

Writing on the wall: the linguistic landscapes of **Umurangi Generation**

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Language in videogames

- Localization and translation (Mangiron 2017; Fernández-Costales 2017; Koscelníková 2021)
- Discourse analysis: within games and between players (Schwartz 2009; Ensslin & Balteiro 2019; Belančić 2020)
- Less studied (though see Kim & Chestnut 2020):
 - Linguistic landscapes
 - ‘Umurangi Generation’

Linguistic landscapes

- “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis 1997)

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Linguistic landscapes

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 - Including font, visual design
- “the motives, uses, ideologies, ... varieties, and contestations of multiple forms of ‘languages’ as they are displayed in public spaces” (Ling.Lands. 2015)



Linguistic landscapes

- Beyond ‘signage’ and beyond ‘public space’:
 - Soundscapes ([Scarvaglieri et al. 2013](#))



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Linguistic landscapes

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 - Soundscapes ([Scarvaglieri et al. 2013](#))
 - Skinscapes/tattoos ([Peck & Stroud 2015](#))
 - Smellscapes ([Pennycook & Otsuji 2015](#))
 - Digital & virtual worlds ([Ivkovic & Lotherington 2009](#); [Kim & Chesnut 2020](#))
 - Videogames: languages as visually arranged in the virtual space of videogame worlds





Umurangi Generation

- PC (2020), Nintendo Switch (2021), Xbox (2022)
- Umurangi = ‘red sky’ (Te Reo Māori)
- ‘Shitty future’ first-person photography game
- Set in near-future Tauranga, Aotearoa (New Zealand) during U.N. occupation, alien invasion, viral pandemic
- Player: Māori courier for Tauranga Express

Umurangi Generation

- Made by Naphtali ‘Veselekov’ Faulkner
 - Ngāi Te Rangi iwi
- Decolonizing and Respectful Design ([Sheehan 2011](#))
 - “Where I think it departs most from traditional design is that it says agency is with a community, not the designer... For this game, the players (the community) decide how they want to take photos and what is a good photo, not the game (the design).” ([Sims 2020](#))
- No dialogue; narrative unfolds through player-directed exploration



Umurangi Generation

- Gameplay overview:
 - First-person photography exploration



Umurangi Generation



GAMEPLAY: EXPLORATION

Umurangi Generation



GAMEPLAY: EXPLORATION

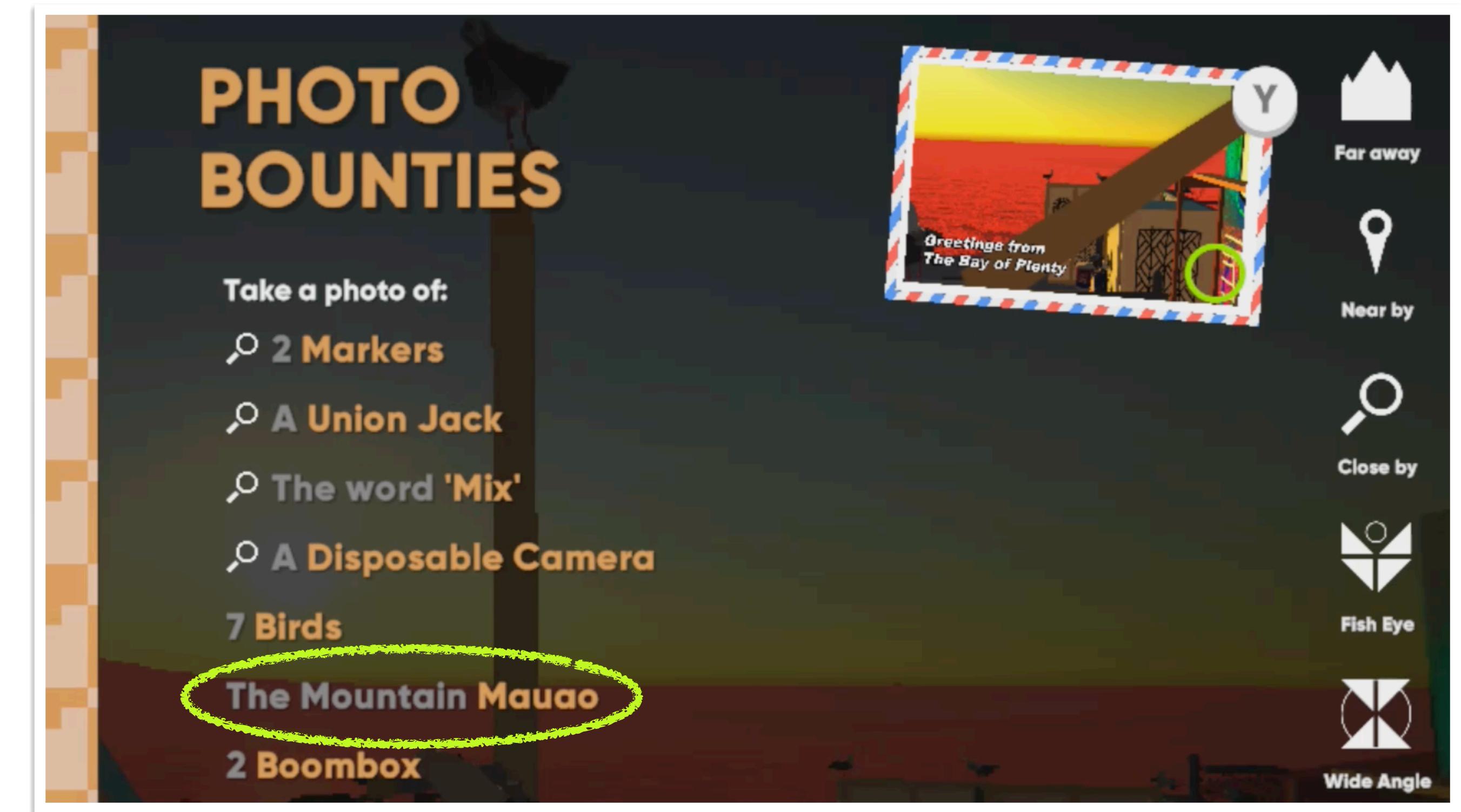
Umurangi Generation



GAMEPLAY: EXPLORATION

Umurangi Generation

- Gameplay overview:
 - First-person photography exploration
 - ‘Photo bounties’
 - Obligatory objectives to unlock next level
 - Creative freedom for player; no ‘bad photos’

