



September, 2015

On Videogames:

Representing Narrative in an Interactive Medium.

**'This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy'**

Dawn Catherine Hazel Stobart,
Ba (Hons) MA

Plagiarism Statement

This project was written by me and in my own words, except for quotations from published and unpublished sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such. I am conscious that the incorporation of material from other works or a paraphrase of such material without acknowledgement will be treated as plagiarism, subject to the custom and usage of the subject, according to the University Regulations on Conduct of Examinations.

(Name) Dawn Catherine Stobbart

(Signature)

This thesis is formatted using the Chicago referencing system.

Where possible I have collected screenshots from videogames as part of my primary playing experience, and all images should be attributed to the game designers and publishers.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who have been instrumental in the production of this thesis, and without whom I would not have made it to the end.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Kamilla Elliott, for her continuous and unwavering support of my Ph.D study and related research, for her patience, motivation, and commitment. Her guidance helped me throughout all the time I have been researching and writing of this thesis. When I have faltered, she has been steadfast in my ability. I could not have imagined a better advisor and mentor.

I would not be working in English if it were not for the support of my Secondary school teacher Mrs Lishman, who gave me a love of the written word. This love was nurtured during my undergraduate degree by Dr. Stephen Longstaffe, who helped me turn it into something I can see myself doing for the rest of my life. Thank you both for showing me how wonderful literature really is!

I would also like to thank my colleagues at Lancaster University, who accepted me as a peer, and widened my scope of academic study further than I thought was possible.

Special thanks are given to my wife, Jane Peet. You gave me the confidence to begin, and have helped me believe, every time I began to think I could not do it. Without you, I would still be dreaming, not doing.

I owe the genesis of this project to my father, James Stobbart, who shared his love of gaming, and did not mind that I hovered at his shoulder when he was playing. Special thanks are needed for my mother, who let me be me, no matter what I was doing.

And finally, to my children Lyssa, Nevyn, and Anya. In you I see a tomorrow that shines brightly. The belief you have in me, and the support you have given me, is something I will treasure forever.

Dawn Catherine Hazel Stobbart. Ba (Hons) MA

On Videogames: Representing Narrative in an Interactive Medium

'This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy'

September 2015

Abstract

This thesis investigates the function of narrative in videogames, challenging views that games do not—and should not—have anything to do with narrative. It tests videogames against literary narrative theories and examines ways in which videogames have evolved beyond other narratives and narrative theories.

The narrative vs. ludology debate among videogame scholars has, at its core, the question of whether narrative is possible in videogames. Ludologists, who prioritize videogames as *games*, argue that narrative is incompatible with play, both interrupting and interfering with it. My research suggests that videogames often render narrative and play symbiotic, even inseparable, as the act of playing reveals and produces videogame narrative. Other objections to videogame narrative include the argument that videogame narrative is less sophisticated than narrative forms in other media. My thesis demonstrates that some videogames contain narrative every bit as complex as those in literature and film, holding up to rigorous testing by complex narratological theories. It further shows that changes in videogame technology and design have brought about evolutions in narrative that are the result of playing rather than being at odds with it.

As narrative has evolved in videogames beyond its manifestations in older media, narrative theories developed to account for older media prove to be inadequate to explicate videogame narratives. The introduction and first chapter of the thesis delineate these issues, theories, and debates. The remaining chapters probe how videogame narrative unfolds in specific areas, such as identity and identification, the navigation of narrative space, narrative agency and authority, consumer ethics, and concepts of death and genre. Finally, the thesis considers the endings of videogames and how death is presented and represented in this medium. My conclusion summarises my own work and suggests possibilities for future studies of videogame narratives.

Contents

Introduction	10
Methodology, Materials, Limitations	17
Chapter Summaries	22
Chapter 1: Definitions and Debates	25
Definitions and Terminology	25
A Brief History of Videogames	32
A Brief History of Videogame Scholarship	38
Play as Narrative Immersion	45
Ludonarrative Dissonance	50
Juul’s Rules: Videogames and Classic Game Theory	51
Aristotle’s Rules: Videogames and Classical Narrative Theory	58
Conclusion	60
Chapter 2: Narratology in Videogames—<i>Assassin’s Creed 2</i>	61
Genette’s Narratological Levels and Videogame Levels	62
Beyond Classical Narratology: Ludology and Time in Videogames	70
Movement Across a Narrative: Temporality in Videogames	74
Flash Back – Or Forward: Prolepsis and Analepsis in Videogame Narratives	81
Conclusion	84
Chapter 3: Narratives of Space in Videogames	85
Letters to Esther: Experimental Narrative Techniques in <i>Dear Esther</i>	97
Conclusion	112
Chapter 4: Identification and Identity in Videogames	114
Focalisation	118
Perspective	124
Third-person Perspective	125
Second-person Perspective	131
First-person Perspective	135
Decentred Point Of View	141
Evolution: The Decentred View in <i>Lara Croft</i>, the Novel, Film, and Videogame Franchise	143
Identification, Replay, Avatars, and Authorship	148
Part 2:	157
Gaming and Narrative Ideology	157

Chapter 5: Ideology, Identity Politics, and Identification	158
Gendered Identity and Identification	163
Birth and Rebirth – Maternality in <i>Tomb Raider</i>	169
Sexual Identity and Identification in Videogames	173
Identity Politics and Identification in Videogames	174
Self-Reflexivity in <i>Spec Ops: The Line</i>	175
Conclusion	184
Chapter 6: The Purpose of Play?: Choice and Morality, in Videogames	187
‘We All Make Choices’: <i>Bioshock</i> and Ideological Decisions	191
‘A Man Chooses. A Slave Obeys’: Playing Political Ideology in <i>Bioshock</i>	198
‘Would you kindly ...’	201
The Great Chain	206
Ludic Critique of Rand	208
Frank Fontaine – The Destroyer of a Utopia	209
Conclusion	211
Chapter 7: The Only Way is Ethics: Videogames, Choice, and Society	214
Human Revolution?	218
Joining in the Debate	224
‘Be Careful Adam, Because Everybody Lies’: Who to Believe In <i>Deus Ex: Human Revolution</i>	228
‘I’m a Father Too ...’: Personal Choices in <i>Heavy Rain</i>	231
The Setting of <i>Heavy Rain</i>	233
The Trials of Ethan Mars	236
Whodunnit?: Discovering the Identity of the Killer	240
Conclusion	241
Chapter 8: Endings	243
Tragic and Comic Narrative Endings in Videogames	246
Life After Death	255
Famous Last Words: Narrative Closure	255
Sequels	263
Single or Multiple Endings?	265
Alternative Endings	270
Fragmented Narratives and Non-linear Endings	272
Conclusion	274
Conclusion	277
Limitations of the Thesis	283

Future Study	284
Bibliography	285

Figure 1: <i>Adventure</i> screenshot	48
Figure 2: Opening of <i>The Walking Dead</i>	53
Figure 3: <i>Super Mario Bros. 3</i> Map	63
Figure 4: ‘Mockingbird’ Cut-scene	90
Figure 5: The Washington Monument In <i>Fallout 3</i> (Left); The Monument Today (Right)	94
Figure 6: Opening shot of <i>Dear Esther</i>	100
Figure 7: Surgical Equipment on the Island.....	103
Figure 8: Stone Circle	104
Figure 9: Underground Cavern	105
Figure 10: Omniscient Camera View	121
Figure 11: <i>Super Mario World</i>	128
Figure 12: <i>Super Mario U</i>	129
Figure 13: <i>Alice in Wonderland, 1903</i>	130
Figure 14: <i>Zork</i> Screenshot, Featuring Second-Person Perspective	132
Figure 15: <i>Doom</i> Screenshot, Featuring Second-Person Narration	134
Figure 16: First-person Perspective in <i>Bioshock</i>	137
Figure 17: Looking Over Lara's Shoulder.....	142
Figure 18: Over-the-Shoulder Shot	144
Figure 19: Reverse Angle Shot.....	145
Figure 20: <i>Space Invaders</i> Screenshot	152
Figure 21: <i>Daily Mirror</i> Front Page, 18 September 2013.....	160
Figure 22 Lara Croft, 1996-2008	165
Figure 23: Activated 'Nude Raider' Patch.....	166
Figure 24: Lara Croft Comparison 2013 and 1996.....	167
Figure 25: Lara Emerging from the Tomb.....	171
Figure 26: <i>Call of Duty 4</i> : ‘Death from Above’ Mission	179
Figure 27: <i>Spec Ops: The Line</i> , White Phosphorus Mission.....	179
Figure 28: Victims of White Phosphorus	181
Figure 29: <i>Spec Ops</i> Loading Screen	182
Figure 30: Atlas Holding Up the World.....	193
Figure 31: Hidden Rapture	194
Figure 32: Anti-Religious Banner in Rapture	197
Figure 33: ‘Would You Kindly’ in Introduction	203
Figure 34: Flashback to the Introduction and Entire Message	203
Figure 35: Atlas/Frank Fontaine	211
Figure 36: Post Augmentation Jensen.....	218
Figure 37: The Striking Gold and Black Colour Scheme Omnipresent in the Game.....	224
Figure 38: <i>Deus Ex</i> Trailer.....	225
Figure 39: <i>The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp</i>	225
Figure 40: Icarus Imagery in <i>Deus Ex</i>	226
Figure 41: Bright Setting Of Prologue	235
Figure 42: Noir Colour Scheme Of Main Game.....	235
Figure 43: <i>Doom</i> 's health status bar.....	249
Figure 44: Chronological View of the <i>Beyond: Two Souls</i> Narrative	273

Video game *n.* a game played by electronically manipulating images displayed on a television screen.

Narrative, *n.* An account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account.

(OED Online 2011)

Introduction

The old and new game components, their dynamic combination and distribution, the registers, the necessary manipulation of temporal, causal, spatial and functional relations and properties not to mention the rules and the goals and the lack of audience should suffice to set games and the gaming situation apart from narrative and drama, and to annihilate for good the discussion of games as stories, narratives or cinema.

—Eskelinen, *Gamestudies*

Explicit in-game narrative can at best only play a superficial role, e.g., as a largely linear layer on top pure gameplay.

—Mateas & Stern, *Build It to Understand It*

As the epigraphs highlight, the presence of narrative in videogames has been contentious. It has been variously denied, ridiculed, and treated as a superficial element of the medium in the brief time since ludology was conceived by Game Studies scholars in the late twentieth century. Just as narratology was born of a desire to understand narrative through the analysis and exploration of its various structural components, ludology is an endeavour, by Game Studies scholars, to understand its gaming

components. The word ludology itself was initially defined by Gonzalo Frasca to refer to the yet non-existent ‘discipline that studies game and play activities’ (Frasca 1999). In the early years of Games Studies, some scholars saw that their primary task to wrest videogames from narrative Media Studies and did this by stressing differences between games and narratives, although some conceded that they ‘share some structural similarities’ (Frasca 1999), and although this position has mellowed somewhat, some Game Studies scholars are still resistant to the presence of narrative in videogames, just as some literary and narrative scholars are.

The primary goal of this thesis is not only to join other challenges being made to attacks on narrative in videogames, but also to show that studying narrative in videogames is essential to understanding them *as games* as well as representational forms. This allows me to argue that studying narrative in videogames is essential to understanding how narrative is metamorphosing through gaming.

I bring to this study more than thirty years of playing videogames. My involvement with the medium as a gamer predates my academic interest in videogame narrative; I have been involved with them from their infancy as text based games, growing up alongside them. I have witnessed first-hand the change from stories in videogames being used to justify ludic structures with little or no regard for narrative, to designers creating games that rely wholly on narrative for their construction, justification, and ludic success. My co-evolution as a gamer, therefore, brings added dimensions to my scholarship, which is based in practice-led research as well as academic study.

Scholarship is only just beginning to address the narrative dimensions of videogames, though resistance has been strenuous. In the late 1990s, critics such as Jesper Juul, Espen Aarseth, and Frasca Gonzala began to define and study videogames

as forms of play, positioning them as a sub-field of Game Studies and focusing on the study of ‘game and play activities’ (Frasca 1999) in electronic games and as a continuation of traditional games and gaming. The emphasis in Game Studies is on rules of play rather than narrative structures, and whilst ludology has flourished in this field, videogame narratives have not been treated with the same interest or enthusiasm as narratives are in other media. However, as more and more games are created specifically to foreground narrative, such as *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment 2010), *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013), and *Beyond: Two Souls* (Quantic Dream 2013), a general agreement that narrative *is* important has been gradually emerging. Even so, some academics and journalists still maintain that ‘games are not a storytelling medium, no matter what people say’ (Kelly 2011). Moreover, while videogames *are* now being studied in Game Studies, Narrative Studies, and Media Studies, the scholarship of their narrative remains embryonic compared to narrative scholarship of media in other disciplines, due to its relative newness and the need for an expanded methodology; this thesis aims to redress some of that neglect.

Prior scholarship on videogames has been viewed chiefly from psychological, sociological, or Game Studies perspectives rather than humanities or narrative ones. For example, Christopher Engelhardt *et al*’s psychological study contends that exposure to violence in videogames causes desensitization to violence in the real world, which increases aggression in individuals (Engelhardt, et al. 2011). Karen Dill, having conducted psychological experiments to measure the aggression resulting from playing violent videogames, judges that videogames induce ‘anti-woman attitudes including attitudes supporting violence against women [including the acceptance of] rape myths (such as the ideas that women enjoy sexual force, that men should dominate women sexually and that women who say ‘no’ are simply engaging in ‘token refusals’) (Dill

2007, 4). Since these and other scholars such as Marcus Schulzke (2010), David Waddington (2007), Henry Jenkins (who does not believe that there is a correlation between violence and playing videogames) (2008), the BBC (BBC 2015), and even the US Supreme Court (Ferguson 2013) have attended extensively to the relationship between playing videogames and violent behaviour in the real world, and because their research questions lie beyond my own interests and disciplinary expertise, this thesis will not be replicating or heavily engaging with social sciences, psychological, and sociological studies. However, it will be addressing the politics of videogames in relationship to narrative and ludology, since a central argument of this thesis is that ludology and narratology are inseparable and that it is ludology as well as technology, with their shared emphases on immersion and interactivity, which have enabled the evolution of narrative perspectives in videogames. I want to stress that by ‘evolution’, I do not necessarily mean progress or improvement. Instead, I mean that videogames engage all of the narrative structures and techniques used by older narrative media such as fiction, film, and television and that their ludic structures, and the technologies that enable them, create narrative modes not available to older media. It is in this sense that videogames have evolved beyond prior media, not necessarily in their ideological narrative sense; a quantitative rather than qualitative development.

