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## Of Dying Machines and Grievable Digital Lives — Framing War and Life in *NieR:Automata*

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### Summary

War and death are common topics in popular culture. In war-themed digital games, reflections on armed conflict and its atrocities vary greatly, ranging from games that trivialize the consequences of killing and loss to ones that offer critical perspectives on the player's actions instead. In this paper we analyze the 2017 war-themed game *NieR:Automata* (Platinum Games) which revolves around an endless war between androids and other machines in a distant future. We focus on how the game reflects on war and death, showing that it discusses these topics in complex ways. At the beginning of the game, *NieR:Automata* illustrates how during war enemies are framed as “non-lives” that need to be exterminated. Gradually, however, the game questions these framings and depicts machines as lives that are vulnerable and that may be grieved for. While *NieR:Automata* at first applies genre-typical frames of death and makes the reversibility of the latter explicit in ludic and narrative elements of the game, it later introduces permanent loss of protagonists, antagonists, and — in the end — also the save files. The game therefore discusses the vulnerable and hence grievable lives of machines, offering rich perspectives on life in war.

**Keywords:** NieR:Automata, war-themed games, war games, death, vulnerability, game-like realism, Japanese games, digital games

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