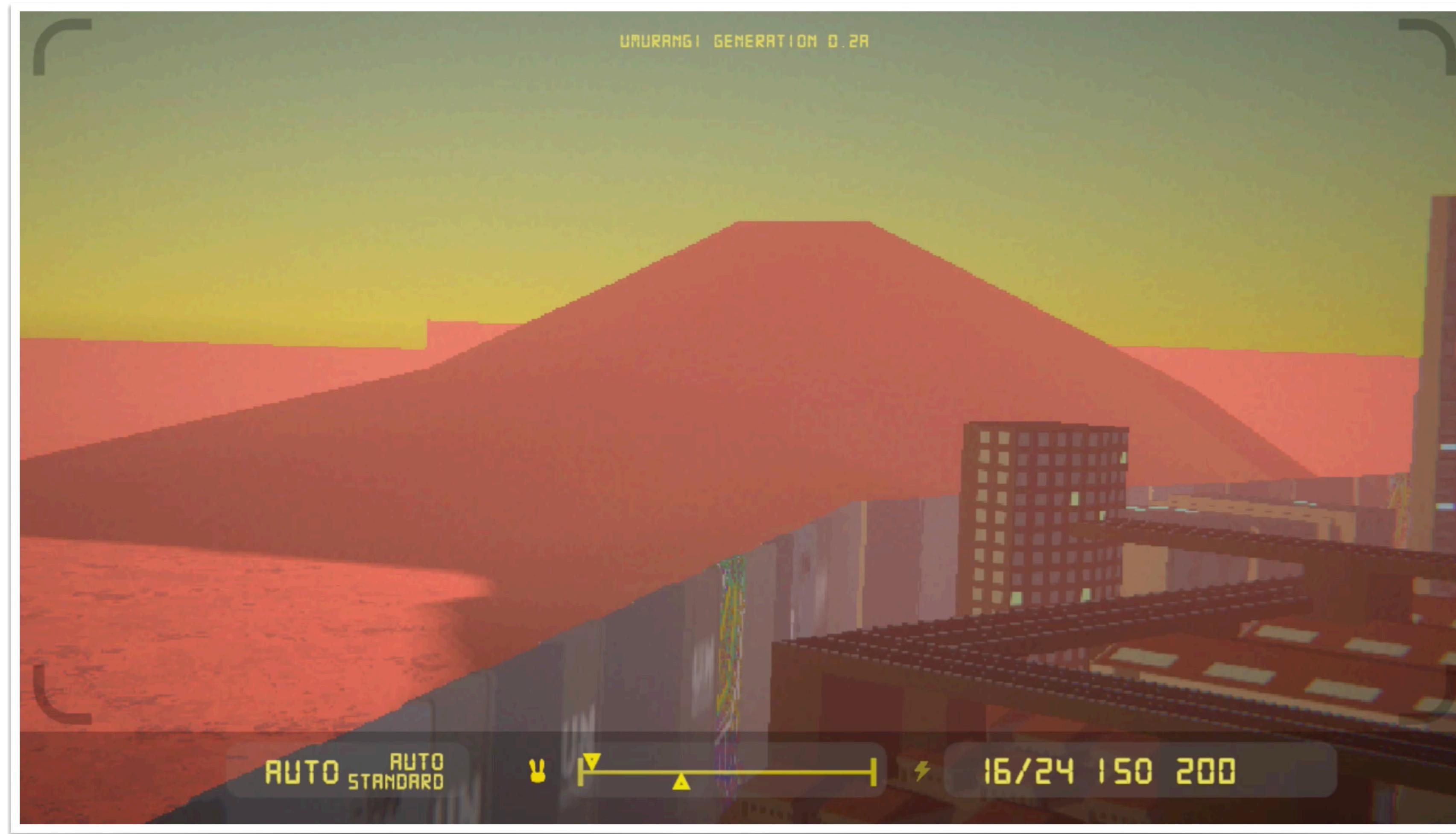


Umurangi Generation



GAMEPLAY: PHOTO BOUNTIES

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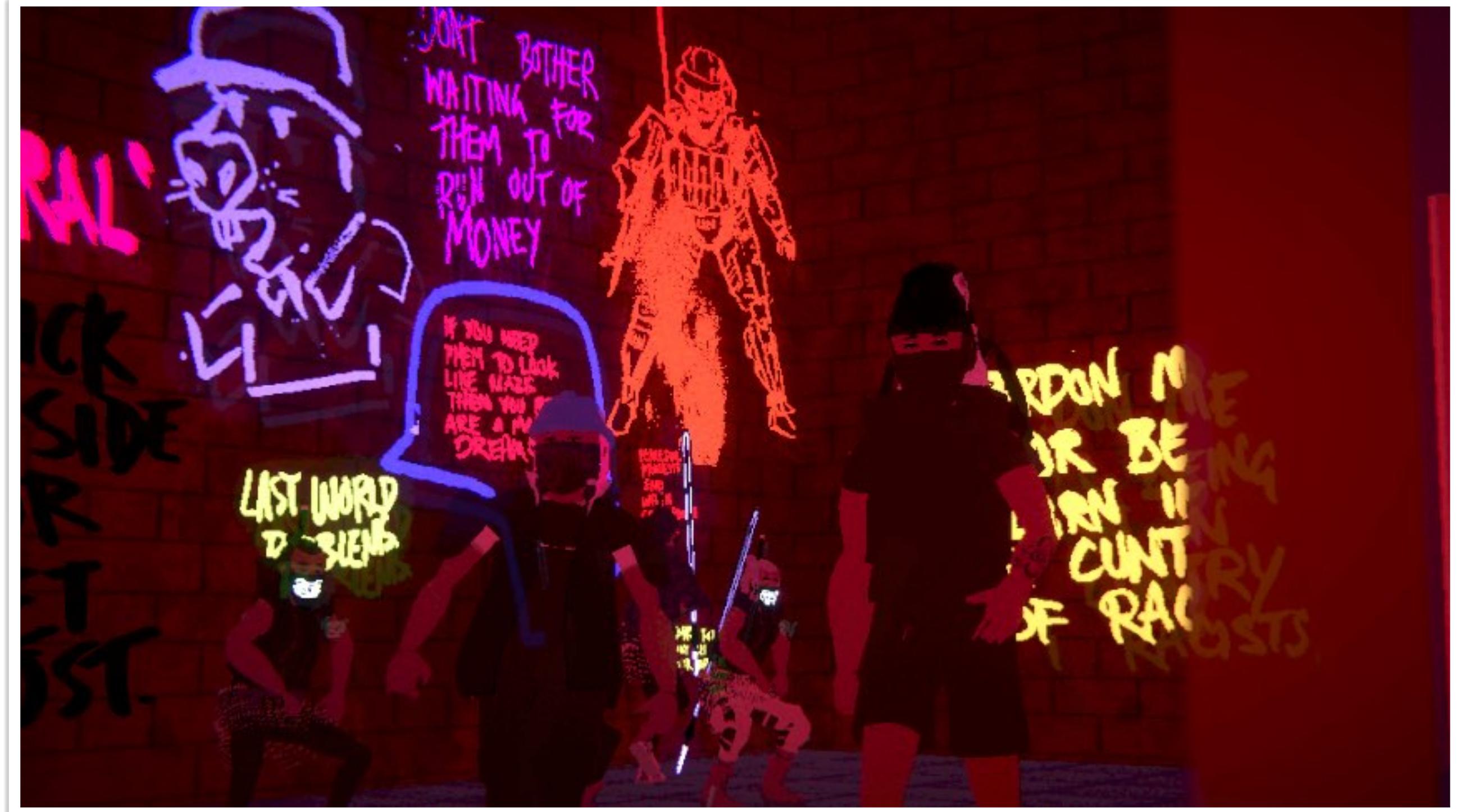
Umurangi Generation



GAMEPLAY: PHOTO BOUNTIES

Umurangi Generation

- Importance of linguistic landscape (LL)
 - First-person: encourages exploration of landscape
 - No dialogue: LL only in-game language
 - Creative freedom: player agency in experiencing LL through photos
 - Photo bounties: guide player attention towards particular items, concepts, and areas
- Level walkthrough: Metro



Umurangi Generation



LEVEL WALKTHROUGH: 'METRO'

Umurangi Generation



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Umurangi Generation



LEVEL WALKTHROUGH: 'METRO'

Method

- Game as virtual fieldsite ([Hjorth et al. 2021](#))
- Photography as data
 - Author playthrough
 - Photo bounties
 - Other photos taken while exploring



Linguistic Landscapes in Umurangi Generation

- Not just ‘flavor text’; narrative design
- Not only linguistic content ('what is said'), but the linguistic landscape itself ('how it's said')
 - How language(s) are ‘arranged and displayed in (virtual) public space’

Linguistic Landscapes in Umurangi Generation

- Themes:
 - Top-down language
 - Bottom-up language
 - Dialogicity
 - Techno-Orientalism

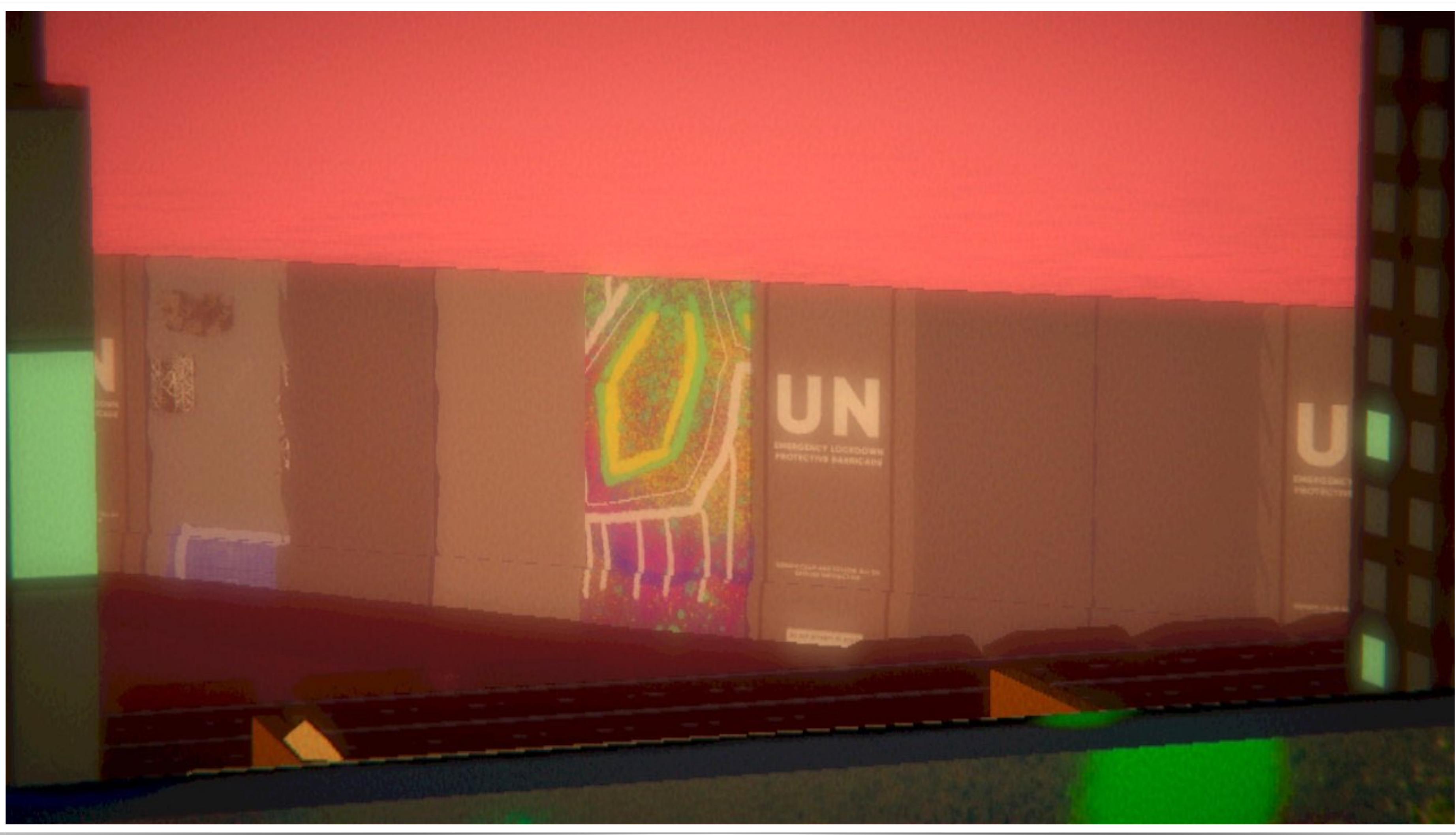
Top-down language

- Permanent & semi-permanent language installations, advertisements, government communications
- Narratively constructs UN occupation and the neoliberalization of the crisis