I am, of course, not the first scholar to consider the importance of narrative in videogames. Scholars such as Barry Atkins, Jim Bizzocchi, Tom Calvert, Tanya Krzywinska, Michael Nitsche, Marie-Laure Ryan, Gordon Calleja, and Huaxin Wei consider narrative to be present in, and an important facet of, videogame analysis. Indeed, Calleja considers the role of narrative and narrative theory in relation to videogames through his work, as does Krzywinska in her collaborative work with Geoff King *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: Videogame Forms and Contexts* (King &

Krzywinska, 2005) and more recently in *Ring Bearers: The Lord of the Rings Online as Intertextual Narrative* (Krzywinska, Parsler, & MacCallum-Stewart, 2012). However, most of the analysis of videogames as narrative artefacts is centred on specific aspects of narrative and gameplay, such as the relationship between time, space, and narrative (for example, *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Worlds* (Nitsche 2005) *Time and Space in Digital Storytelling* (Wei, Bizzocchi and Calvert 2010) and *Embedded Narrative in Game Design* (Wei 2010)) and on narrative in videogame design rather than on a narratological consideration of the content of videogames.

I would like to begin by introducing what I mean when referring to a narrative based videogame, which will be expanded in chapter 1's discussion of definitions. Titles such as *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) and *Alan Wake* differ from 'video games' as defined by the *OED* and Jesper Juul, which are primarily competitive and rule based. In contrast to rule-based games, *Heavy Rain* is designed to be 'an emotional experience, an emotional journey based on immersion' (Kendal 2010), while *Alan Wake* is marketed as a 'psychological thriller' on the official website for the game (Remedy Entertainment 2012). Whilst containing ludic components that are integral to the delivery of the narrative, these games do not foreground the process of play as the sole, or even the most, important aspect of their make-up in the ways that traditional games do. Instead, they focus more on the narrative and the kinds of emotional experiences associated with narrative in the verbal and visual arts, emphasising the player's interaction with and participation in a *story*. As Deborah Mellamphy notes, 'the spectator's gaze becomes less passive as the spectator becomes a more active participant in the spectacle *and narrative*' of a videogame (Mellamphy 2013, (original emphasis)). Chapter 4 will have more to say on gamer identification.

My research aims in this thesis are two-fold. Firstly, I look at videogames through a narratological lens, considering them as specifically narrative artefacts rather than as games. This analysis will show that narrative, even traditionally viewed, is present in videogames. Secondly, I engage theories in which narrative is a primarily ideological affair, as in identity politics, to examine how videogames function narratively in that sense, although narrative structures and narrative ideologies, of course, overlap. My thesis argues that the merging of ludology and narrative results in *ludonarrative*, in which ludology is an integral method of narrative delivery. The chief aim of this thesis is to redress the imbalance and opposition between ludic and narratological approaches to videogames, arguing that videogames not only involve narratives, but also that they are influencing and driving the evolution of narrative. Exploring the extent to which narrative is present in videogames and how it functions in them, my thesis asks how videogames conform, or do not conform, to existing narrative theories that have been developed to address other media, and to consider what new theories of narrative are required to account for them. One of my central arguments throughout this work is that, although the technologies of videogames have produced tremendous evolution and progress in the variety of narratological structures they engage, their narrative ideologies and politics have remained atavistic and regressive, with few exceptions. Considering videogames ranging from early examples, *Spacewar!* (1961) and *Pong* (1972) to the latest releases, such as *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012), the *Assassin's Creed* franchise (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2013), *Alan Wake*, and *Heavy Rain*, the thesis assesses the usefulness of examining videogames both through narratology—developed by scholars such as Mieke Bal, Vladimir Propp, and Gérard Genette—and narrative theories and approaches that are more concerned with ideological content than formal structures,

established by scholars such as Seymour Chatman, James Phelan, and Wayne C Booth. Narrative is not simply a structural and formal matter; it is, as Roland Barthes (Barthes 1993) and many others have argued a cultural, ideological, and political affair. Using various narrative theories allows this study to investigate videogame narrative from a variety of viewpoints, establishing its diversity and richness, and supporting my hypothesis that, since videogames are relatively new forms of narrative and are illuminated by existing narrative theories, they require new theories and discourses to account for their narrative innovations.

While many critics have dismissed narratology as outmoded, there are three reasons why it is essential to this study and to my arguments. First, narratology, in spite of its perceived dismissal in Games Studies and its rejection by newer humanities theories, is a useful tool and indispensable starting point for my arguments about narrative in videogames. Indeed, this thesis contends that it is because narratology has not been applied to videogames in sufficient depth that scholars have discredited and dismissed the presence of narrative in videogames.¹ Secondly, narratology needs to be applied to videogames in order to understand how their narratives have evolved beyond traditional narratological models and narrative forms in other media. Thirdly, after exploring the pertinent aspects and limitations of narrative theories for videogames, I suggest ways in which these models need *themselves* to expand and adapt to explicate videogames more fully; the ongoing evolution of narrative in videogames calls for a similar evolution of narratological theory.

Not all evolutions in videogame narrative are innovative or progressive; ideologically and politically, videogame narratives are often conservative, even regressive. Because they can cost as much as a blockbuster film to create, and need

¹ There have been narratological studies of specific aspects of narrative in specific videogames, such as *Time and Space in Digital Game Storytelling* (Wei, Bizzocchi and Calvert 2010), and the work of Michael Nitsche but more work is needed.

extensive financial backing, this results in a majority of mainstream games conforming to financially successful predecessors that have proven to be economically viable. The most successful games are generally seen as the most violent and sexist; the production of sequels and establishment of franchises relating to these games therefore reinscribes these narrative ideologies, although my study also addresses independent games, such as *Flower* (thatgamecompany 2009), whose political messages are more progressive. My thesis juxtaposes the technological innovations of videogames to the cultural conservatism and stereotypes of their ideological narratives and, in its conclusion, ponders whether advances in technology and narratology have, paradoxically, contributed to ideological narrative regression, or whether such regression is simply the result of economics.

Methodology, Materials, Limitations.

In selecting videogames for analysis in this thesis, I have chosen to focus primarily on ‘triple A’ rated videogames: games that have a large budget, high levels of promotion, command the highest retail prices, and have a wide, global circulation. These games reflect the status of narrative in the high-end mainstream market, which has the largest number of players. I have also included some smaller games that have a specifically narrative focus in order to widen my arguments beyond the mainstream. Even with these parameters, I have had to be selective as to which videogames feature as case studies – with more than 140 releases in 2013 alone (Reilly 2013) and several thousand others prior to that (even without the inclusion of ‘indie’ games) no thesis could possibly cover them all. Within mainstream, high-end videogames, I omit most shooting games, such as the *Call of Duty*, *Halo*, and *Medal of Honour* franchises; these games, although containing narrative, focus more on the ludic elements and pay only secondary attention

to their narratives, although these are the ‘status quo’ games that *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager 2012) positions itself against, as I will argue in chapter 6. I also exclude simulation games, such as those involving sports and racing activities, as these are generally virtual representations of a real world activity and their engagement in narrative is limited.

My experience as a gamer is also central to determining which games I analyse; I have used my own playing experiences to assist in the selection of games that offer scope for different kinds of narrative analysis. Firstly, desktop research has been used to compile a list of potential case studies, using reviews and personal experience to aid my search. The resultant list was then reconsidered, using Gerard Genette’s chapter headings in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Genette 1980) to help me select the games that I believe would be the best case studies for narratological analysis. In addition to selecting games that might best enable their narratological analysis, I selected games that would enable scrutiny of how narrative ideology functions in videogames. Once I had outlined the structure of the thesis, the case studies were revisited and reconsidered for their relevance in each chapter. This has been an ongoing, evolving process, with new games being added to the thesis, and older ones being deemed less relevant and discarded as the thesis has progressed. Each of the videogames I use as case studies have been subject to a primary playing experience; that is, I have played them all, at least once. This gives me the ability to discover for myself the juxtaposition of ludology and narratology, and to investigate how immersion within a videogame works through play, rather than through observation. Whilst observing play and conducting qualitative and quantitative research is useful in other disciplines, for this study, personal and primary interaction with the texts are more relevant. A primary playing experience allows me to consider the role of ludic identification and how this

influences, challenges, and disrupts prior narrative ideologies. Furthermore, whilst this study of videogame criticism and theory sets narratology in dialogue with narrative ideology, the primary playing experience allows me to test theory with practice rather than imposing theory upon practice.

The scope of this thesis is limited to the study of narrative in videogames. It cannot and does not attempt to address every aspect of Genette's narratological system; I am not myself a narratologist but rather a critic seeking to understand how far Genette's theories can be applied to videogames, as well as their limitations. In the same way, the thesis cannot cover every aspect of narrative ideology, but can only select and probe a few aspects of this enormous field. The thesis also sets formal and ideological narrative theories in dialogue, with an aim to integrate both, and to inform narrative in videogames more broadly and generally.

This thesis focuses on the second-level narratives created by computer programming rather than the language of computer programming itself, which lies beyond my expertise and training. This is not to say, however, that programming is superfluous to the construction of narrative in videogames; as my thesis repeatedly demonstrates, the game design team is responsible for authoring a game text, and that includes its programming, which determines its ludic, aesthetics, narrative components, and the ways in which users can engage them. As the chapters expand in more detail, contemporary Triple A videogames have deviated from Juul's game models as technology, game design, and player expectations change. This thesis will demonstrate that videogames can be more narrative than ludic. As my thesis argues and Grant Tavinor explains, 'playing videogames, it turns out, does not necessarily amount to playing a game' (2009, 87).

My research extends from scholarship to blogs, as well as using videogames for my primary research materials. Whilst not usually used within academic studies, resources such as blogs allow me to consider how other players define and react to the games I use within this study. The expertise that other players bring to games and their own primary playing experiences also offers new avenues to explore, just as collaboration does in other disciplines. As the critical commentary of videogames in literary academia is limited, these sources are important to my understanding of the player involvement and narrative experience of videogames.

If a dependence on technology has worked to differentiate videogames from other games, it has also worked to make them more accessible and diverse, and to evolve their narratives beyond their forms in other media. Technological advances allow videogames to encompass a variety of media, including written text, film and video footage, music and other audio recordings, carrying them from games and Game Studies into other academic fields, including Narrative Studies and Media Studies. Their multimedial modes of delivery also mean that they can be played by many people, not just 'hard-core' gamers or computer programmers, as was the case only 30 years ago. Technological development has also expanded videogame consumption by making them available on a variety of platforms; they can be displayed on a dedicated screen attached to a handheld console, such as the Nintendo Gameboy, DS, or Playstation Vita, on television or computer screens, or on mobile phones and other handheld electronics, such as the iPhone and iPad and other 'smart' technology, a lot of which is considered essential everyday technology in the Twenty-First Century. Technology has thus increased access to videogames; where players once had to go to dedicated arcade halls or find a specialist shop, they can now utilise the Internet and various 'app' facilities to download videogames and play them almost anywhere. This means that videogames

are increasingly becoming more casual, accessible, and portable; many people have smart phones,² personal computers,³ and games consoles⁴ within easy reach on a daily basis. It is as easy in the Twenty-First century to pick up and play a videogame as it was to read a book in the nineteenth, or to watch a film or television in the Twentieth. Therefore, the ramifications of new videogame technologies for narrative are as far reaching as the introduction of the printing press in 1440, film in 1895, television in 1925, or the World Wide Web in 1989.

More fundamentally, this thesis will show that videogames themselves integrate ludology and narratology rather than oppose them; each feeds into and shapes the others. Tavinor claims that there are two ways that game designers are attempting to ‘reconcile the gaming and narrative aspects of videogames’: those who try to disguise the differences between narrative and gameplay and those who use gameplay to furnish strongly interactive narratives (Tavinor 2009, 120). Both of these methods are attempting to integrate narrative into videogames, rather than to treat either narrative or play as mutually exclusive to the creation of a successful videogame. Therefore, the levels of sophistication that these methods are engendering facilitate a literary, rather than ludic, analysis of the field.

Both ludic and narrative aspects of videogames continue to change rapidly: player-authored videogame narratives, although relatively rare, involve a method of narration that Murray considered impossible only fifteen years ago, when she stated that ‘unless the imaginary world [of videogames] is nothing more than a costume trunk of empty avatars, all of the interactor’s possible performances will have been called into being by the originating author’ (Murray 1997, 152). Today, players are able to play

² Apple sold 39.2 million iPhones in the Q4 of 2014 in the US, with a 38% market share of Smartphones in that quarter (Lowensohn 2014).

³ There were 306 million new PCs sold in 2014 (Mick 2015)

⁴ There were nearly 45 million consoles sold worldwide branded by Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo in 2014 (Statista 2015)

games in which they can author their own narratives, and interactivity has become increasingly popular and prevalent as simulation games such as *The Sims* (Electronic Arts 2001) have become one of Electronic Arts best-selling game franchises ever.⁵ The chapters that follow make clear that changing definitions and technologies of videogames and their engagement with other media mean that videogame scholarship benefits from being flexible and open to new developments, as and when they become apparent in this relatively novel field of study, rather than seeking to constrain the medium to universal principles, rules, or structures.

Chapter Summaries

Depending on the theoretical interests of the individual, some chapters will appeal more than others. Narratologists will find the first part of the thesis to be of use, whilst scholars who are interested in narrative ideology will gravitate more towards the second half of the thesis, where this is the dominant theme. Chapter One revisits earlier narratological and ludological approaches to videogame scholarship, situating this thesis within prior discourse to demonstrate the veracity of the thesis as part of Narrative Studies. Chapter Two considers the videogame as a specifically narratological artefact: using Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* as a template, the chapter analyses the videogame franchise *Assassin's Creed 2* (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2011), to ascertain whether the game can withstand a specifically narratological reading. In doing so, the chapter shows the strengths and weaknesses of using narratology to establish the presence of narrative in a videogame. Chapter Three explores the role of narrative space in videogames, and how interactions with a landscape, setting, and even building can bring about narrative understanding and cohesion. Chapter Four rounds

⁵ *The Sims*, the first game in the franchise, has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide at a retail cost of over \$2.5 billion (Terdiman 2009).

off the specifically narratological section of the thesis, using narrative theory to examine identification, probing focalisation and perspective in videogames as a narrative device, establishing a further perspective viewpoint that is dominant in videogames: the decentred perspective. The second section of the thesis begins with Chapter Five, changing the focus from narratology to narrative ideology, and returning to identification as a representation of complex ideas, histories, worlds, and value systems that invite the player to engage with systems that contain belief structures that the player may not share. Chapter six looks more widely at the ideological structure of a society, and how players own judgements in a fictional world can be formed through interacting with videogames that espouse different ideological processes, conducting an in depth reading of *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), an adaptation of Ayn Rand's 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 2007). Chapter seven continues this theme, considering choice and ethical actions societally, before going on to consider how these actions affect the individual personally. Chapter eight finishes the thesis with a study of videogames and endings: narrative, ludic, and cultural. As a whole, this thesis is designed to establish and interrogate the concept of the videogame as a narrative carrier, in a specifically narrative capacity, reflecting the growing prominence of the range of narratives that are found in videogames in the Twenty-First Century.

