think the research design presents a considered and malleable format for exploration of "ludo-fication" of genres of other media. For example, one could explore the intermediality of the gangster genre by analyzing the intermediality of the *Mafia* (2002-2016) series.

Secondly, I think further research on this topic could be based on the guidelines I presented for the ludic Western. As I recognized, the guidelines are far from perfect. Thus, future research could, with a basis in other ludic Westerns, seek to verify or amend these definitions or characteristics of the ludic western.

Finally, I think there is a strong case that slow-motion in ludic Westerns is used to "ludo-fy" superhuman speeds, allowing people with normal reaction times to essentially achieve the same effect. The intermediality

of slow-motion could itself be subject for future analysis. For example: The use of slow-motion across media. Slow-motion in film is generally used to emphasize something. Is it the same for video games? Or is slow-motion in a ludic context more likely to be used to allow players to perform things that would be impossible in real-time?

## Conclusion

Three different formal game analyses were conducted on the Dead Eye, Duel and Gravesite Collectable mechanics of *Red Dead Redemption 2*. The findings of the formal analyses were then used in conjunction with Jørgensen's Ludophile Intermedial Framework. The framework served as a basis for intermedial analysis between the game mechanics and the Western film genre. The intermedial analysis found that each of the analyzed game mechanics were highly intermedial in regard to Western films, and that each element could be perceived as a ludic interpretation of these structures. Furthermore, it was found that, on the semiotic modality, *Red Dead Redemption 2's* interface was inspired highly by both photography of the time (mid 1800s) and Spaghetti Western films of the 1960s and -70s. The findings, along with brief comparisons to other video game Westerns, were then discussed. The discussion was used to establish characteristics of the ludic Western. Of these, it was found that ludic Westerns are ultimately based on the myth of the West and frontier America. That they share structures with film Westerns (and incorporate these into the ludology). That their semiotics are often highly similar to film Westerns. And that shooter-Westerns often use slow-motion to emulate inhuman quick draw speeds. Reflections on the methods and the findings' implications were then evaluated.

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