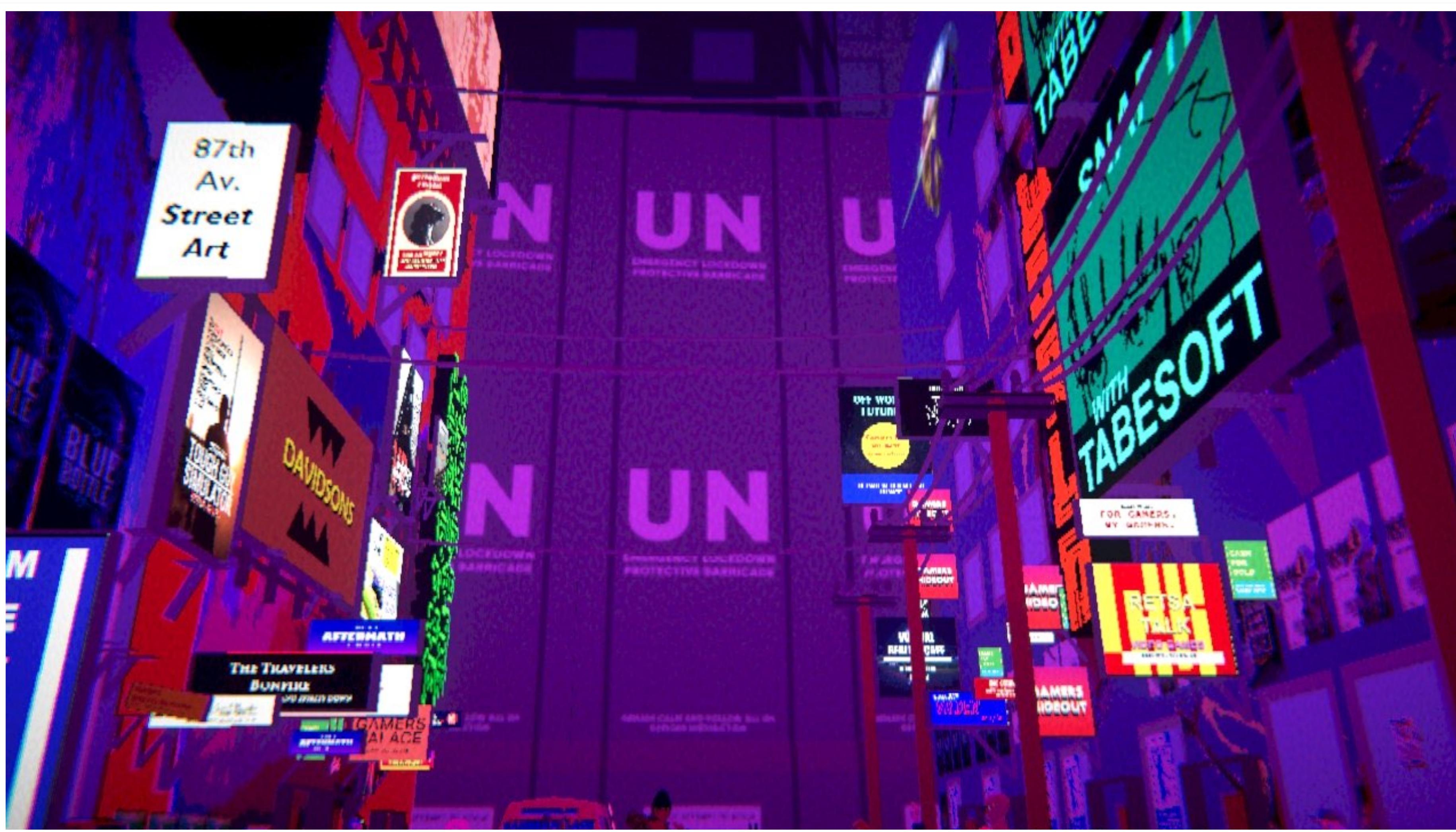
Top-down language



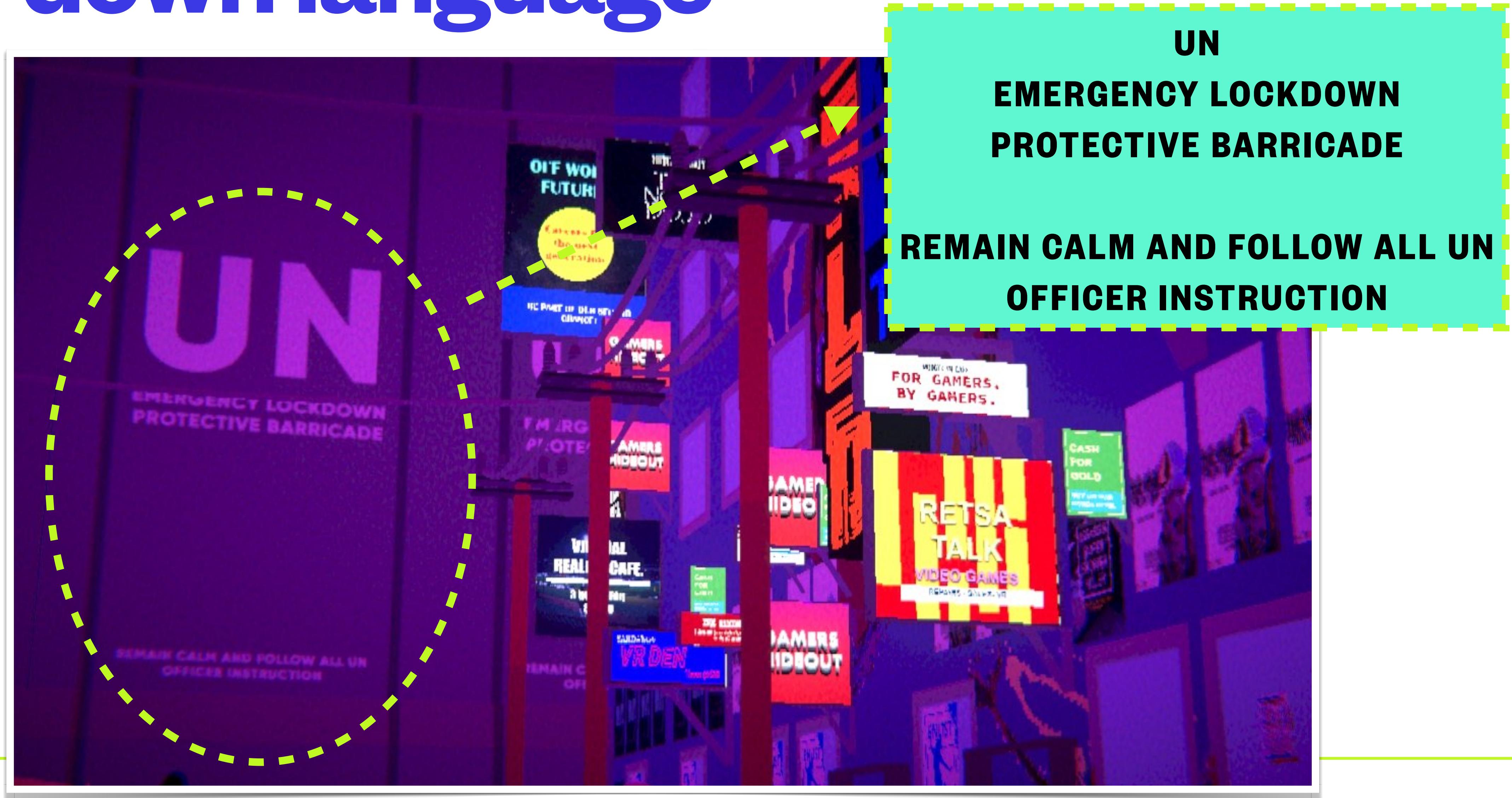
Top-down language



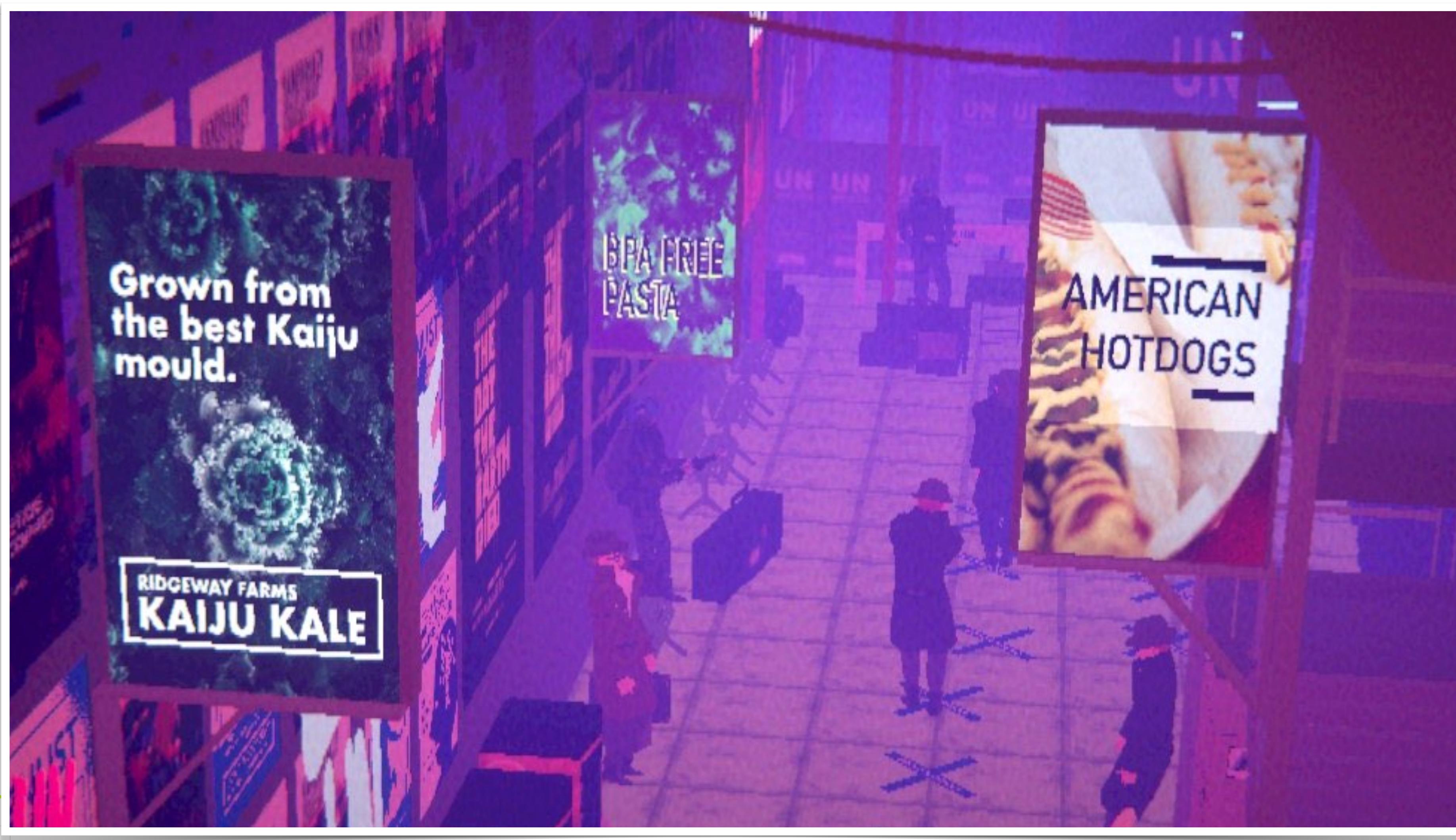
Top-down language



Top-down language



Top-down language



Bottom-up language

- Graffiti, other additions to the linguistic landscape from individual people
- Narratively emphasizes indigeneity (in Māori context) and resistance