Part One:
Narratology and
Formal Narrative
Structures

Chapter 1: Definitions and Debates

The opening chapter of this thesis is concerned with defining the key terms that will be used throughout its entirety, as well as revisiting earlier debates over narratological and ludological approaches to videogames in light of recent developments in videogame technology, design, narrative, and genre. This will establish the veracity of the thesis as part of Narrative Studies, as opposed to Game Studies (although I would like to stress that it does not reject Game Studies as a valid model of analysis). I begin with definitions of the primary terminology that will be used in the thesis.

Definitions and Terminology

One of the first tasks for the scholar considering narrative in videogames is to define exactly what is meant by key terms, such as narrative and videogame, and even basic terms such as text. As this is primarily a narrative based thesis, I begin with narratology. Defined as ‘the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that tell a story’ (Bal 2009, 3), narratology is part of the structuralist movement in the humanities, becoming a distinct subdiscipline in the late 1960s after Tzvetan Todorov’s invocation of the term in ‘*Grammaire du Décaméron* found wide international acceptance’ (Kindt and Muller 2003, v-vi). The discipline was initially ‘heavily influenced by Russian and Czech Formalism and structural linguistics’ (*ibid*), with ‘French narrative theory [in the form of scholars such as] Barthes, Kristeva, Todorov and others’ (*ibid*) leading the field, and culminating in the more accessible work of scholars such as Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal. Bal considers

narratology to be ‘the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that ‘tell a story’ (Bal 2009, 3) and as part of her introduction to *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, uses the multiple interpretations of the term ‘subject’ to illustrate the confusion that different understandings of a term can bring, thereby highlighting the importance of establishing what is meant by a term (Bal 2002, 5). Often the words narrative and story are used interchangeably, one standing in for the other; for the narrative scholar, however, this is not the case. In her widely cited text, *Narratology: An Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Bal differentiates narrative from story, defining the latter as ‘the content of that text’ (Bal 2009, 5) and therefore a component of narrative, rather than as the narrative itself. However, the term is applied variously in different media fields. In film studies, for example, the definition of narrative can be all-encompassing and broad; David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define narrative as ‘a chain of events in [a] cause—effect relationship occurring in time and space’, before going on to say that ‘a narrative is what we usually mean by story’ (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 75), thereby ignoring the differences between the two terms. Roland Barthes supports a multimedia understanding of narrative more suited to this study’s claim that videogames are narratives, considering that it is ‘first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances’ (Barthes 1993, 251), which includes

myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama,
 comedy, mime, painting, stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news
 item, conversation. (*ibid*)

While most of these are recognisable as texts or the oral precursors to texts, Barthes includes non-traditional structures as narrative carriers in his list. Stained-glass

windows, for example, whilst recognised as carrying a story, are not typically thought of as narratives. French theorist Genette, author of the influential *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* agrees with this broad definition, considering a narrative to be ‘the representation of a real or fictitious event or series of events’ (Genette 1976, 1), which Bal further explains as ‘a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee a story in a particular medium’ (Bal 2009, 5). Bal, too, insists that a text ‘does not have to be a linguistic text’, to be narrative, adding that a text can contain ‘non-linguistic sign system[s such as], the visual image (Bal 2009, 4). This is elucidated in *Travelling Concepts* where she argues that ‘there are, for example, many reasons for referring to images or films as “texts”’ (Bal 2002, 26). She goes on to explain that ‘such references entail various assumptions, including the idea that images have, or produce, meaning, and that they promote such analytical activities as reading’ (Bal 2002, 26). A narrative text, then, does not have to be language or word based, but this term can be used to describe images, films—and videogames.

Debate over the use of literary terminology is found in Games Studies as well as in narrative studies. An ongoing notion that narrative is literary contributes to Game Studies scholars seeking to excise it from the field as a literary encroachment upon gaming territory; Markku Eskelinen has, in the past, been an outspoken anti-narrative scholar, considering that ‘stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy’ (Eskelinen 2001). At the other end of the spectrum, Grant Tavinor gives a generic definition of narrative as ‘a representation of sets of events chosen for their contribution to an unfolding plot’ (Tavinor 2009, 20), broadly in agreement with Bal and Genette, but such a general definition is considered to be unhelpful by other Game Studies scholars. Jesper Juul in *Half Real: Video Games*

Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds rightly points out that ‘the term narrative has such a wide range of contradictory meanings and associations for different people and in different theories that it is practically meaningless unless specified in great detail’ (Juul 2005, 156), going on to offer six definitions of the term to highlight his theory that narrative has become a term used to describe ‘all aspects of human society and sign-production’ and that, since this ‘blurs boundaries and muddles concepts’ (*ibid*), there is a need to define the term and other related terms more precisely so as to prevent confusion. Juul, however, does not bring a unified redefinition of narrative to the debate, but instead uses the definition he feels fits best for a particular example, and further considers that scholars who criticize narrative in games use the following as their definition:

- 1 Narrative as the presentation of a number of events. This is the original and literal meaning of the word: *storytelling*
- 2 Narrative as a fixed and predetermined sequence of events.
- 3 Narrative as a specific type of sequence of events. (*ibid*)

He juxtaposes these definitions with those he considers advocates of narrative in videogames to use, as follows:

- 4 Narrative as a specific type of theme—humans or anthropomorphic entities
- 5 Narrative as any kind of setting or fictional world
- 6 Narrative as the way we make sense of the world. (*ibid*)

Whilst all of these definitions come from other sources than Juul (see Juul, 2005, 156-157 for his sources), and *do* define narrative in a broad sense, they are not necessarily literary definitions such as those of Bal and Genette cited earlier.

In this thesis, I consider narrative to be the presentation of an event (or series of events) that constitutes a story, following Genette’s definition. This includes the way

the story is presented, its narrator and narration, setting, characters, and the medium it is delivered through. This definition is both specific enough for my analysis and broad enough to encompass the understanding of narrative within different media disciplines. Following this understanding, story is one of the elements that constitute a narrative, although some definitions, such as that in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, do not make this distinction. The *OED* defines story as ‘a narrative, true or presumed to be true, relating to important events and celebrated persons of a more or less remote past; a historical relation or anecdote’ (OED Online 2013).

But, there is more to narrative than narrative structures and forms: there are also narrative contexts and contents. Stories and narratives are re-presented to viewers, readers, and players inhabiting various social, cultural, political, and economic contexts; they are inevitably infused with the ideologies and values of their producers and consumers. Therefore, narrative has to be understood in these terms as well. Narrative ideology, the frame of values informing a narrative, instils hierarchical relationships between pairs of oppositional terms (Herman and Vervaeck 2013). When artists create a media work, their own as well as their culture’s values, ethics, and beliefs will invariably be present and reflected in the finished product. These can take the shape of a simple good versus evil dichotomy, or can engage with more diffusely aesthetic elements in order to attach beauty and ugliness, for example, to political or social values. Texts that engage with narrative ideology also provide ways of allowing the consumer to reconsider the real world through interrogating a fictional situation, and allowing a reader, viewer, listener, or player to consider the ways the narrative and real worlds work through interactions between consumer, context, and text (Herman and Vervaeck 2013). Most narratives can lead to multiple ideological consumer interpretations, regardless of producer intent, and part of this thesis considers how the interactivity and

immersive aspects of videogames enable or hinder freedom of interpretation for the player.

Narrative perspective, defined as the features that determine the way a story is told, and that includes the perspective of the reader/viewer/listener/player (Niederhoff 2011), and the role of the narrator in representing the narrative to her audience, is a crucial aspect of both traditional narratology and narrative ideology, and features prominently in this thesis as a link between the two. It is also central to my argument that videogame technologies have caused narratological structures to evolve beyond those of other media, and yet, that a failure to develop equally in terms of narrative ideologies has led to their being used to support reactionary, regressive, often oppressive ideologies. The immersion and physical interactivity of videogames means that the narrative perspective of the player can substantially differ from that of other media, even in those games whose perspective resembles print or audio-visual media, even in comparison with immersive theatre, cinema, and art installations, whose relationship to videogames is closer than traditional media. Narrative perspective includes the ability of videogames to allow the player to identify with and as a protagonist, and includes the gender, sexuality, race, nationality, age, occupation, (dis)ability, and even humanity of the protagonist and those with whom the player engages in the course of a game. Mainstream videogames have been widely critiqued for their sexism and violence, particularly those that allow and even require players to enact extreme and stereotypically sexist actions (Chang 2013) (H. J. Brown 2008) (Beck, et al. 2012). Perspective is not only an issue in videogames; it is also an issue of videogame scholarship: prior scholarship on issues such as violence and sexism has been viewed from chiefly psychological, sociological, or Game Studies perspectives rather than narrative ones. Whilst I will not be considering specifically psychological

and sociological positions, other than in relation to narrative, I will be addressing these in relationship to ludology, since a central argument of this thesis is that ludology and narratology are inseparable and that it is ludology as well as technology, with their emphases on immersion and interactivity, which have enabled the evolution of narrative structures in videogames.

The evolution of videogames is evident as titles such as *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) and *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment 2010) differ from ‘video games’ as defined by the *OED* and Juul, which are primarily competitive and rule based. In contrast to rule-based games, *Heavy Rain* is designed to be ‘an emotional experience, an emotional journey based on immersion’ (Kendal 2010), while *Alan Wake* is marketed as a ‘psychological thriller’ on the official website for the game (Remedy Entertainment 2012). Whilst containing ludic components that are integral to the delivery of the narrative, these games do not foreground the process of play as the sole, or even the most important, aspect of their make-up in the ways that traditional games do. Instead, they focus more on the narrative and the kinds of emotional experiences associated with narrative in the verbal and visual arts, emphasising the player’s interaction with, and participation in, a *story*. As Deborah Mellamphy notes, ‘the spectator’s gaze becomes less passive as the spectator becomes a more active participant in the spectacle *and narrative*’ of a videogame (Mellamphy 2013). When referring to a narrative based, or narrative videogame within this thesis then, I mean any videogame that foregrounds the narrative elements over, or as equal to, the ludic elements of that game. This is in contrast to those games that are predominantly ludic.

A Brief History of Videogames

If definitions are indispensable to field introductions, so too are histories. Since videogames are best defined via their history, this section does double duty, offering a brief overview of videogame history, including its contested definitions of videogames. In 1961, MIT fellows Steve Russell, Wayne Witanen, and Martin Graetz created a computer programme to show off the capabilities of the new PDP-1 computer system and to give visitors to the department the opportunity to interact with this new technology (Donovan 2010, 10). Called *Spacewar!*, the program allowed two people to play a game against each other, using the computer system to do so. It has become generally accepted that this was the first videogame, although this is not uncontested in the videogame community, with other contenders for the title including *Nim*, created in time for the Festival of Britain in 1951 (Donovan 2010, 4), and *Tennis for Two*, developed in 1958 (Newman 2005, 1). Whichever game came first, it is clear that compared to other media, the videogame is a very young medium; however, it has quickly established itself as a powerful multimedial form that can tell stories, express emotions, and engage cultural ideas in new technologies that engage consumers in new ways.

The technological, ludic, and narrative evolution of the videogame can, to a degree, be traced in the changing definitions of its baseline terminology. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a video game (two words) as a ‘game played by electronically manipulating images displayed on a television screen’ (OED Online 2011). This definition, first published in the 1986 edition of the *OED*, stems from usage dating back to 1973, but does not account for the many changes that had taken place

within the videogame industry between 1973 and 1986 or, indeed, those that have taken place since 1986. When this definition was first coined, videogames were a new medium and their focus was on play. The first coin-operated videogame, *Galaxy Game*, had been released only two years prior, in September 1971, costing approximately \$20,000 dollars to produce a single game (Pitts 1997). Each game was a formidable physical object, housed in a box up to two metres tall, and even when *Pong* became a household object in 1975 (Donovan 2010, 35), the hardware remained a dedicated machine for one (very simple) game involving a ball and two bats. Following the invention of the microprocessor in the 1970s, the technology used to create videogames evolved very quickly: rather than creating a single game on a piece of hardware, micro-processing technologies meant that multiple games could be made to play on a single console, such as the Magnavox Odyssey.⁶ Even this early on, we see the inflection of narrative into videogames: it should not pass unnoticed that the title of this technology derives from one of the west's foundational narratives, Homer's *Odyssey*. But, play was the dominant activity and as such, these products garnered the title of 'video games', a two-word name that positions them as a subcategory of games determined by their technology and platform (video), with a familial relationship to non-electronic games. Early 'video games' were very much ludic and behavioural: 'players agree[d] to abide by the rules [and they] agree[d] to be put into a position where they c[ould] lose the game' (Tavinor 2009, 103, original emphasis). As such, playing *Spacewar!* or *Pong* meant engaging with ludic rules and ludic outcomes based on these rules; their primary status and function as games was clear and narrative was rarely a consideration.

Juul has sought to define videogames as games and not narratives. In *Half Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, he insists that videogames are

⁶ The first home games console, the Odyssey came with familiar accessories, paper money, chips, dice, and overlays for attaching to the television screen (Svensson 2012).

rule-based activities and are as such incompatible with storytelling. He locates their ancestry in games, not narratives, arguing that videogames are an evolution of non-electronic gaming that stretches back to the Ancient Egyptian game of *Senet* (Juul 2005, 4) and as such should not be confused with narratives or co-opted by Narrative Studies. He goes further to define a videogame as a *game* in terms of six rules:

1. A rule based formal system;
2. With variable and quantifiable outcomes;
3. Where different outcomes are assigned different values;
4. Where the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome;
5. The player feels emotionally attached to the outcome;
6. And the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable (Juul 2005, 6-7).

In order to be considered a game, Juul insists that all six criteria must be met in full and, throughout *Half Real*, attempts to fit videogames into existing definitions of gaming, despite acknowledging that there are ‘new types of games that would previously not have been possible’ (Juul 2005, 5). Whilst he concedes that not all activities called games can be situated within his definition, instead of allowing this fact to challenge it, he nominates games that do not conform to his theory ‘borderline cases’. These include pen and paper role-playing games and open-ended simulations, such as *SimCity*.⁷ Juul considers games such as *SimCity* to be borderline cases because of their lack of adherence to all of the six rules of his model (*SimCity* is open-ended, meaning that the game can carry on *ad infinitum*). Even as he develops his criteria to claim videogames entirely for Game Studies, its weakness is exposed, in that it cannot account for all games.