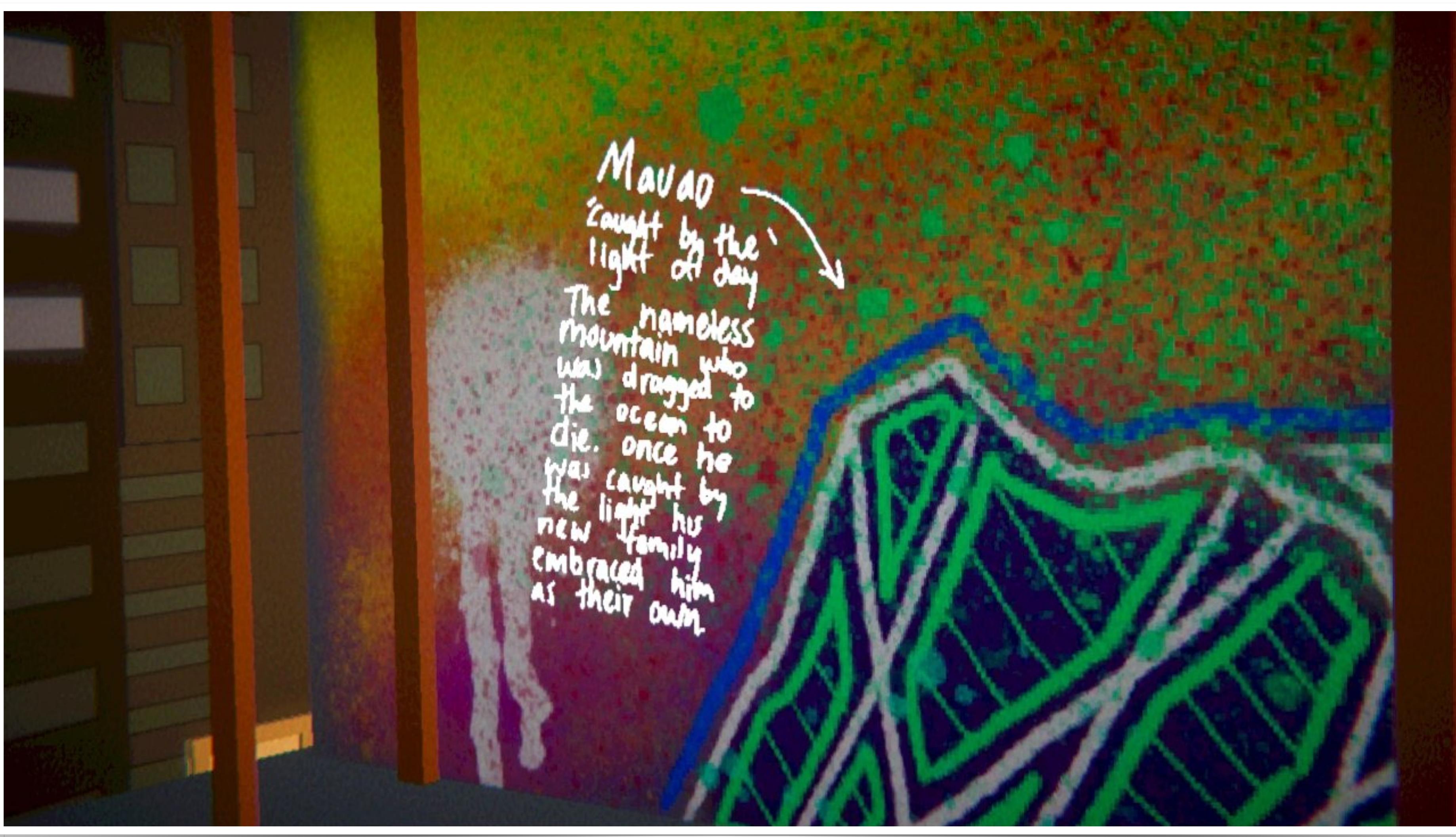
Bottom-up language



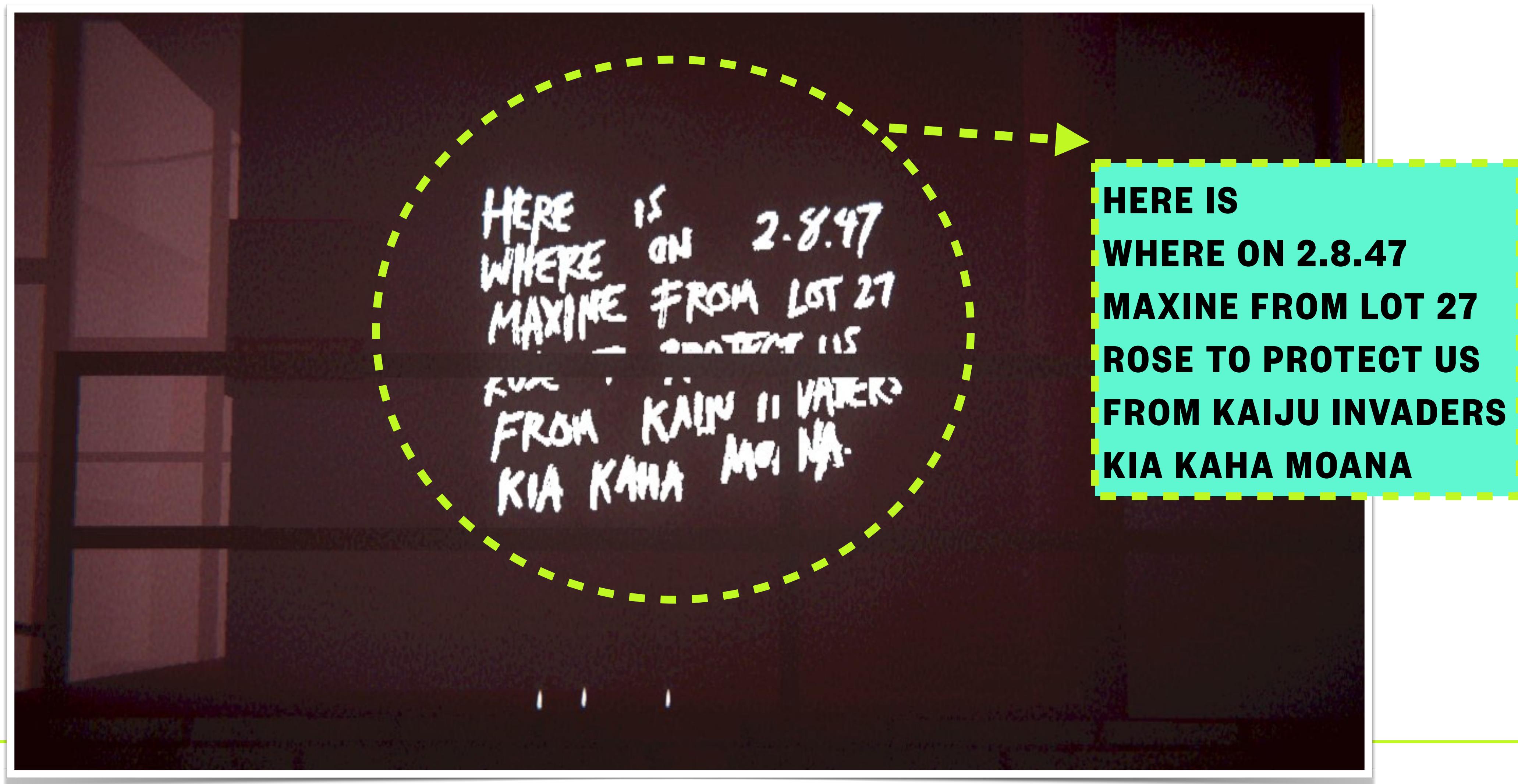
Bottom-up language



Bottom-up language



Bottom-up language



Bottom-up language



Bottom-up language



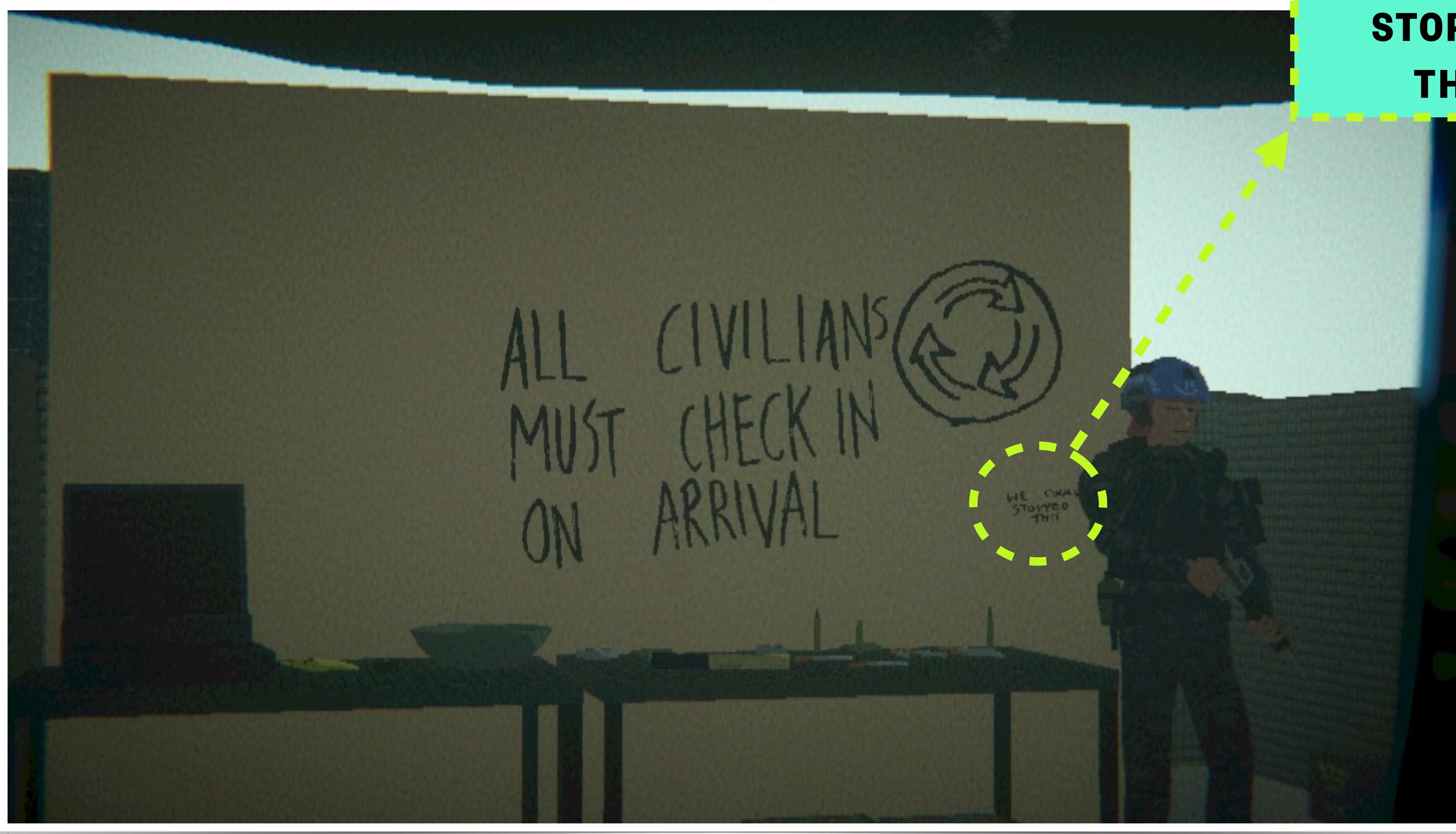
Bottom-up language



Dialogicality

- Graffiti and other bottom-up language adding to or recontextualizing top-down language