⁷ As the title suggests, *SimCity* is a game simulation of city management; the player takes the role of Mayor and attempts to create his/her own ideal city, while being faced with a series of natural, economic, social factors, problems, and disasters

Where Juul focuses on the structural aspects of videogames and considers videogames primarily in terms of ‘how they borrow from non-electronic games, and how they depart from traditional game forms’ (Juul 2005, 4), Gonzalo Frasca considers videogames more broadly, including their use as carriers of rhetoric. One of the first ludologists and responsible for the popularisation of the use of the term ludology within Game Studies (Juul 2005, 16), Frasca, in *Ludology Meets Narratology* proposes the term ludology to refer to the ‘yet non-existent “discipline that studies game and play activities”’ (Frasca 1999). However, Frasca is not as much of a separatist as Juul; he acknowledges the relationship between videogames and narrative, but chooses to focus on their ludic aspects, whilst acknowledging that his research will further the understanding of narrative in videogames, stating that there are ‘elements that games do share with stories, such as characters, settings, and events’ and that ludology ‘does not disdain this dimension of video games’ (Frasca 2003). Nor is he as rigid in defining videogames ludically as Juul; rather than considering games as needing to conform to a set of six specific rules, Frasca proposes a contractual definition of what constitutes a game rather than an essentialist one, asserting that ‘a game is a form of play where players agree on a system of rules’ (Frasca 2007). This definition allows a more contextual, less formalist understanding of a game and includes the player in its definition and allows her to determine her own guidelines for success. In Frasca’s definition, games do not need to have a winner or loser, as Juul argues, rather, they can have an outcome determined by a single player playing alone, or by two or more players in contractual agreement.

Videogames (one word) in the twenty-first century have evolved still further both in terms of narrative and ludology, bearing only a passing resemblance to the early examples with which this section began; they are now mass-produced for a variety of

computer media, with the television screen being only one of a range of visual interactors; indeed, the television screen itself has undergone dramatic changes since the 1970s due to changing technologies, which in turn inform and determine the content and aesthetics of new videogames and how consumers engage with them. Videogames today have gained the ability to establish elaborate, fictional worlds and to provide a narrative complexity that rivals that of film, television, and the novel. This medium also goes beyond the narrative capacities of other media. Contemporary videogames involve tactile, even whole body, interactions between medium and user, as well as the use of eyes and ears, and players thereby become not only more sensorily immersed in videogame narratives, but through gaming interactivity players experience greater agency as they traverse virtual worlds, taking ‘meaningful action and see[ing] the results of [their] decisions and choices’ (Murray 1997, 126), known as ludic embodiment (see Farrow and Iacovides, 2012 for further information). Paradoxically, then, it is the gaming—that some Game Studies scholars pit against narrative—that has enabled the evolution of narrative in videogames.

Quite apart from these advances in narrative structures and the consumption of narrative, videogames can contain narratives akin to those in older media. The *Assassin’s Creed* franchise (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2013), *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013), *Beyond: Two Souls* (Quantic Dream 2013), and *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar Games 2010) contain strong stories that both work alongside, and are reliant on, gameplay to create a multimedia, interactively consumed narrative that has proved popular, with *Red Dead Redemption* selling more than 2.5 million copies in just two months in 2010 (Rockstarwatch 2010) and *Skyrim* (Bethesda 2011), the fifth instalment of the *Elder Scrolls* franchise, selling seven million copies in the first week of its release (Statistic Brain 2013). This in itself is evidence that videogame narratives are being

consumed by a large number of people, and as such they should be analysed for their narrative content and their ideological message.

Technology and game design have carried the videogames of the twenty-first century far beyond both the *OED*'s 1986 definition and Juul's rule-based model: not only have narratives developed, as we saw above and will see further below, but many no longer conform to definitions of videogames as games, lacking a gaming structure that Juul describes as being 'necessary and sufficient for something to be a game' (Juul 2005, 7). Indeed, the single word 'videogame' that 'dominates current usage' (Tavinor 2009, 17) reflects the recent evolution of the field; the term acknowledges the ancestry of video games (two words), while establishing that it has, in fact, become an entity in its own right, encompassing a variety of practices besides games, including narrative, which has a genealogy in other narrative forms such as literature, film, and television and a field of study in narratology and other forms of Narrative Studies.

Clearly, 'video game' as defined by the *OED* and the expanded ludic definition developed by Juul early in the narrative versus ludology debate no longer offer a full or accurate definition of the medium. Once videogames became a mass-market industry rather than a niche market, with technology rendering the medium capable of multiple ludic and narrative structures, they not only became a significant narrative medium but further offered new modes of narrative forms and engagements. Twenty-first-century videogames now encompass large and sophisticated narratives that involve gameplay as *part of* the narrative, as well as narratives that do not rely on gameplay at all, but are delivered through animated pieces of cinema known as cut-scenes. Videogames now offer players tactile as well as mental and audio-visual interaction with a set of fictional characters, settings, situations, and events. Videogame interactivity, granting players the opportunity to interact with narrative environments through gaming, not only refutes

the assertions that ludology and narrative are incompatible, or that videogames are not suitable carriers for narrative, but goes further to make ludology a central factor in the evolution of narrative, pushing it beyond its forms and functions in traditional media. The way in which ludology has caused narrative to evolve beyond its structures in traditional media is therefore one of the main focuses of this thesis.

A Brief History of Videogame Scholarship

Before I proceed to develop my arguments in the chapters, some attention to prior scholarship is required in order to contextualize them. Whilst there is a relative lack of specifically narrative based research into videogames, which includes both identifying narrative in games and the application of narrative theory to videogames, there has been some work carried out in this area. In 1985, Mary Ann Buckles attempted to situate the text based game, *Adventure*, within a humanities context in her PhD thesis, *Interactive Fiction: The Computer Storygame 'Adventure'* (Buckles 1985). Despite meeting with little success at the time, this thesis has gone on to become considered canonical in videogame studies. Acknowledging that text-based games are not literature, she nevertheless considers them as interactive fiction, and furthermore argues that both the story and the gameplay are vital to its success. Twelve years after this, Janet Murray's utopian vision for the future of videogame narratives, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (Murray 1997), inspired by the fictional holodeck suite of the *Star Trek* series, and envisages traditional and recognisable narratives that involve the player/reader 'acting' in a fictional narrative situation. These narratives, in Murray's vision, would be completely immersive, with the player participating fully, not only as a character in the narrative

experience, but also in the authoring of subsequent events. Here, the player is not only a consumer of narrative, as in Buckles' work, but a quasi-author of narrative through gaming.

In the same year as Murray's vision, Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (1997) also addresses the relationship between traditional and electronic literature. Focusing primarily on the written text in electronic forms such as hypertexts and computer generated poetry and prose, as well as on text-based videogames such as *Adventure*, Aarseth's work lays a foundation for addressing electronic media not simply as narrative forms, but more specifically as literature. Whilst acknowledging the differences between games and narratives, Aarseth, like Buckles, recognizes that these differences are 'not clear cut, and [that] there is significant overlap between the two' (Aarseth 1997, 5). Using the term 'ergodic literature' to describe a text where 'nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text' (Aarseth 1997, 1),⁸ Aarseth attempts to situate the electronic text as an evolution of literature, whilst 'challeng[ing] the recurrent practice of applying the theories of literary criticism to a new empirical field, seemingly without any reassessment of the terms and concepts involved' (Aarseth 1997, 14). What contemporary videogames inherit from these hypertexts is interactivity and choice, evolving from them just as the hypertext evolved from earlier choice based written narratives such as the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series (which has subsequently been adapted to electronic media and the hypertext medium).

Aarseth's work is recognised as a seminal text in Game Studies, establishing a set of similarities and differences between a wide range of electronic texts, whilst at the same time offering a literary consideration of these texts. He is also the founding editor

⁸ Aarseth's examples range from the *I Ching* to hyperfiction texts, such as *Afternoon: A Story* (Joyce 1987).

of the field's major online journal, *Game Studies*, launched as the 'first academic peer-reviewed journal dedicated to computer games', declaring that '2001 [was] Year One of Computer Game Studies as an emerging, viable, international, academic field' (Aarseth 2001). Complaining that other disciplines, such as Media Studies, Sociology, and English, had over 30 years to study videogames without drawing any significant academic conclusions about them, he announced that he was therefore co-opting them for Game Studies.

This first journal features articles by pioneering Game Studies scholars, such as Jesper Juul, who calls for a divorce of Aarseth's marriage of narrative and gameplay. Acknowledging that games can contain elements of narrative, he nevertheless maintains that 'You can't have narration and interactivity at the same time; there is no such thing as a continuously interactive story' (Juul 2001). In the same journal, Markku Eskelinen goes further to argue that

The old and new game components, their dynamic combination and distribution, the registers, the necessary manipulation of temporal, causal, spatial and functional relations and properties not to mention the rules and the goals and the lack of audience should suffice to set games and the gaming situation apart from narrative and drama, and to annihilate for good the discussion of games as stories, narratives or cinema. (Eskelinen 2001)

These opinions are in stark contrast to the utopian ideal of gaming envisioned by Murray in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997). Murray's vision of a computer producing an immersive, interactive narrative, created by a 'new kind of storyteller, one who is half hacker, half bard' (Murray 1997, 9), is at odds with Juul's and Eskelinen's critiques of narrative in videogames, initiating what became known as the 'narratology versus

ludology debate', in which scholars attempted to assert one or the other as the dominant field for videogame study. The position of videogames as a branch of Game Studies rather than of Narrative Studies has led to prioritising their *playing* over (and often against) their narrative functions, although as narrative is becoming more developed and blatant in videogames and the co-reliance of playing and narrative becomes more apparent, this is an increasingly difficult position to occupy.

Marie-Laure Ryan, like Murray, sees electronic technology as a mode of developing narrative. Looking past its ability to serve 'as a medium of transmission for print texts' (2004), Ryan perceives digital narrative to be a new medium, one that 'cannot be transferred into the print medium without significant loss [and one that] depends on the computer as a sustaining environment' (*ibid*). Unlike printed books, digital narrative relies on its parent technology for its consumption as well as its production. More pertinent to the arguments of my thesis, even as Ryan acknowledges the 'ludic pleasure' of a videogame, she argues that it 'cannot be separated from the *narrative* pleasure of watching the story unfold' (*ibid*). Perceiving an 'affinity between narrative and fiction', Ryan argues that there is a 'tacit belief that narrativity and fictionality can only reach their full potential in conjunction with each other' (Ryan 1991, 1). This is relevant to current debates, since most, if not all, videogame critics acknowledge the presence of *fiction* in videogames, even when the presence of *narrative* is contested or denied (Juul 2005) (Brown 2013). Ryan understands narrative to be 'a matter of degree' (Ryan 2001) further perceiving that narrative permeates the marketing as well as the content of videogames: 'the concept of narrative has caught like fire in cultural discourse, and the software industry has duly followed suit by turning the metaphors of narrative interface and of the storytelling computer into advertising buzzwords' (Ryan 2001). These metaphors offer multiple definitions of videogames and

other digital media rather than the narrow definitions to which dictionaries and theorists like Juul aspire.

Since the turn of the millennium, the study of videogames has been expanding. Whilst many studies do not didactically focus on narrative, they nevertheless offer the narrative scholar insights when their analyses of videogames construction coincide with certain narrative concepts. For example, *The Medium of the Videogame* (Wolf 2001) considers the emergence of the videogame as a medium, the videogame in society and culture, and also addresses formal aspects of the videogame, which include space, time, genre, and narrative. James Newman's introductory text, *Videogames* (Newman 2005), similarly devotes sections to the validity of studying videogames, the construction of games, and the embryonic status of the narratives found within them. More centrally focused on narrative, Barry Atkins' *More Than a Game* (Atkins 2001) looks at the computer (and video) game as a fictional form, arguing that computer games and videogames are 'fiction, and should be treated, and subjected to rigorous examination, just as other forms of fiction are' (Atkins 2001, 22). Despite these claims, Atkins himself conducts a superficial inspection of his chosen videogames, rather than the 'rigorous examination' he calls for. My own analysis therefore, begins by conducting such an analysis, looking at videogames through a specifically narrative lens, and considering their ability to function as explicitly narrative texts, filling what I perceive to be a gap in the analysis of videogames within the literary domain.

One aspect of narratology and narrative structure that has received considerable attention is the use of game space in videogames. Henry Jenkins considers that 'game designers don't simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces' (2003, 3-4) and argues that games can fit within the 'much older tradition of spatial stories [such as] hero's odysseys, quest myths, or travel narratives' (2003, 4). Michael Nitsche considers

that ‘game spaces evoke narratives because the player is making sense of them in order to engage with them’ (2008). Mark J. P. Wolf has also been involved with researching the use of space in videogames (Wolf 1997) (Wolf 2011), though he is more interested in its cognitive than narrative aspects, regarding navigation as a ‘cyclical process which involves exploration, the forming of a cognitive map of how spaces are connected, which in turn aids the decision making process’ (Wolf 2011, 2).

Rhetoric is another area closely related to and overlapping with narrative that has garnered considerable critical attention in recent videogame scholarship. Ian Bogost, a scholar and game designer, considers videogames as an expressive medium. Focusing on political and art games, he both critiques and creates videogames that foreground the medium’s rhetorical capability to persuade players to think in different ways. His monograph, *Persuasive Games* (2007) offers a ‘general approach to how rhetoric functions uniquely in software in general, and videogames in particular’ (Bogost 2007, viii). Whilst the origins of what Bogost terms ‘procedural rhetoric’ lie in earlier work by scholars such as Lev Manovich and Janet Murray (Sicart 2011), it is through his research that rhetoric has become an accepted aspect of Game Studies. Miguel Sicart also considers procedural rhetoric and defines proceduralism as ‘the ways arguments are embedded in the rules of a game, and how the rules are expressed communicated to, and understood by a player’ (*ibid*). This carries game rules beyond ludology into rhetoric, a realm of literary studies and also into communication, a domain of Media Studies more generally. Sicart is concerned with narrative not only as rhetoric, but also as ideology and beliefs stating that, through rules, ‘games present embedded values, and it is the appropriation and understanding of that model’ that gives a game its meaning, and furthermore, it is through ‘reconstructing the meaning embedded in the rules [that players] are persuaded by virtue of the game’s procedural nature’ (*ibid*).