- Narratively demonstrates resistance to UN occupation

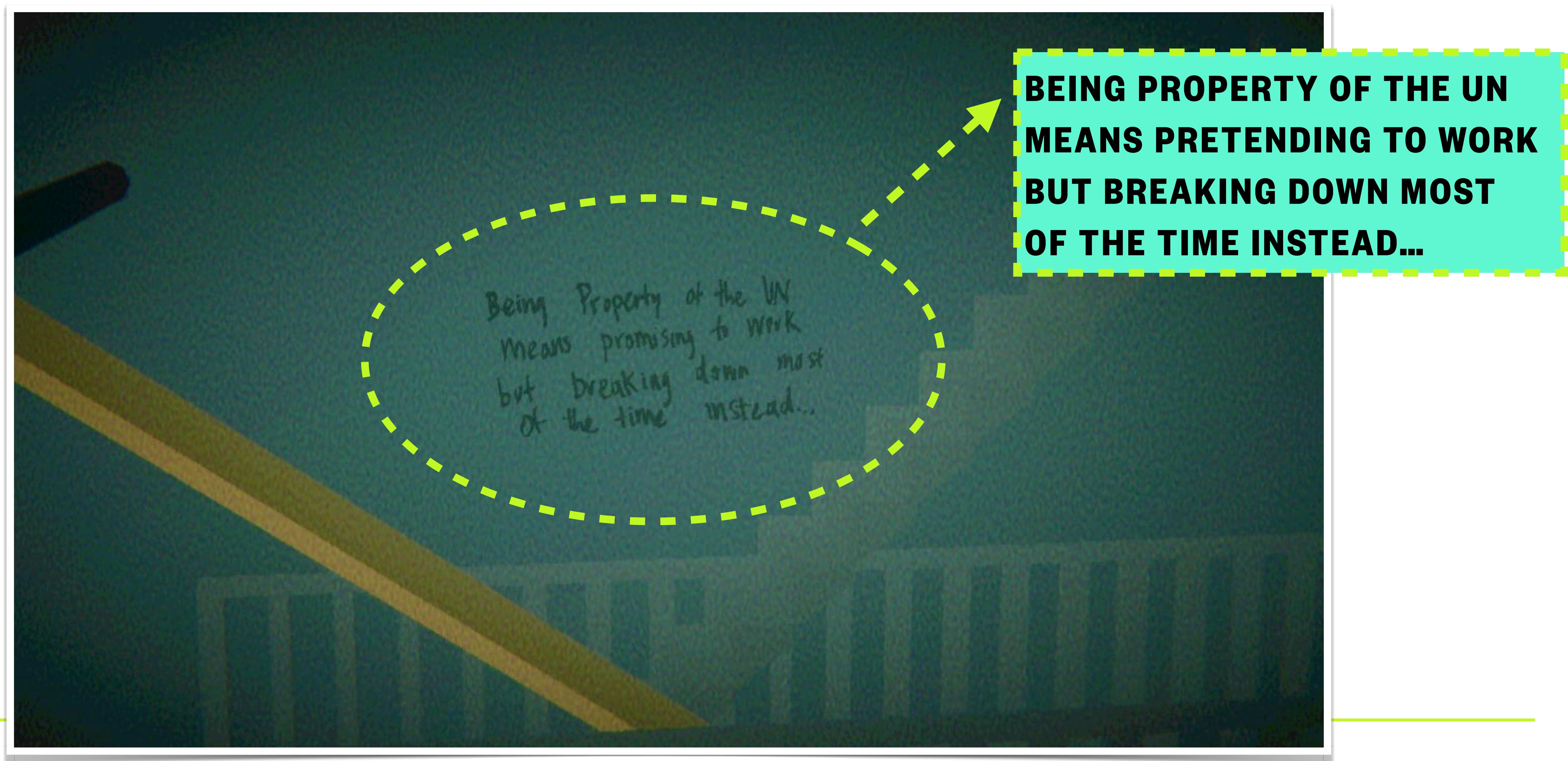
Dialogicality



Dialogicality



Dialogicality



Techno-Orientalism

- Particular use of Japanese (and Korean and Chinese) in top-down language
- Narratively contextualizes this imagined future in terms of techno-Orientalist (Roh et al. 2015) tropes and anxieties