In addition to space and rhetoric, *The Art of Videogames* (Tavinor 2009) has considered the status of the videogame as an art form, entering into the domain of aesthetics that literature, film, and many other media are concerned with. Philosopher Grant Tavinor argues that since videogames can arouse a player's emotion, be 'genuinely psychologically and behaviourally injurious to their players, and involve players in making moral decisions', and that 'they should be thought of as a branch of representational art' (2009, 9). While representational art is broader than narrative, Tavinor, like Frasca, affirms narrative's presence in videogames, albeit with the caveat that videogame narratives are a 'significant departure from how narratives are depicted in traditional forms' (Tavinor 2009, 110) and, joining Juul in his view that the definition is complicated by the use of the term narrative to 'refer to any number of things' (Tavinor 2009, 111). Whilst not specifically exploring narrative in videogames, Tavinor does consider many aspects that are pertinent to narrative as part of his thesis, arguing that videogames can be considered within 'the framework of analytic philosophy of the arts' (Tavinor 2009, Back Cover). His study attends to the relationship between games and fiction chiefly in terms of the ability of videogames to carry a moral or political message, and of relationships between videogames and earlier forms of media. Tavinor, unlike early ludologists, understands that 'videogames encode or depict their games not necessarily in declarative rules, but in the possibilities for interaction in a fictional world' (Tavinor 2009, 109), thus acknowledging that videogames share many qualities with other cultural forms, whilst being 'artistically significant in their own terms' (Tavinor 2009, 5). His aim in *The Art of Videogames* is to constitute the videogame as an art form that is 'filled with a potential for creativity, richness, and subtlety' (Tavinor 2009, 11), as well as shedding new light on traditional issues within the philosophy of

the arts, including the role of narrative and that the role that videogames play in the evolution of other art forms.

Play as Narrative Immersion

In 1997, Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* envisioned the potential of electronic media to provide an immersive and sophisticated narrative, with 'the promise of a new medium of expression that is as varied as the printed book or the moving picture' (Murray 1997, 28). Preceded by Buckles' now canonical PhD thesis, *Interactive Fiction: The Computer Storygame 'Adventure'*, which treated the text-based videogame *Adventure* as a form of 'interactive fiction' (Buckles 1985, viii), and Brenda Laurel's *Computers as Theatre*, which envisaged the computer as a medium for 'creative, interactive experiences and, in particular, for new forms of drama' (Laurel 1991, ix), *Hamlet on the Holodeck* went further, anticipating that computer media would someday become carriers for complex narratives in which the player, or interactor, is not only an active consumer and participant of narrative, but is also a creator of subsequent narrative authoring.

Whilst narratologists were looking at videogames and considering the possibilities of this embryonic fictional form for narrative, ludology was being established by academics, including Juul and Frasca. Scholars in this field thought of the videogame not as a carrier for narrative, but as

a rule based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels

emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable. (Juul 2005, 36)

Differences and oppositions between the two approaches to videogames quickly coalesced into the Ludology vs. Narratology debate briefly discussed earlier. Ludologists consider that the gaming and playing aspects of videogames are paramount, overriding any narrative that they may have, going further to argue that narratives can be counterproductive to play. Juul, we have seen, considers that videogames, like traditional non-electronic games, rely on rules for their successful implementation, and that these rules are counterproductive to and disrupted by narrative.

Juul supports his argument with claims that have been made about other media in other discourses trying to claim the incompatibility of two media such as poetry and painting or novels and films. In *Half Real*, Juul states that ‘games are not just representations of events, they *are* events’ (Juul 2005, 158, original emphasis) and his definition of narrative involves a ‘narrator recounting previously happened events’ (Juul 1999), which he argues is at odds with a videogame’s status as a *game* whose events occur ‘now’ in a present temporality. Juul is wrong, however, in supposing that videogames are incapable of re-presenting events that have already taken place; a number of games that explicitly do this. Both *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment 2010) and *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (CD Projekt RED 2011) features characters relating events to other characters in the past tense, while the player enacts those narrated events in the present as gameplay. *Call of Juarez: The Gunslinger* (Techland 2013) too includes a narrator who relates events to the player as taking place in the past, who plays them in the now of the game. The narrator in this game is explicitly shown to be presenting an unreliable version of past events, changing them as other characters question his memory, which is reflected in the gameplay as repeating parts of the game

with this new information (Kubinski 2014). Even games that do not involve speaking narrators engage in re-presentation of events when players re-play the games. As with re-watching a film or re-reading a book, this involves a re-presentation of a formerly consumed story.

Juul bases his definition of narrative on prominent narratologist Gerard Genette's writings. Genette defines narrative as the 'succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subject of [...] the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell an event or series of events' in his seminal text, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980, 25). His aim is to construct a 'systematic theory of narrative' (1980, 7) that is not limited to literature but rather encompasses narrative in all media:

the study of a totality of actions and situations taken in themselves,
without regard to the medium, linguistic or other, through which
knowledge of that totality comes to us. (1980, 25)

Although to some extent systematic narrative theory has been challenged by the theoretical turn,⁹ the original narratology versus ludology debate is predicated on its concepts of narrative. It is thus essential to begin any challenge to Juul's refutation of narrative in videogames with a thorough investigation of whether and how narratological theories operate within videogames—a task that has not yet been extensively undertaken. While it is relatively easy to prove that videogames enter into ideological narrative theories (for example, those surrounding gender, sexuality, violence, politics, or ethics), if videogame narratives can withstand the test of a traditional narratological analysis, this will establish the validity of the arguments for the presence of narrative in videogames at a baseline level. If videogames are capable

⁹ The theoretical turn refers to a major shift in academia from a primary focus on humanism, formalism, and aesthetic scholarship and high-art, canonical texts to Marxist, post-structuralist and postmodern studies of popular texts and from historical, existential and Freudian analysis of canonical texts to new historical, phenomenological and Lacanian examinations of a wide variety of texts.

of traditional modes of narrative as well as forging new ones, then they are shown to have features in common with other narrative media.

As far back as 1985, early electronic adventure games were studied as forms of narrative literature. As we have seen, Buckles' PhD thesis, *Interactive Fiction: The Computer Storygame "Adventure"*, considers her key 'text' to be both a game and literature. Due in part to technological restrictions, the game uses text to impart information to the player (Figure 1). *Adventure* is, according to Buckles 'a "literary game"' (1985, 31);

```

PAUSE INIT DONE statement executed
To resume execution, type go. Other input will terminate the job.
go
Execution resumes after PAUSE.
WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!! WOULD YOU LIKE INSTRUCTIONS?

y
SOMEWHERE NEARBY IS COLOSSAL CAVE, WHERE OTHERS HAVE FOUND
FORTUNES IN TREASURE AND GOLD, THOUGH IT IS RUMORED
THAT SOME WHO ENTER ARE NEVER SEEN AGAIN. MAGIC IS SAID
TO WORK IN THE CAVE. I WILL BE YOUR EYES AND HANDS. DIRECT
ME WITH COMMANDS OF 1 OR 2 WORDS.
(ERRORS, SUGGESTIONS, COMPLAINTS TO CROWTHER)
(IF STUCK TYPE HELP FOR SOME HINTS)

YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END OF A ROAD BEFORE A SMALL BRICK
BUILDING . AROUND YOU IS A FOREST. A SMALL
STREAM FLOWS OUT OF THE BUILDING AND DOWN A GULLY.

```

Figure 1: *Adventure* screenshot

'written in words [...] with which the reader/player can verbally interact to create stories' (1985, viii), assessing that its 'form, story content, and effects are clearly outgrowths of the more familiar types of literature' (1985, 1). Although not the first text-based adventure game, it is considered to be 'the first interactive fiction game' (Adams no date), one that helped to define the adventure game genre.

Videogames have evolved technologically from text-based games and print-based hypertexts, allowing narrative choice to incorporate audio-visual representations of narrative with which players also interact and make narrative choices. We have seen

that Espen Aarseth defines an ergodic text as one that requires nontrivial effort by a reader to traverse the text (1997, 1), including hypertexts and adventure games. The nontrivial effort needed to navigate these game ‘texts’ is largely due to their nonlinearity, signalled by their multiple and branching narrative frameworks:

when you read from a cybertext, you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard. Each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed. (Aarseth 1997, 3)

Aarseth’s points extend to videogames as well. While *Heavy Rain* and the Telltale games *The Walking Dead* (2012) and *The Wolf Among Us* (2014) are marketed as videogames, the predominance of narrative over ludic skill would indicate that they are more ergodic texts than games in Juul’s sense, even as their ludic heritage is acknowledged through the need for dexterity and occasionally quick reflexes.

As a ludologist, Juul focuses on the rules, structures, and modes of play in videogames rather than on their narrative structures and consumption (plot, character, narrative point of view, etc.). Fellow ludologist Gonzalo Frasca sees Juul’s approach as system-centric, one that involves identifying a game’s ‘structural components and allowing [the critic] to dissect games as if they were machines’ (Frasca 2007, 41). Even so, Juul recognises the presence of fictive elements within videogames and acknowledges that they have ludic functions: for example, he considers that ‘fiction cues the player into understanding the rules’ (Juul 2005, 197). Yet he does not go far enough to consider how narrative can be an *inseparable* part of gaming rather than an aid to it or a distraction from it, nor how videogames go beyond the structures, motivations, and satisfactions of ludology to encompass the structures, motivations, and

satisfactions of narratology. This chapter demonstrates that, just as videogames have evolved technologically to incorporate ever more complex narrative structures, so too narrative has evolved in videogames beyond traditional structures and functions in other media forms such as fiction, film, and television through ludic structures. As the remaining sections of this chapter show, the two interpenetrate and are often inseparable.

Ludonarrative Dissonance

Not all narrative in videogames is well constructed, or works to create a game that allows the player to become immersed in the narrative, and should be addressed upfront. Ludonarrative defines the combination of play (ludo) and narrative in games, especially videogames, and an effective game will balance the narrative content with the ludic so that the player does not experience dissonance in shifting from one mode to the other. The ludonarrative in a videogame refers to the narrative parts of the game with which players can interact and feel that they are influencing, such as making choices, and affecting the ending of the game. In 2007, after the release of *Bioshock*, Clint Hocking coined the phrase ‘ludonarrative dissonance’ to describe situations that ‘throw the narrative and ludic elements of the work into opposition’ (Hocking 2007). He posited that the game offers the player two contracts--ludic and narrative--and that these work in opposition to each other in *Bioshock*. Whilst I do not agree with Hocking’s conclusions regarding *Bioshock*, as I argue further in Chapter 6, ludonarrative dissonance in videogames does occur in videogames such as *Max Payne 3* (Rockstar Studios 2012), where narrative and ludic elements work contrary to each other. Narratively, its protagonist, Max is a hard drinking, unfit, and dangerous bodyguard.

Ludically, however, he is able to shift from being so drunk he cannot stand up, to being a sharpshooting hero in seconds. The protagonist of the *Uncharted* franchise, Nathan Drake, is ‘a regular guy with no special powers or skills [whose] ordinariness helps explain the game's overarching structure. Nate is basically in it for the ride, tracking a story he does not control, figuring it out as he goes along’ (Abbott 2009). However, controlling Drake does not reflect this; gameplay shows Drake as an able soldier, proficient with many weapons, able to take on (and beat) armies of enemies as the game progresses, thereby creating a disparity between the narrative of the cut-scenes and the gameplay being enacted by the player.

Juul's Rules: Videogames and Classic Game Theory

Whilst Juul and other ludologists do not deny that games contain rudimentary narrative elements such as movement across spaces, acquisition of objects, battles with opponents, and the attainment of goals, they nonetheless perceive complex narratives to be incompatible with the act of playing a game. Juul argues that as games involve learning a set of skills and require conformation to rules, they should not be studied as storytelling media. He further analyses the narratives inserted into videogames as crude and unsophisticated, arguing, ‘if games were simply storytelling media, this would be radically uninteresting’ (Juul 2005, 161). This is certainly true of many of the narrative examples cited in *Half Real* as evidence for his argument: they *are* narratively less sophisticated than most fiction films and novels. Since the publication of *Half Real*, however, the narrative sophistication—and ambition—of games has increased dramatically, as has the technology that allows the insertion of more intricate and photorealistic gameplay and animated ‘cut-scenes’ which have been at the forefront of

narrative videogames in recent years. New technology has enabled game designers to introduce embedded narratives into games—narratives that are inserted into a game’s environment via audio, visual, collectibles, and interaction with non-player characters.¹⁰ However, some ludologists object that even these more sophisticated pieces of video animation and embedded narratives interfere with the interactivity and agency of ludic play, forcing the gamer into becoming a physically passive viewer and consumer of narrative information instead of active gaming.

However, even as Juul is formulating his classic game model to support the claim that videogames and narrative are (or should be) mutually exclusive, there are points at which his thesis does not hold, signposting the fragility of his argument, one that has become even more tenuous with evolving videogame technologies. Games with a significant and prominent narrative can, intriguingly, even *adhere* to his game model. This is best demonstrated by a case study of *The Walking Dead*. *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012) is an episodic videogame based on the five-part zombie apocalypse graphic novel series of the same name (Kirkman and Moore 2011) and influenced by the ABC television series (AMC Networks 2010 -) that also adapts the novels. Set before the events of the graphic novels, the videogame prequel introduces a new set of characters and plotlines, whilst incorporating familiar aspects of *The Walking Dead* mythology. Both the videogame and graphic novels ‘explore how people deal with extreme situations and how these events CHANGE them’ (Kirkman and Moore 2011, Intro, original emphasis), using a branching structure that allows player to influence the games narrative direction, a structure explicit from its opening screen (**Figure 2**).

¹⁰ This is explored in more detail in Chapter 3

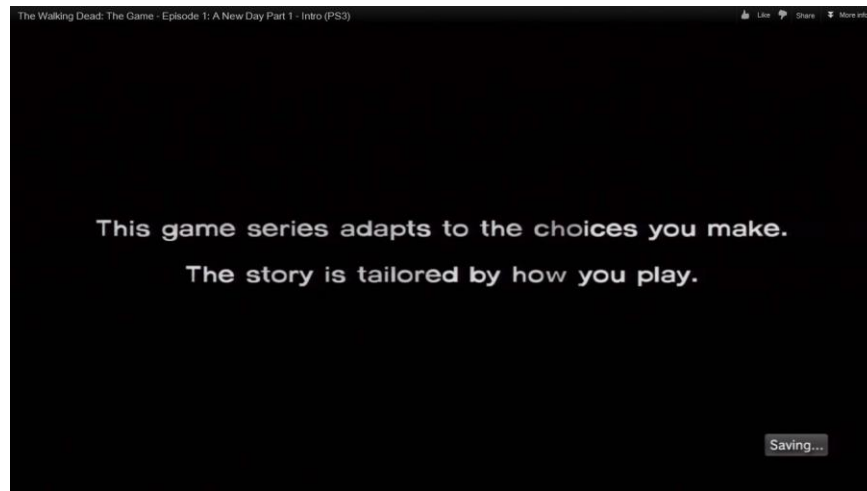


Figure 2: Opening of *The Walking Dead*

The Walking Dead consists of five episodes centred on the player-controlled character, Lee Everett. Both gameplay and narrative are delivered via ‘point and click’¹¹ gameplay, precluding more animated gameplay such as fighting and warfare. Instead, the player makes decisions and reacts to situations by interacting with other characters and diegetic objects to influence events. The play here is decidedly narrative play. At set points in the game, the player is required to make decisions that affect subsequent play bridging all the episodes, giving the illusion that the player has influenced the narrative.

It is in this illusion that the analyst can recognise ludic elements that are connected to the narrative. One of the first narrative decisions the player controlling Lee makes is choosing whether to save the life of a teenager, Shaun, or a younger boy, Duck, when zombies attack them both. The choices made by the player function as ludic elements of the game, just as shooting or solving puzzles do in other videogames; the game’s systematic, rule-based structure therefore remains, even as the ludic modes are changed for less active, narrative methods of play. However, no matter which character the player chooses to have Lee save, Shaun dies, meaning that the player

¹¹ This style of game literally asks the player to point a marker at an object on the screen, usually with a computer mouse, and click the mouse buttons to interact with that object.

cannot alter this narrative event. Even though the game offers ludonarrative choices, the narrative path is strictly linear, with a single outcome, despite the player's interactions.

Rules, we have seen, are at the heart of Juul's classic game model. For Juul, a game is a

1. A rule based formal system;
2. With variable and quantifiable outcomes;
3. Where different outcomes are assigned different values. (Juul 2005, 6)

Juul makes the first rule his principal reason for the mutual exclusivity of videogames and narrative. 'Rules', in Juul's definition, 'describe what players can and cannot do, and what should happen in response to player actions' (2005, 55-56). Narratives, he claims, do not follow such rules. Player actions are directed at 'trying to reach as positive an outcome as possible' (*ibid*): again, Juul contrasts this gameplay to the passive activity of consuming narrative. Videogames, Juul argues, whilst seeming to differ structurally from traditional games, nevertheless have a set of rules that must be followed, just as board games do. Videogames, however, embed their rules into the programming of the game, rendering them invisible to the player and functioning as an automated structure, in contrast to the written instructions and rules accompanying games like *Monopoly*, which players have to study and learn.

As we have seen, playing *The Walking Dead* requires the player to make decisions; each decision is subject to gaming rules, offering a finite number of options to the player, just as a chess piece can only move at certain times and in certain directions, with each option creating a different direction for the game. In the example cited above, the player has three choices; she must instruct Lee to save one of the two boys or do nothing; the player cannot choose to do anything else at this point. This is a

clear instance of ludic rules, which insist that inaction is classified as action; the player *must* choose one of three options to continue the game, just as the player of chess must move a piece on the board for the game to progress.

Continuing this analysis, and underscoring rules two and three of Juul's classic game model is the premise that every game has a winner and a loser. While winning and losing may not be characteristics of reading books or viewing films and television, they are often characteristics of narratives, in which antagonists and protagonists battle for supremacy. Even apart from that, whilst winning was almost always the goal in the infancy of videogaming, a variable outcome ending with distinct winners and losers is becoming increasingly rare as videogames develop. Modern games, even those that are predominantly ludic, such as the *Call of Duty* franchise,¹² are adopting the singular ending as the norm, with gameplay moving in a linear direction towards that single ending, which all players reach, regardless of their skill. Therefore, the alternatives of winning or losing are no longer the norm, if indeed they ever were; many early games such as *Tetris*, *Space Invaders*, and *Pac-Man* did not allow players to win—only lose.

However, despite the single ending of so many videogames, there are 'variable and quantifiable outcomes' (Juul 2005, 6) in other aspects of the narrative that emerge. While Shaun dies regardless of the choice the player makes, the choice affects Lee's relationships with the boys' parents. If he chooses to save Shaun, he alienates Duck's father; if he chooses to save Duck, he alienates his host, Shaun's father. *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), another game whose ending—structurally, if not experientially—remains the same regardless of the decisions made,¹³ is similarly tempered by those decisions,

¹² *Call of Duty (COD)* is a first-person shooter franchise which, as the genre classification suggests, involves the player in a first-person perspective, where the protagonist shooting at targets in a simulation of wartime conflicts.

¹³ The protagonist operated by the player defeats the antagonist, Atlas, and returns to the surface, regardless of the choices made by the player and even the final cut scene (the good or bad ending) does not change this outcome.

changing the narrative of the protagonist's return to the surface— whether he is deemed a hero or a despot on his return, with different post-game futures presented in the final cut-scene of the game, depending on those decisions. Where *Bioshock* gives the player a good/evil dichotomy in its ending, *The Walking Dead* involves more subtle moral judgments to bring about a variable outcome—not in major narrative events, but in the way the narrative outcome is reached. The player can choose how Lee reacts to events and in consequence, how the NPCs¹⁴ react to him. For example, in one player's version of the game, she might choose to have Lee act sympathetically, whilst another player might choose to have him behave selfishly. These choices determine subsequent character interactions, and affect *how* the end of the game is reached.

If the winning/losing dichotomy is the least applicable of Juul's rules to contemporary videogames, gaming structures do conform to the 'valorisation of outcome' that Juul describes as 'the different potential outcomes of the game [with] different values, some positive and some negative', with 'some of the possible outcomes better than others' (Juul 2005, 40). Juul determines that 'positive outcomes are harder to reach than negative ones' (*ibid*), a principle that *The Walking Dead* observes in the choices it asks the player to make for Lee. The decisions that the player makes are often difficult—choosing who will eat, for example, when the survivors find food. The choice required for a positive outcome is not always the clearest or easiest one, while making the 'wrong' choice results in it becoming more difficult to achieve a positive outcome when other characters angered by the choice refuse to cooperate with the player-protagonist.

The second half of Juul's classic game model rules—

4. Where the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome;

¹⁴ Non Playable Characters

5. The player feels emotionally attached to the outcome;
6. And the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable. (Juul 2005, 6)

are also applicable to narrative dimensions of *The Walking Dead*. Each decision the player makes for Lee is an attempt to influence the moral and emotional progression and outcome of the game, quite apart from its actual ending. In *The Walking Dead*, the actual ending of the game sees Lee die following a zombie bite, but the relationships he has at this point are dependent on the decisions the player has made throughout the game, a moral outcome that varies according to these choices. Following the work of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga 1938), we see that play shapes moral and emotional outcomes in this game. Whilst morality and emotion are not seen as traditionally ludic structures, they are, nevertheless, part of *The Walking Dead's* ludic structure and design just as the solving of a puzzle or the destruction of an enemy constitutes the ludic structures of other games. As Juul states, 'the players' actions can influence the state of the game and the game's outcome' and the consequences of the game must be 'optional and negotiable' (Juul 2005, 40). In *Monopoly*, Juul says, the 'exchange of goods or money' are things that 'players can consciously control' (Juul 2005, 42) and thus are part of the game's optional and negotiable consequences. In *The Walking Dead*, the game's optional and negotiable consequences are achieved through the decisions the player makes on Lee's behalf. Picking up on Juul's analogy then, if a player of *Monopoly* lands on Old Kent Road, she may have to pay 'rental' on the square, choose to buy it, or do nothing. These are the only options available, but two of the three are under her control. Similarly, as we have seen, Lee has three choices: to save Shaun, save Duck, or do nothing. As with *Monopoly*, the player has choices and the choices have consequences that affect subsequent gameplay.

The classic game model proposed by Juul as an all-encompassing definition of a videogame and to promote the exclusion of narrative in videogames, then, can be used to support the inclusion of narrative videogames within this definition, and to demonstrate that narrative structures are not necessarily separate from ludic structures, but that the two interpenetrate.

Aristotle's Rules: Videogames and Classical Narrative Theory

Aristotle's insistence that a story must have a beginning, middle, and end is still maintained by many makers and critics of narrative media; as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in their canonical *Film Art: An Introduction* write, 'A film does not just start, it *begins*' (2008, 86) and 'a film doesn't simply stop, it *ends*' (2008, 88 (original emphasis)). The opening or exposition of a film, like that of other media introduces the viewer to the structure of the film, as well as providing a basis for what is to follow, and acts as an introduction to the narrative. Yet beginnings and endings often multiply in contemporary media and no more so than in videogames. 'One of the ways', write Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, 'in which a literary text multiplies its beginning is through the deployment of peritexts—a title, subtitles, dedications, epigraphs, introductions, 'notices' and so on' (Bennet and Royle 2009, 5). A peritext, defined by Genette as 'the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author's name, a title, a preface, illustration' (Genette 1991), encompasses all of the space outside the 'space' occupied by the text. In a videogame, this includes the information that Genette describes, and other information such as the artwork, cinematic trailers for the game, and physical maps. Yet here again, the ludic medium of videogaming goes beyond written and

audio-visual narrative media in the possibilities it offers for multiple beginnings and endings. Once the game is placed in the hardware, its loading also becomes part of the peritext, usually presenting an introduction to the game both in narrative and ludic terms. *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013), for example, uses the pre-credit sequence to introduce its protagonist, Joel, and the apocalyptic event that precedes the main body of the game. In many games there is a cinematic opening—a cut-scene that introduces the player to the narrative before she takes control of her character. This opening cinematic sequence, much like film, establishes the game's principle features: genre, setting, plot, characterisation, atmosphere, point-of-view, and of course, the conflict. The opening of *The Last of Us* not only introduces the principle character, it also presents the narrative genre, the setting and atmosphere, point-of-view and genre. It then uses the credit sequence to relate 20 years of narrative information to the player, providing her with the required material needed to understand the fictional world the player finds herself in as she takes control of Joel again.

Beyond the narrative introduction that the peritext brings, the opening sequence of videogames acquaints the player with the ludic elements of the game, such as the control system. *Heavy Rain*'s prologue familiarises her with its innovative method of controlling the protagonist, such as using context sensitive movements that mirror an onscreen prompt, for example, gesturing with the control pad, or twisting the joysticks in a particular pattern. The prologue also introduces the player to Ethan, establishes the game as action adventure and the setting as contemporary America. Sequels use similar strategies: *Tomb Raider 2*'s prologue reminds the returning player of the controls and any changes that have been made to this system, as well as informing the new gamer of the gameplay structure, as does *Mass Effect 2* and *Mass Effect 3* – just a small sample of the many games to do this and a clear appropriation of the 'previously on' format of

other episodic media, with the addition of telling the player how to engage with the new system. These segments further introduce differences in the sequels from their predecessors, including narrative information that situates the current game in the franchise.

Conclusion

In the short history of videogames, polarities quickly grew around the content of videogame media and its function, with each faction claiming supremacy in terms of importance to videogames, and even in the short time since the ludology vs. narratology debate, academic study has been subject to these polarities. However, as I have shown, Juul's classic game model, created to establish the relationship between electronic games and non-electronic gaming can be equally applied to games that use narrative as their basis, despite his insistence that this cannot be so. This has not been the case within some parts of Game Studies and Journalism. Where the presence of narrative in games has become an established fact through the content, marketing, and reception of videogames that accepts narrative as an integral part of videogame construction, some scholars still deride, ignore, or ridicule it. However, as I will show in the next chapter, narrative in videogames has become as complex as any other media.

Chapter 2: Narratology in Videogames—*Assassin's Creed 2*

Chapter one, whilst situating this thesis as a specifically narrative based examination of videogames, nevertheless, also attempted to show that narrative can be seen as a ludological aspect of videogames. In this chapter, I turn to narratology, specifically and principally that of Gerard Genette to show that the narrative in videogames is both evident and quantifiable, using literary techniques and concepts, showing that in addition to game design and marketing evidence for the presence and effectiveness of narrative in videogames, mainstream videogames can also withstand the scrutiny of narrative and narratological analysis, as a case study of *Assassin's Creed 2* will attest.

Assassin's Creed 2 is made up of three instalments: *Assassin's Creed 2* (Ubisoft 2009), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (Ubisoft 2010), and *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* (Ubisoft 2011), and is part of a wider *Assassin's Creed* franchise that includes *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft 2007) and *Assassin's Creed 3* (Ubisoft 2013).¹⁵ This series was chosen as a case study for a number of reasons: it is a successful videogame, both in economic and critical terms, with the third instalment, *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* selling nearly 7 million units (Makuch 2012). Its success situates it in the videogaming mainstream and renders it prominent in both gaming and critical media culture. The game franchise was also chosen because it has both strong and complex narrative structures, including a framing narrative, secondary narratives, and various historical embedded narratives, as well as strong ludic features, including fighting, driving, exploration, and problem solving, marking it as a strongly ludological game,

¹⁵ Several other games in the franchise have a different framing narrative and will not be included in this analysis.

rather than a primarily narrative game such as *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012).

Aristotle's *Poetics* is a well-known, widely acknowledged, foundation of contemporary narrative theory (G. Genette 1980, 163 & 173) (Onega and Landa 1996, 1, 13-14); it offers a theoretical foundation, affirming narrative in *Assassin's Creed 2*. The game constitutes a clear example of Aristotelian story, in that it 'is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude' (Aristotle 2008, 19). Echoing *The Odyssey*, Aristotle's main example of narrative in *Poetics*, *Assassin's Creed 2* follows a central protagonist, Ezio Auditore da Firenze from youth to old age as he travels from country to country encountering both enemies and friends and engaging in a variety of conflicts as he seeks vengeance for the execution of his father and brothers. During the game, the player controls Ezio's movements as he becomes a Master Assassin and destroys the corrupt Borgia family, loosening their grip on the Papacy¹⁶, which marks the end of the game. As Aristotle remarks in his equally brief summary of *The Odyssey*, this 'is the essence of the plot' (2008, 38); it takes many hours of playing, however, to discover this narrative and to piece the narrative elements together into a coherent whole within the larger framing narrative of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise.

Genette's Narratological Levels and Videogame Levels

Videogames have from their incipience featured levels through which players must progress to complete the games. The Mario games, (spanning more than 30 years of games and play), for example, require the player to traverse 'worlds' that are constructed from several smaller levels, each of which must be completed to allow access to the next

¹⁶ The game features a number of historically factual elements, including characters and locations.

one. All of these levels must be completed in order to allow access to the end of level boss, whose defeat allows progress to the next world. This is best exemplified through examination of the map of one of the games, in this case *Super Mario Bros. 3*, shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: *Super Mario Bros. 3* Map

As the map shows, there are 5 discrete levels in this world, a desert, which the player must complete in order to make her way across the map each marked with a number. The player moves from left to right across this space, beginning with level 1, and working through the levels to get to the castle (marked with the word 'help') and the primary antagonist, or boss, of the level. As can be seen, however, there is also scope for the player to access other elements of the map, such as bonus mushroom spaces, which provide rewards, for example extra lives and other prizes that will aid ludic progress. Even here, in a primarily ludic game, there is a structure that reflects that of western narrative fiction, a transition from left to right, and a quest that must be completed to allow closure.