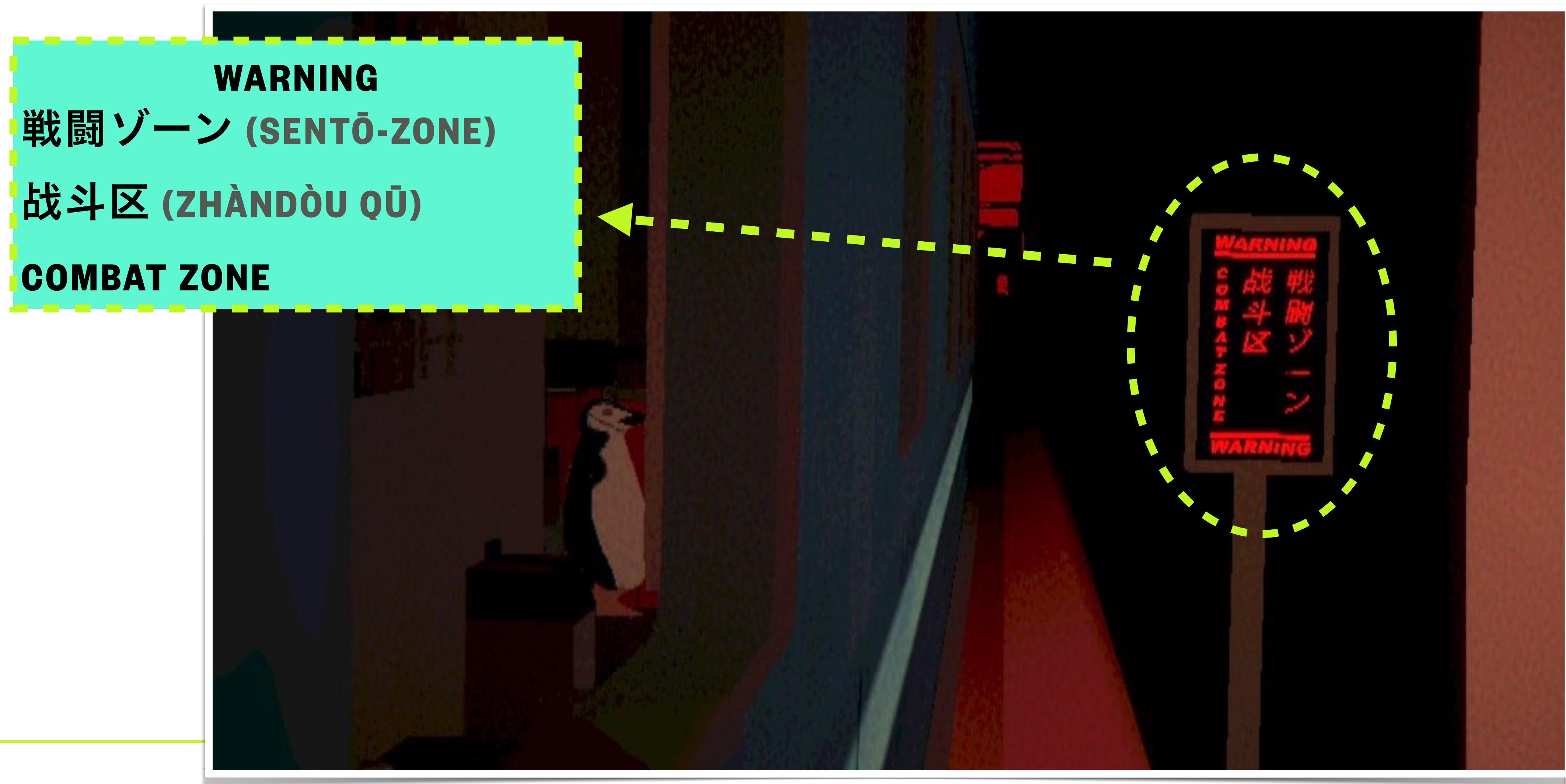
Techno-Orientalism



Techno-Orientalism



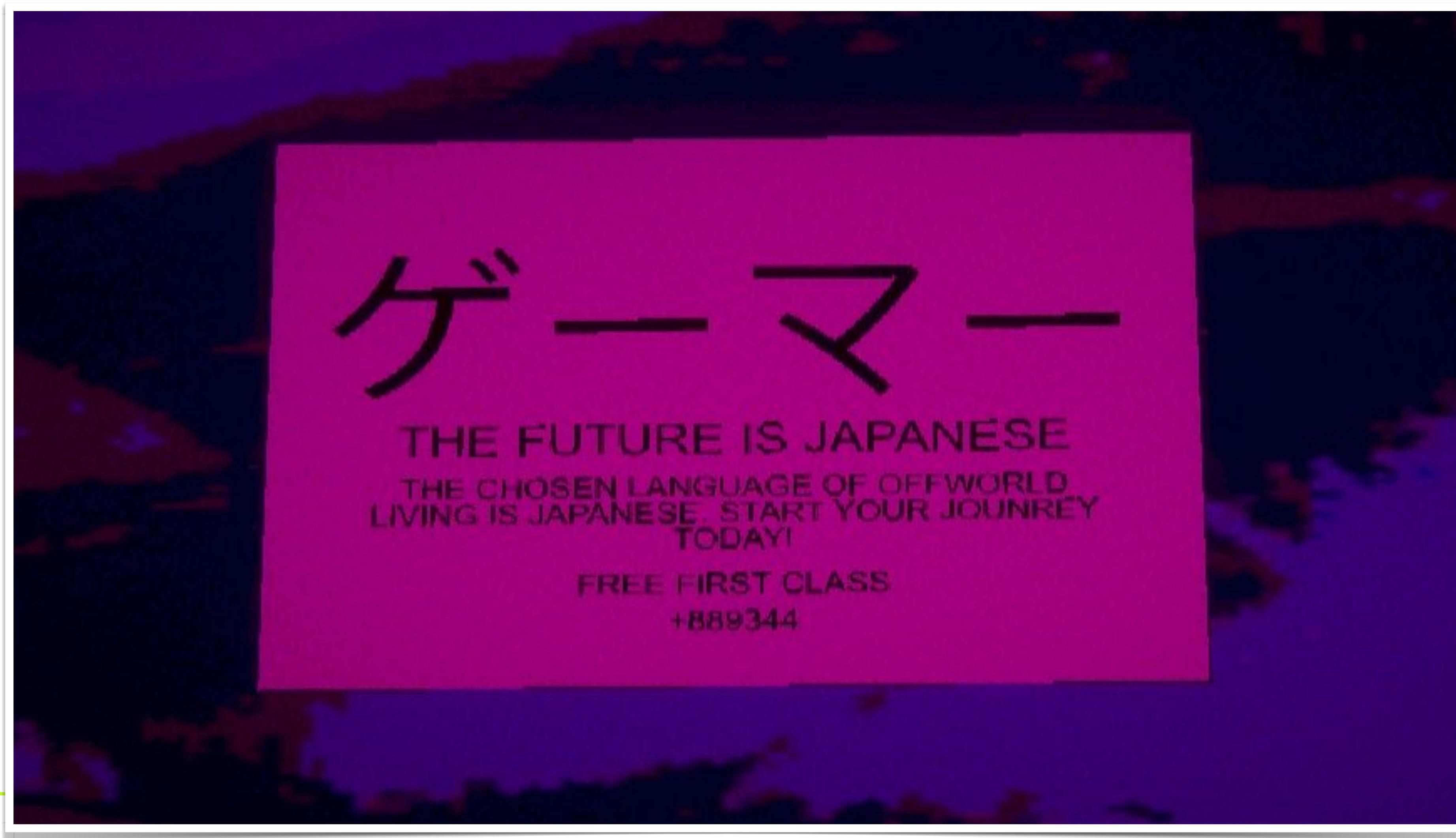
Techno-Orientalism



Techno-Orientalism



Techno-Orientalism





Linguistic landscapes as narrative

- Not only what's written, but meaningful visual arrangement of language(s) in virtual space
- Real-world language ideologies and indexicalities
- Centers Respectful Design
 - Gameplay instantiation of indigenous futurisms ([Henry 2022](#)) in narrative
- Affordances of gameplay:
 - Ludo-linguistic landscapes

Ludolinguistic landscapes

- “Linguistic landscapes as shaped by gameplay”
- How gameplay focuses and guides player attention and experience in terms of LL, ludically
- Umurangi Generation:
 - Photo bounties
 - Prompts, angles, lenses
 - Creative freedom within parameters

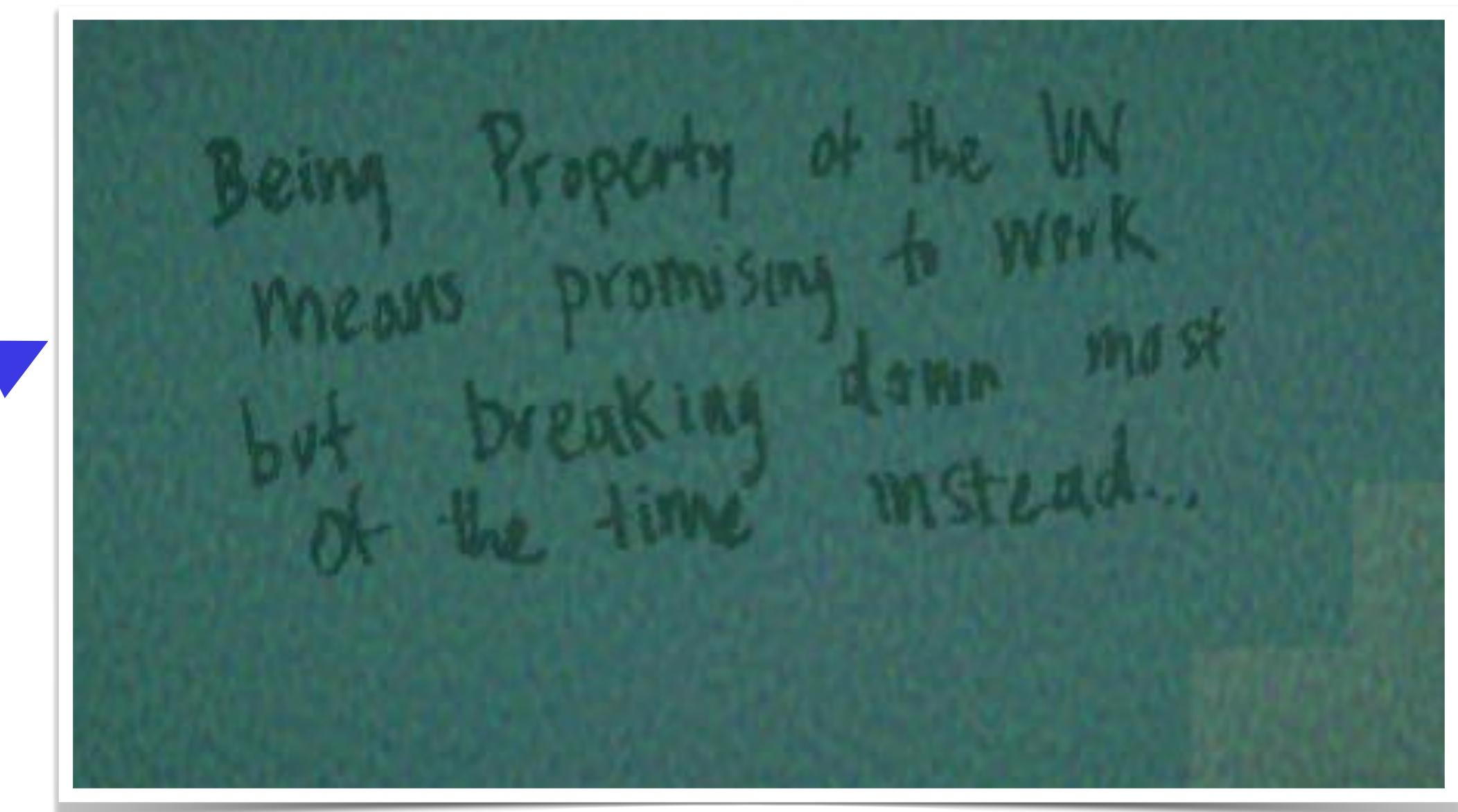
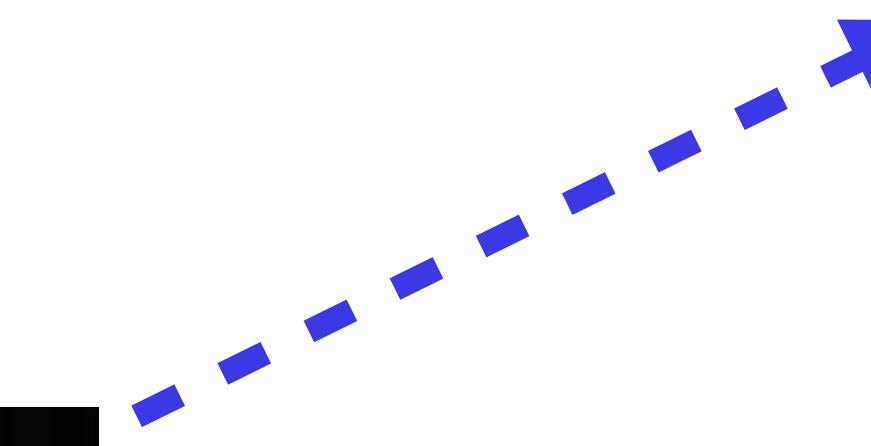