Narrative theory has grown in complexity since Aristotle, most recently and notably through the work of Genette. This chapter seeks to establish whether videogame narratives stand up under the scrutiny of his multi-level and layered narrative theory, and I begin by addressing framing narratives containing non-linear, anachronistic narratives

from other times and places—what Genette designates ‘anachronies’. ‘Every anachrony’ he writes ‘constitutes, with respect to the narrative into which it is inserted – onto which it is grafted – a narrative that is temporally second, subordinate to the first’ (Genette 1980, 40). Genette defines anachrony as ‘all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders of the story and narrative’ (*ibid*), and expands on this, stating that ‘an anachrony can reach into the past or the future [...] this temporal distance we will call the anachronic reach’ (Genette 1980, 48). This temporal structure allows a narrative to be placed within a specific time period, and permits the use of flashbacks (and flash-forwards), enabling game designers to signal important events and incidents that occur outside the parts of the narrative the player directly interacts with, but that are needed for a full understanding of it. The relationship between the story and its assorted anachronisms allows the connection of the various elements and temporalities of the franchise to create a chronological timeline of events that comprise what I call the ‘Desmond’ narrative and that encompasses the wider (fictional) history of the Knights Templar and the centuries-long struggle for the ‘Pieces of Eden’, the location holding the power for world domination. The anachronic reach of *Assassin’s Creed 2* is 536 years, from 2012¹⁷ back to 1476. However, when considering the franchise as a whole this reach is much greater: the narrative of *Assassin’s Creed 1* begins in 1191, making the historical reach nearly a millennium;¹⁸ all of its information is needed to interpret and understand the narrative of the franchise.

The *Assassin’s Creed* franchise includes three temporal levels and anachronies: what I will call the ‘Ezio narrative’, set in Renaissance Italy, the aforementioned Desmond narrative, set in the twenty-first century across multiple locations, and the ‘Altair narrative’, set in the twelfth century in the Holy Land. Like many other

¹⁷ In-game information suggests that Desmond is kidnapped in September 2012.

¹⁸ The first *Assassin’s Creed* game is set in the twelfth century and follows the life of the assassin Altair ibn-La’Ahad.

videogames, consuming the narrative of *Assassin's Creed 2* involves the exploration of virtual, diegetic spaces, including historically accurate fifteenth-century landscapes: Italy in *Assassin's Creed 2*, Rome in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, and Constantinople in *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*. The Desmond narrative, which also appears in *Assassin's Creed* and *Assassin's Creed 3*, is the framing narrative for the three games; it is centred on Desmond Miles, a descendent of both Altaïr ibn-La'Ahad and Ezio, who is, like them, an assassin. The twenty-first century segments of the game provide a justification for the earlier historical sections of the game, requiring Desmond to enter the memories of his ancestors. Whilst the Ezio narrative in *Assassin's Creed 2* takes up the majority of the game, it is framed by, or grafted onto, the Desmond narrative. Mieke Bal, another prominent narratologist, observes that 'often the primary fabula [narrative] is hardly more than the occasion for a perceptible, character-bound narrator to narrate a story' (Bal 2009, 58), which is certainly the case here, as the twenty-first century framing narrative takes less than ten per cent of the game time. However, since the Ezio narrative is being relayed to Desmond, he is implicitly present throughout the game, as is the player who operates him and discovers the historical narrative alongside him. This also allows for ludonarrative dissonance to be lessened, through Desmond familiarising himself with the system, and explains extra-diegetic elements of the game, as I shall explain further.

Like videogame designers, Genette is concerned with levels in hierarchical terms: 'any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed' (Genette 1980, 228). In *Assassin's Creed 2*, the Ezio narrative is explained biologically as a series of ancestral memories located in Desmond's DNA, memories that are relayed to the player through Desmond's interaction with them. The amount of time spent on the Ezio narrative

(approximately 90% of the total playing time) might lead to the impression that this is the primary narrative, with the Desmond narrative being secondary, but as I state above, the Ezio narrative is in fact grafted onto the Desmond narrative. Although in a linear historical and biological sense, without ancestor Ezio there could be no descendent named Desmond, narratively speaking, without Desmond's narrative, there can be no Ezio (or Altaïr) narrative, a fact that the game makes explicit through references to previous failed attempts to access the memories through other test subjects. (Desmond is designated subject 16 and earlier subjects are inserted into the narrative, highlighting this within the game itself.)

In narratological terms, the Ezio narrative is placed higher than the Desmond narrative, which is, in Genette's terminology, diegetic (set within the primary fictional universe), as Table 1 makes clear.

Level 3	Altaïr/Cristina	Meta-Meta Diegetic
Level 2	Ezio	Metadiegetic
Level 1	Desmond	Diegetic

Table 1: Diegetic Levels of *Assassin's Creed 2*

By contrast, the Ezio narrative is metadiegetic, 'a narrative within the narrative' (1980, 228), at a higher level than the Desmond narrative, designated 'diegetic'. Further narrative levels appear in *Assassin's Creed 2*, through the Altaïr narrative, and the Cristina memories (which I will return to). In the first *Assassin's Creed* game, the Altaïr narrative is metadiegetic. In *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*, however, Ezio learns of his

ancestor, Altaïr, after the conclusion of the first game.¹⁹ Within the Ezio narrative, Altaïr's personal story is completed, adding a third temporal and narrative level that is classified narratologically as meta-meta-diegetic.

Clearly, the *Assassin's Creed 2* franchise demonstrates that videogames can achieve narrative complexity akin to complex narratives in other media. But the franchise goes further in its complex interweavings of temporal and narrative levels. The virtual reality system that features in the game, called the Animus, has authorial control over the narrative and the elements that are relayed to Desmond and, by extension, the player who is also consuming the narrative. Crucial to my argument about the interpenetration of ludic and narrative elements, the Animus serves as a way of reconciling ludic facets of the game with its narrative aspects. All of the User Interface (UI) information²⁰ (that is, non-diegetic information usually available only to the player—maps, health meters, prompts, etc.) is presented in this game as diegetic information also made available to Desmond in the fictional world of the game. Usually, UI information remains outside the story world; incorporating the UI information into the diegesis allows a higher level of what Janet Murray terms 'immersion' in the narrative via gameplay, thereby 'actively creat[ing] belief [...] to reinforce rather than to question the reality of the experience' (Murray 1997, 110).

While the main narrative is chronological, there are memories that are accessed in the later part of the game. The foldback²¹ structure of *Assassin's Creed 2* allows individual memory fragments to be considered as separate entities, permitting the anachronic extent of each narrative fragment to be variable. Anachronic extent refers to

¹⁹ Throughout *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*, Ezio uncovers 'Masyaf keys', which relay the conclusion of the Altaïr narrative to Ezio and the player.

²⁰ For further information on User Interfaces, see *Beyond the HUD: User Interfaces for Increased Player Immersion in FPS Games* (Fagerhold and Lorentzon, 2009).

²¹ A foldback structure in a videogame allows a varied ordering of both the gameplay and the narrative content. There is typically a main quest that must be completed in a linear order and other secondary narratives and quests that can be accessed in any order.

the time that an anachrony lasts—the length of a flashback or flash-forward—and Genette makes use of the term to describe ‘a duration of story that is more or less long’ (Genette 1980, 48). Some memories represent events occurring when Ezio was a younger man, such as the Christina memories.²² Desmond can interact with these memories in order to understand Ezio’s experiences, and to consider how they have shaped his personality; similarly, the ability to traverse the memories of Ezio is a significant factor in understanding him. This is a sophisticated temporal structure in any medium; the different memories are woven together to create multifaceted characterization and complexly interpenetrating narrative consciousness. Desmond accesses the memories of his ancestors in the DNA he inherits from and shares with them through interaction with the Animus. Integrating narrative and extra-narrative information, the Animus controls the representation of the different temporal aspects of the narrative, as well as what the player can and cannot do throughout the game. Functioning much like the holodeck of Murray’s utopian ideal, the Animus allows Desmond to interact directly with his ancestors - to *become* Altair and Ezio and relive their memories. The player is thus able not only to control Desmond but also, through the Animus, Ezio, and thereby to relive—or replay—the memories—or narratives—extracted from Desmond’s DNA. The Animus in *Assassin’s Creed 2* is upgraded from the first game to allow NPCs (non-playable characters controlled by the computer) from the Desmond narrative to communicate with Desmond even while as he is immersed in Ezio’s memories, as well as to pass non-diegetic information such as maps and historical facts to Desmond. The DNA memories that constitute crucial aspects of the diegesis and help to connect its parts over wide expanses of story time are sometimes accessed ludically and sometimes simply as recounted narratives. A number of memories have to

²² These are optional side missions in the game.

be ludically completed in a specific time, involving such gaming activities as fighting or racing; the time taken to consume these memories by players is measured in minutes made visible on the screen. Alternately, there are other memories whose time for narrative consumption is measured in days or even weeks – although ellipses and an exaggerated timeframe actually allows them to be completed in minutes or hours, rather than the longer timeframe that would be necessary if the game were completed in real time.

The structure of memory and reliving past events presents the main narrative of the game as a chronological set of memories requiring the player to follow a linear progression, with certain parts of the landscape inaccessible until the narrative demands it. However, structurally speaking, reliving memories allows the game to be presented as a semi-linear or foldback narrative. ‘Sand-box’ or open world games are predominantly non-linear structures that try to maintain narrative immersion through allowing the player to roam the entire landscape at will, without being channelled in a particular direction and with the ability to complete tasks and quests in any order.²³ In the *Assassins Creed 2* franchise, the combination of sandbox and linear play allows both a traditional narrative structure and free gameplay. Usually, sandbox games are non-linear in that they allow access to the whole landscape and the player to choose which parts of the game or narrative she wishes to explore, rather than be led along a specific route that has been decided by the game designer (there are few truly sandbox games that have narratives as understood by narratology, however). *Assassin’s Creed 2* gives immediate access to most of its landscapes and the player is able to complete some game content in whatever order she desires. The foldback structure of the game allows certain events to be presented linearly, whilst the majority of the game events can be accessed in

²³ Games such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda 2011) and *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar Games 2010) are also examples of foldback, or sandbox, games.

any order. This structure allows a game narrative to be broken down into chapters, or segments, and gives the player the ability to access these segments at different times, thus allowing for both narrative and ludic variation and integration. However, this does not mean that the player can access all content at will; if the player attempts to access parts of the narrative of *Assassin's Creed 2* that are prohibited by this structure, the Animus displays a message on the game screen telling the player that 'this area is not available in this memory' and warning that if the player does not return to the correct area, desynchronisation will occur and the memory will have to be relived (replayed). Many games require replaying, but here the game requires replay through loss of *narrative* memory, rather than ludic character death within the narrative, subtly accentuating the player's engagement with the narrative rather than the life-and-death ludic conventions of gameplay.

The next two sections of this chapter test videogames against additional aspects of Genette's theory of narrative temporality to demonstrate that here too they are every bit as complexly narrative as other media and that videogames go beyond narrative in other media through their ludic elements.

Beyond Classical Narratology: Ludology and Time in Videogames

Whilst all stories move in one direction—forward (Porter Abbott 2007, 39), the complexity of narrative temporality (as opposed to the diegetic historical temporality address in the previous section) leads Genette to devote two of his five chapters in *Narrative Discourse* to the topic. One chapter considers temporality in terms of duration ('the relationship [of] duration-of-story/length-of-narrative' [Genette 1980, 88]); the

other addresses it in terms of frequency: ('the relations [...] of repetition between the narrative and the diegesis' [Genette 1980, 133]).

Videogame narratives have much in common with other narrative structures. Teresa Bridgeman considers that temporal and spatial relationships are essential to our understanding of narratives'; and that 'theorists posit two basic temporalities of narrative which are generally referred to as "story" and "discourse"' (Bridgeman 2007, 58) In Genette's work, these correspond to 'erzählte Zeit (story time) and Erzählzeit (narrative time)' (Genette 1980, 33); story time is the time frame in which the narrative occurs; narrative time is the time taken for the reader to consume the narrative. Genette defines narrative time as pseudo-time, having 'no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading' (Genette 1980, 34). Jakob Lothe agrees, stating that it is impossible to 'answer the question how long a narrative text "lasts"' and that 'the only relevant yardstick is 'reading time'—something that varies from reader to reader' (Lothe 2000, 57).²⁴ Whilst this is an issue through all media, it is in written fiction and videogames that the time to consume a narrative is particularly variable. In film and most other audio-visual media, a narrative has a predetermined time. A film, for example, has a total length usually given in minutes, and this is the time it takes to consume the narrative. Within the narrative time, the viewer constructs the story time based on the events presented. The viewer constructs the story time within the narrative time 'through identifying its events and linking them by cause and effect, time, and space' (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 70). Like other media, videogames contain both types of temporality—the story time of the diegesis and the time it takes to play the

²⁴ Where Genette proposes two main temporal categories, Lothe's *Narrative in Fiction and Film* constructs three:

- 1 Order (ordre): answers the question 'when?'
- 2 Duration (durée): answers the question 'how long?'
- 3 Frequency (fréquence): answers the question 'how often?' (Lothe 2000, 54)

game. However, videogames also have the ability to ‘tell two stories: the story story – the narrative story that is the sum total of a game’s cut-scenes and dialogue and the gameplay story – the story described by the actions the player takes in the game world’ (Allison 2010), resulting in a third timeframe for the narrative, for which Genette’s theory offers no account. Through ludic gameplay, the videogame surpasses even the embedded and enacted narrative structures of other media addressed by Henry Jenkins in his discussion of classic detective story structure: ‘telling two stories – one more or less chronological (the [enacted] story of the investigation itself) and the other told radically out of sequence (the [embedded] events motivating and leading up to the murder)’ (Jenkins 2003, 126).

To avoid confusion, I propose the following terms to address the temporal aspects of videogame narrative, based on Genette’s model and incorporating Juul’s temporal framework (Juul 2005, 142-144):

Story Time: the total length of the narrative or ‘story story’

Narrative Time: the total length of the gameplay story

Playing Time: the total time needed to ‘consume’ the narrative

The story time of a videogame corresponds to the entire temporal framework of the story, from the earliest point in time found within the diegesis to the latest; this is the *erzählte Zeit* or story time. In *Bioshock*, the ‘narrative of Rapture’ (Stobbart 2011)—the story time— covers approximately fifteen years from the end of World War II until the conclusion of the gameplay story; however, the narrative time occurs over several hours at the end of the story times duration. In *Assassin’s Creed 2*, the story time of the Ezio narrative runs parallel to the fictional time, with the earliest point in the narrative, Ezio’s birth marking the beginning of both the story time and fictional time and ending with his retirement from the Assassin’s order (although the story time of the Ezio narrative is

concluded with a later animated film set 10 years after his retirement). When looking at the franchise as a whole, however, the story time becomes significantly longer. Beginning in the Twelfth Century with Altair, and ending with Desmond in 2012, the story time of this whole covers approximately a millennium, while the Ezio narrative takes only a small portion of this total time. The use of narratological conventions such as analepsis and anachronies within this structure, as with other media, allows the player to interpret the elements of the narrative and to place them in a chronological order and thereby establish the chronology of the story time, given that discrete elements are discovered non-chronologically.