Ludolinguistic landscapes

🔍 Sarcastic 'Property of the UN'

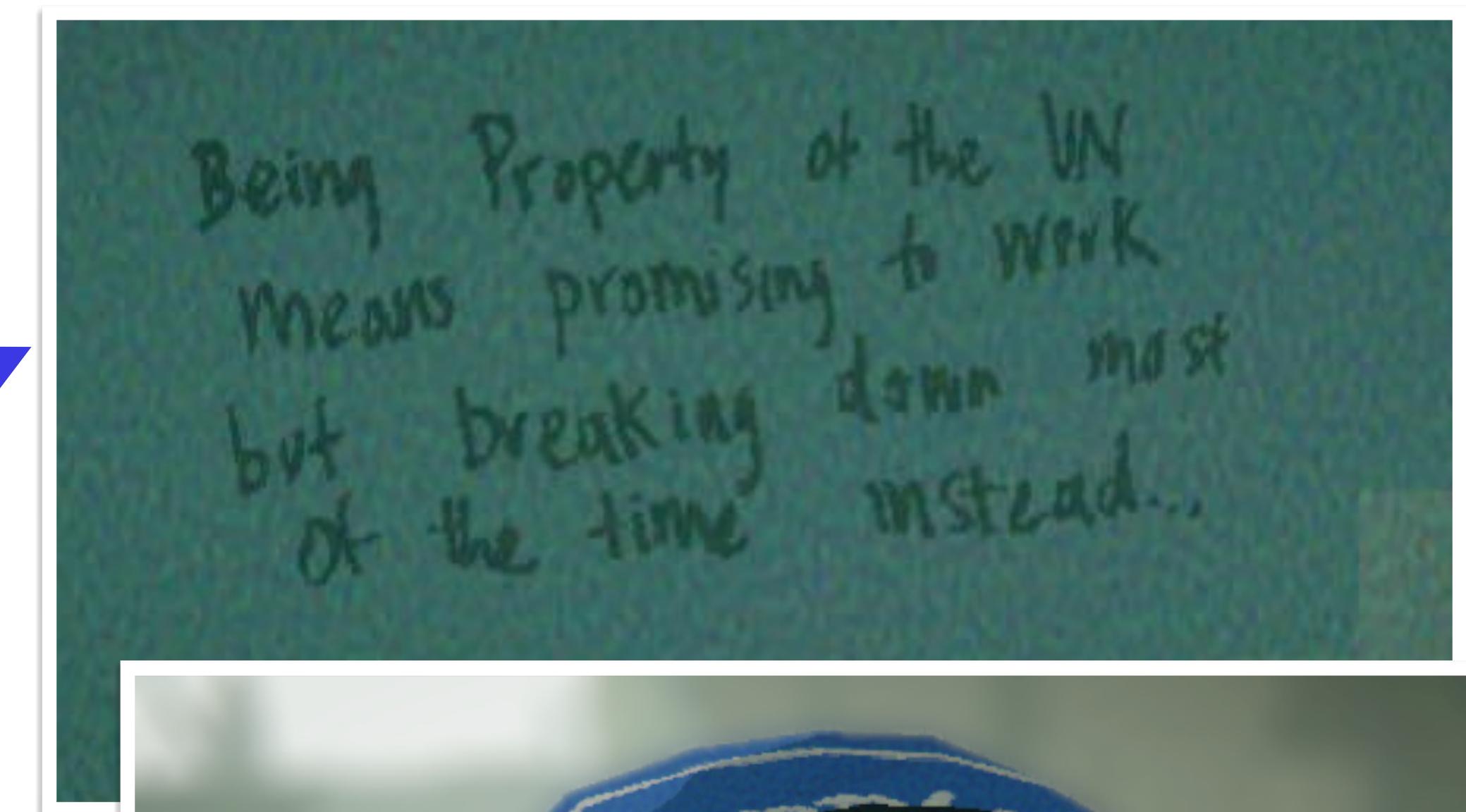
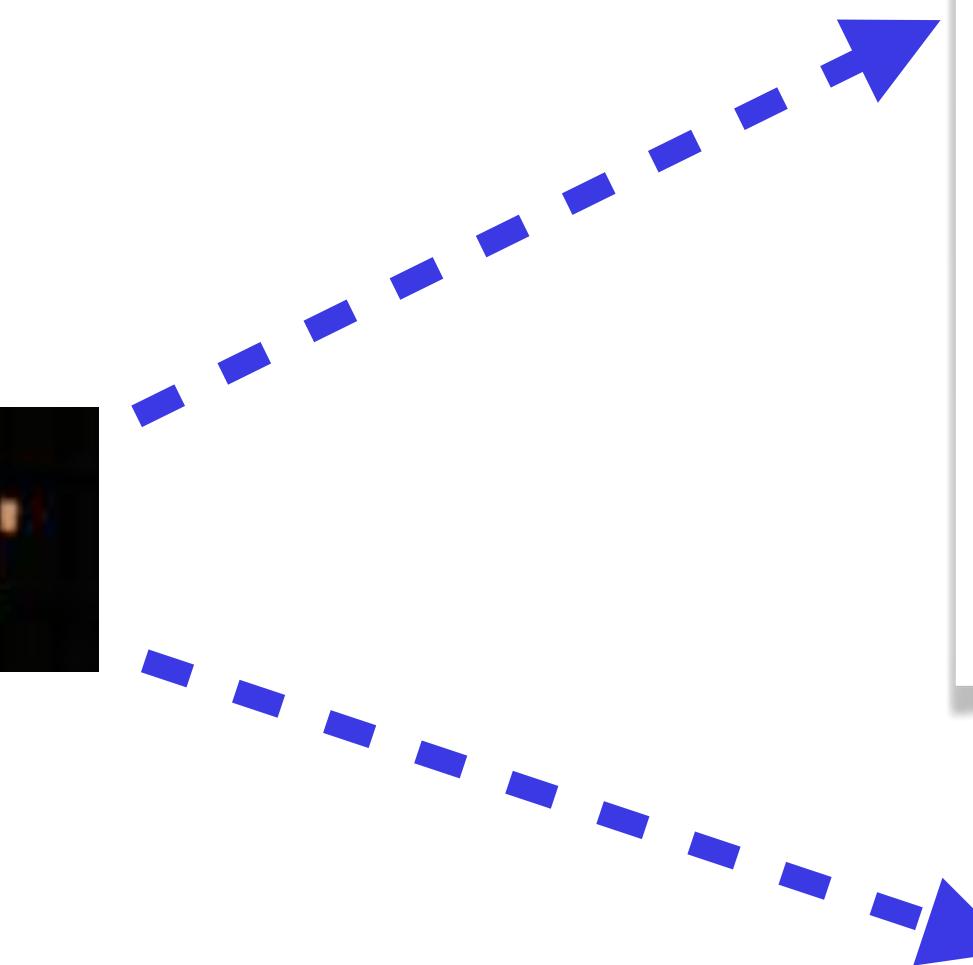
Ludolinguistic landscapes

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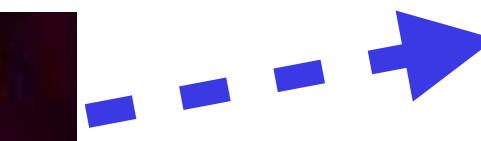


Ludolinguistic landscapes

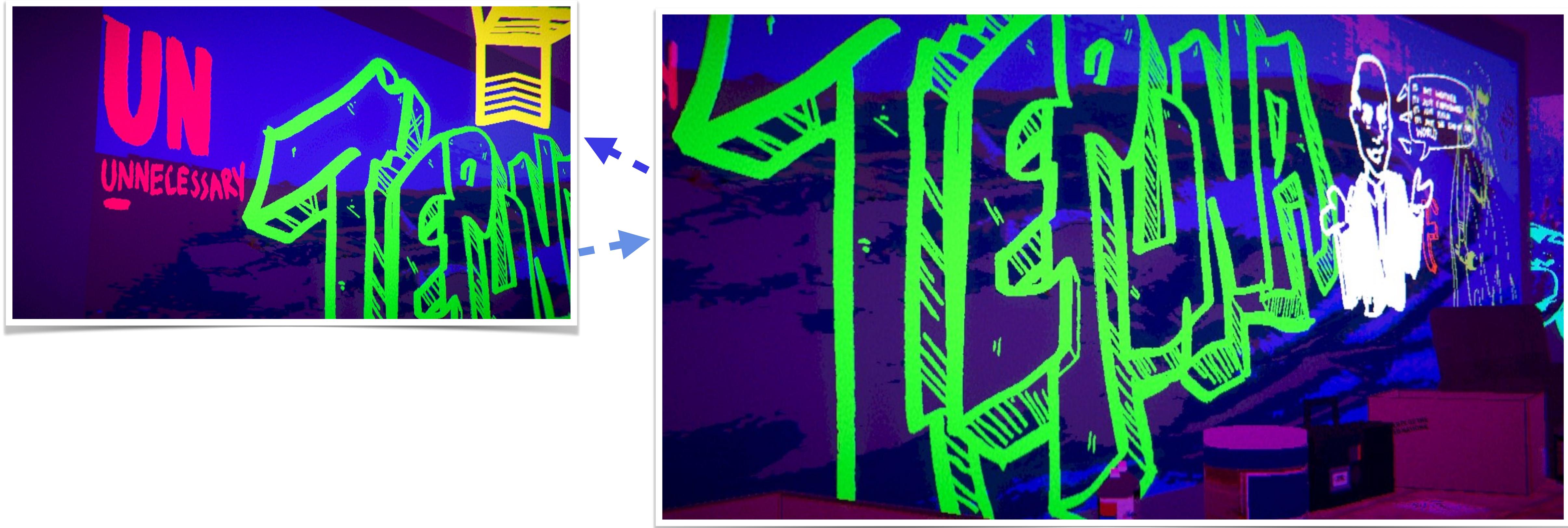
The word 'Tepuna'

Ludolinguistic landscapes

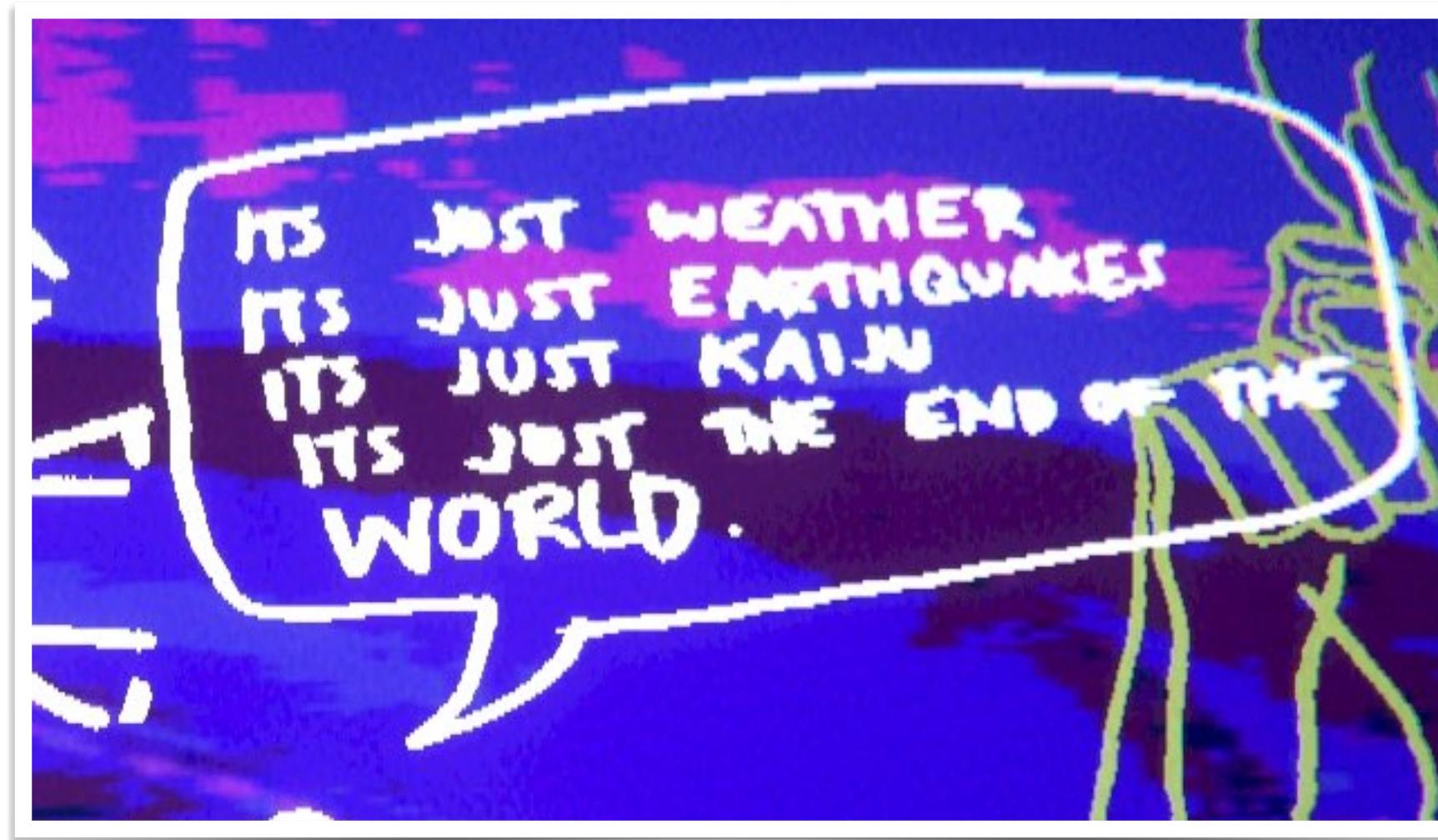
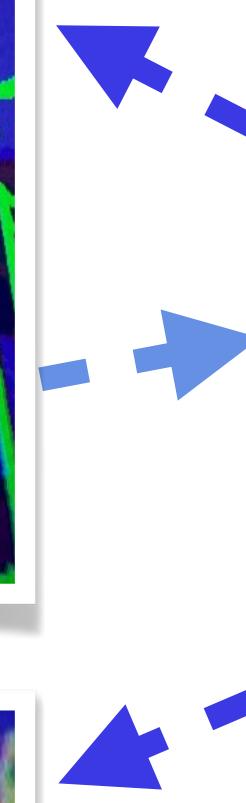
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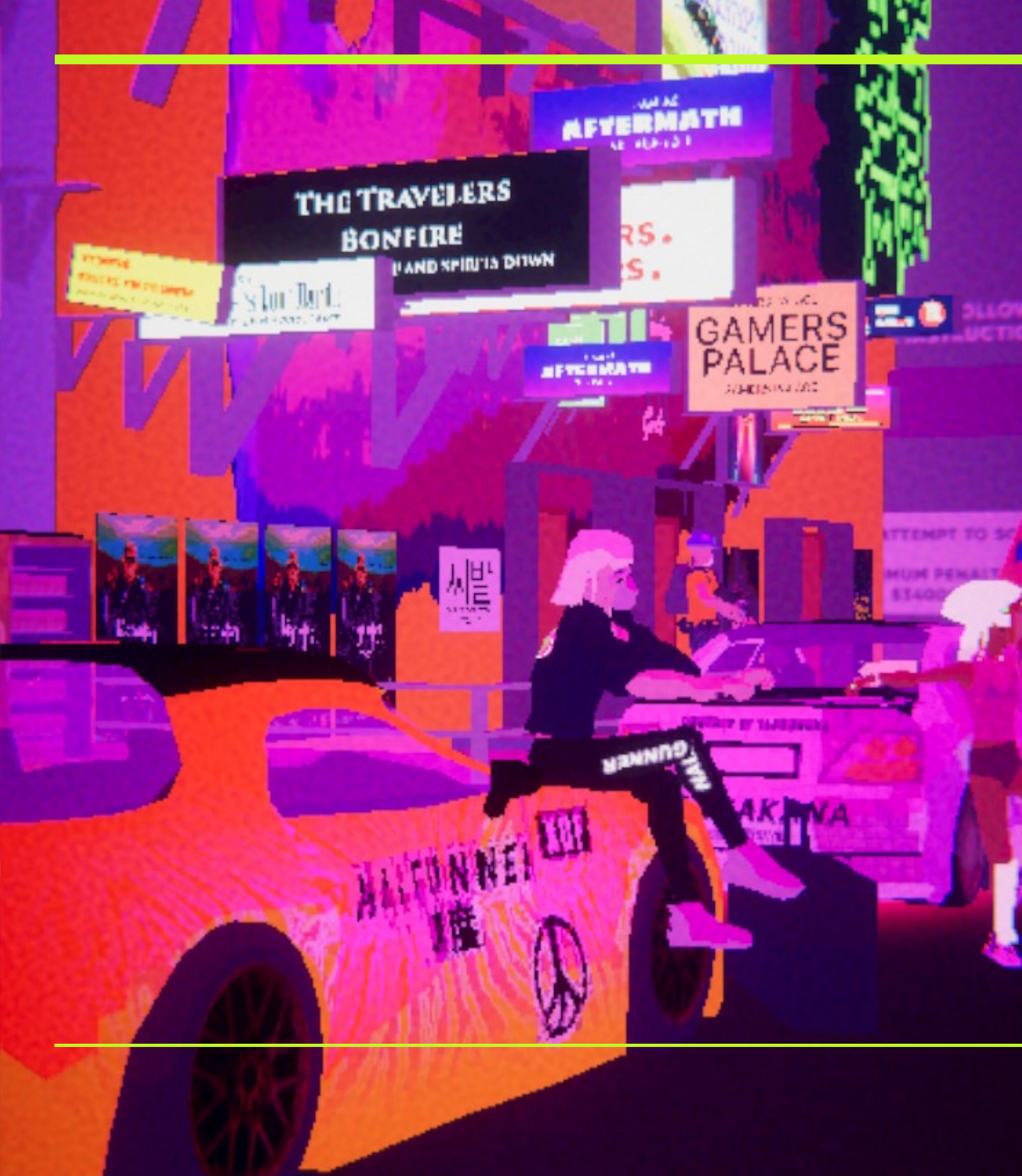


Ludolinguistic landscapes



Ludolinguistic landscapes





Conclusions

- Linguistic landscapes are **central to narrative design** in Umurangi Generation
- **Imagined future** created through real-world linguistic indexicalities of the present
- LL as **decolonizing game design**
- **Ludolinguistic landscapes**
 - Beyond Umurangi Generation

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Thank you! / Grazie!
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