In *Bioshock*, the narrative time of the game takes place approximately in 1960, although there are no signifiers within the game other than visual references to a New Year's party to welcome 1960. The narrative time of the game begins when the protagonist is stranded at sea and enters the underwater city of Rapture; both the narrative time and story time end with the escape from Rapture after the ludic climax of the game and its final cut-scene. The discovery of the narrative takes place primarily in what appears to be real time; that is one minute of play correspond to one minute of time passing in the diegesis. The game uses audio recordings and ghostly visions of prior events to allow the player to discover elements of the story time as she plays in the narrative time. The temporality of the narrative within this and other videogames, so far, is constructed using the same techniques as traditional literature, such as those explored by Genette in *Narrative Discourse*.

The playing time of a videogame is similar to the narrative time discussed by Genette. He considers that narrative time 'exists in space as space, and the time needed for "consuming" it is the time needed for *crossing* or *traversing* it' (Genette 1980, 34 (original emphasis)). In the case of a videogame such as *Bioshock*, the playing time

varies, taking anywhere from approximately eight hours to over 20 hours, depending on player choices, including the level of ludic difficulty, and the degree to which the player chooses to interact with the story time of the game. This can allow the player to foreground the ludic aspects of the game, or to engage in an in-depth, time-consuming exploration of the landscape to uncover all of the embedded narrative.²⁵ Similarly, in *Assassin's Creed 2*, the three instalments can be completed in as little as 30 hours if the player follows a strictly linear path and avoids the optional story content. Completing the games with a shorter playing time does not influence the narrative time of the game, which is authored by the game designer and is a fixed length. A full completion and understanding of the narrative, however, can take a significantly longer time; in videogames, as with other forms of fiction, the time taken to 'complete'²⁶ a videogame can vary widely from person to person. These games clearly demonstrate that videogames can sustain narrative temporalities in their story worlds every bit as complex as in other media and that the division between narrative and play, far from setting videogames outside of narratological theories, requires new narratological theories to be developed to explicate them. Once again, narratology and ludology are shown to be deeply implicated in each other in videogame design and consumption.

Movement Across a Narrative: Temporality in Videogames

Videogames, as we have seen, share the same temporal basis as traditional narratological texts. However, the temporal framework of videogames takes this structure and not only keeps up with it, but goes beyond to change and to make this framework more complex. We have seen that, for Genette, narrative time is the time it takes to consume a narrative

²⁵ This will be discussed in depth later in this chapter

²⁶ To get from the opening scene of a game to the closing scene through play.

and the story time is the timeframe in which a narrative occurs. Genette does not stop with this basic distinction; he goes further to address four ‘narrative movements’ (Genette 1980, 94) that navigate between the two temporalities: pause, scene, summary, and ellipsis. These movements, when taken together construct the passage of time within a narrative, with each of the four having a different temporal function. Genette uses the following to describe these four narrative movements:

Pause:	$NT = n, ST = 0$. Thus: $NT \infty > ST$ ²⁷
Scene:	$NT = ST$
Summary:	$NT < ST$
Ellipsis:	$NT = 0, ST = n$. Thus: $NT < \infty ST$

(Genette 1980, 95)

This schema describes the relationship between the narrative time and the story time, as it is found within a traditional narrative. This also forms the basis of the narratological analysis of videogames; therefore, each of the narrative movements will be considered, beginning with ellipsis.

Ellipsis is a major part of the narrative construction of most videogames, as it is with many other media, an omission of information that is not relevant to the narrative, such as sleeping, eating, travelling to familiar locations and personal grooming. This can take several forms; for example, many games use ‘fast travel’ to allow the player to revisit locations once they have been discovered. The player chooses the location on a map and the game takes the character there, without the need for repeatedly traversing the landscape. As well as this general ellipsis, *Assassin’s Creed 2* contains the three narratological sub-categories found in *Narrative Discourse*, and which Genette terms explicit, implicit, and hypothetical ellipses. Explicit ellipses are those that ‘arise either

²⁷ NT = Narrative Time; ST = story time; $\infty >$ = Infinitely greater than; $< \infty$ = Infinitely smaller than

from an indication of time they elide [...] or else from elision pure and simple' (Genette 1980, 106). Put simply, they are openly referenced in a narrative, for example, having characters commenting on the passage of time, or a written presentation of dates that make a temporal omission clear. *Assassin's Creed 2* uses the Animus to construct a chronological temporal sequence, the earlier temporality occurring in Desmond's DNA. Each DNA sequence involves a new timeframe, the date of which is shown both on the Animus screen and at the beginning of the memory, explicitly making the player aware of the ellipsis and the period that is omitted from the narrative.

Complicating the narrative structure of videogames further, the second subcategory of ellipsis occurring in *Assassin's Creed 2* is implicit ellipses, those instances 'whose very presence is not announced in the text' (Genette 1980, 108) but of which the player becomes aware through play. At several points in *Assassin's Creed 2* there are references to events in the Desmond narrative that the player becomes aware of through talking to NPC characters and reading their emails. In doing so, the player learns of non-ludic information such as Desmond having nightmares, the only reference to this information in the whole game. These events do not occur within the story time or fictional time of the game, and therefore are implicit, occurring outside the player's primary interaction with the narrative. Less obvious than implicit ellipses are hypothetical ellipses, omissions in a narrative that have no temporal placement. The only way these ellipses can be placed is through their relationship to other narrative factors, such as characters, specific settings, and the events occurring around the ellipsis. Whilst the emails of the NPCs in *Assassin's Creed 2* are implicit—it is easy to situate them temporally through repeated interaction with the diegetic computer system, they also indicate that Desmond frequently emerges from The Animus and carries out tasks in the primary diegesis, despite this not taking place during play. The discovery that he

emerges frequently and carries out routine tasks places is hypothetical – there is no way to place these events within the narrative or ludic structure of the game.

Ellipsis is not alone in constructing videogame narratives, and alongside *Assassin's Creed 2's* frequent use of ellipsis, summary can be used to deliver narrative information that exists outside the gameplay narrative. For Genette, summary, is 'a form with variable tempo [...] which with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range between scene and ellipsis' (Genette 1980, 94). More simply, Bal defines summary as 'a suitable instrument for presenting and, for the reader, for gleaning background information, or for connecting various scenes' (Bal 2009, 103) by condensing information and presenting that information to the reader, viewer, or player in that concentrated form. This is part of Juul's supposition of a mutual exclusivity between games and narrative. In his MA thesis, *A Clash between Game and Narrative*, Juul posits that in videogames, 'the now of the game prevents it from being a representation of something happening another time' (Juul 1999, 33), and while early videogames certainly followed a structure that appeared to take place in the 'now' of a videogames temporality, this is no longer the case. Videogames such as *Bioshock*, *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment 2010), and *Doom 3* (id Software 2004) insert information such as written text, audio recordings, or visual signifiers into the landscape to enable the player to construct a narrative, separating the narrative time from the fictional time. This allows the player to not only *play* the game in the present, as Juul deems necessary, but also allows the player to interact with the entire narrative temporality, collating and constructing the composite information of a previous timeframe into a coherent whole. In *Assassin's Creed 2* this takes the form of inserting extra-diegetic information into the game. The *Assassin's Creed* franchise uses an historical basis to the game, placing the fictional narrative within a wider factual structure, which has been created with the help

of professional historians (Sternfeld 2012, 269). This includes the presence of historical figures, locations, and architecture in the game. These elements are signalled to the player using a short textual explanation upon their discovery. For example, when the player discovers the Little Hagia Sophia church (a real location in Istanbul), she is given the following information: ‘The Ottomans called that one "Küçük Ayasofya", or Little Hagia Sophia. It was a Byzantine church initially, built sometime around 500, and many believe it served as an early prototype for the larger Hagia Sophia cathedral built a few decades later’. This information is factually correct, and its insertion helps to create a world that transcends the fictional, and allows the player to interact with a seemingly historical narrative setting, without it encroaching significantly on gameplay or the fictional narrative.

Scene is the most problematic of the four movements in videogames, whilst seeming to be the simplest. Returning to Genette’s literary definitions, scene is considered to be an ‘equality of time between narrative and story’ (Genette 1980, 94), and involves events taking place in ‘real time’—comparable to time in the real world. Juul, broadly agrees with this as a definition for videogames, and in his consideration of narrative understands the term ‘scene’ to refer to a situation ‘where the narration relatively takes as long as the action’ (Juul 1999, 31), reflecting the Aristotelian unity of time. He draws on this definition to assert that ‘an action-based computer game always passes with the speed of a scene: one minute in the time of the game corresponds to one minute of playing’ (Juul 1999, 31). Although initially this appears to be true, an inspection of games such as *Assassin’s Creed 2* and *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar Games 2010) shows that time does not pass with a 1:1 ratio; however, Juul is correct in his assertion that ‘pressing the fire key or moving the mouse immediately affects the game world’ (Juul 2005, 142-143). Juul, in *Half Real*, considers that ‘most action

games, and in the traditional arcade game, the play time – fictional time relation is presented as being 1:1' and considers that 'the game presents a parallel world, happening in real time' (Juul 2005, 142-143). It is indeed true that the physical interactions of the player affect the game in real time, but the presentation of fictional and story time in the game does not necessarily correspond to Juul's 1:1 ratio. For example, the passage of time within the diegesis is made visible in *Assassin's Creed 2* through the passage of the sun, moon, and stars, which have a set rotation, as they do in real life. But, this is not the same as the playing time or the narrative time of the game. *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar Games 2010) uses a similar structure with the sun and moon traversing the sky, but sets a ratio of 1:30, where a 24-hour period in the story world takes 48 minutes to pass in the game. There is then, a ratio and a dual temporality at work, encompassing both the real-time effects of interaction with the fictional world and the internal temporal structure of that world, but they are different time frames, occurring simultaneously in the same game section.

Whilst the temporal aspects of a videogame scene are not at a 1:1 ratio of the game to real time, the action taking place within that scene are, establishing a sophisticated temporality within a game narrative, one that uses two concurrent timeframes. In *Red Dead Redemption*, although there is a 1:30 ratio (one minute of game time represents the passage of 30 minutes of story time), the actions of the player are delivered as Juul states, 'in real time' (Juul 2005, 142). This is a more complex temporal narrative than anything in Genette's system: not only do two temporalities occur in a single scene, these are overlaid and the player must interact with both temporalities simultaneously. For example, in *Assassin's Creed 2*, there are missions that must be completed at a specific time. Ezio must wait until dawn or nightfall usually to complete a series of tasks, and whilst the passage of time is truncated to allow a full 24 hour period to pass in

minutes, the action take place in ‘real-time’ even whilst the passage of the sun, moon, and stars continue to move at the faster speed around the action.

Moving on from definitions of scene, pause involves halting a narrative in order to insert some other information, such as description. Historically, pause has been the most popular way to insert narrative information into a videogame. This technique began in order to allow the action of the next scene to be loaded at a time when it could take several minutes for the information to be transferred from a cassette tape or disk to the computer. In the 1980 game *Pac-man*, the ‘player sees “Intermission” screens that feature [Pac-man] chasing ghosts’ (Howells 2002, 111). This game ‘constructed a simple narrative, even using movie-style scene markers to divide it into acts. This coincided with the move of videogames from arcades to the home, and the ability of the player to save their progress and to continue later’ (*ibid*). Designers then went on to incorporate narrative information into the cut-scene, breaking the tension of the game and providing the player with a reward for their ludic skill, as well as to allow the next game segment to load. Sacha Howells cites *Tomb Raider* as an example of this reward structure, in which the player, after defeating five levels of the game, is shown a ‘slickly produced CG cut-scene of Lara’s action-hero break-in to Natla Headquarters, where she uncovers the next piece of the puzzle’ (Howells 2002, 113).

Pause and summary are closely related, in that a pause in a narrative is frequently used to allow a summary to take place. Whilst the cut-scene provides narrative and ludic information, game designers are beginning to make games that do not prominently feature cut-scenes, partly to alleviate the objection that some gamers have to the game being interrupted by the narrative, instead inserting the narrative through other means, such as the aforementioned summary. However, the ludic structure of videogames still uses pause; usually this involves panning over the

immediate landscape to show the player the environment before a ‘boss’²⁸ battle or a spatial puzzle, recognisable as a visual relation to the establishing shot in cinematography. However, these animated shots function in the same way as pause in traditional narratives, halting the action to provide further necessary information.

Taken together, these four movements construct the passage of time in a narrative. The interplay of the four movements allows the reader, viewer, or player to create a chronological order of that narrative, despite events being delivered non-chronologically. This is the same for videogames and traditional narratives, despite objections. The four narrative movements allow play and narrative to be integrated, rather than separated; narrative information can be included into a game without detracting from play, whilst the temporal structure described in narratology is also found in the ludic construction of videogames.

Flash Back – Or Forward: Prolepsis and Analepsis in Videogame Narratives

One of the primary narratological strategies used in *Assassin’s Creed 2* is analepsis, defined in *Narrative Discourse* as ‘an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment’ (Genette 1980, 40). The entire game franchise (up to the end of *Assassin’s Creed 3*) is constructed as a series of memories that the player—and Desmond—interact with in order to complete both the game and the narrative. As the definition of analepsis is so broad, Genette sub-divides it into two categories, internal and external analepsis, which are differentiated by the narrative level at which they occur (as discussed earlier in the chapter). An external analepsis, as

²⁸ The Boss is the culmination of the gameplay in a level and is usually the hardest enemy to kill.

the name suggests, is one that takes place outside the first, or framing, diegesis, whilst providing narrative information. An internal analepsis takes place within the first diegesis, albeit at an earlier time, and again provides narrative information. Structurally, the entire Ezio narrative of *Assassin's Creed 2* is a series of external analepsis, as it is separate from (in temporal terms as discussed earlier) but nevertheless dependent on and occurs within the Desmond narrative. Other videogames also use external analepsis, albeit less explicitly to carry a narrative forward; *Bioshock*, for example, uses a series of ghostly scenes, which take place earlier than the fictional time of the game to help construct the narrative. These scenes do not take place within the primary temporality that the player interacts with, and so are external, rather than internal; as Genette writes they 'never at any moment risk interfering with the first narrative' (Genette 1980, 49-50). Here, the notion of the embedded and the enacted narrative structure comes to the fore. The scenes in which the player/protagonist observes earlier events in *Bioshock* are instances of the embedded narrative—the story of Rapture and its destruction, all of which take place before the arrival of the protagonist. These are embedded into the game for the player to uncover, should she so wish. Crucially, whilst these ghostly images would usually be an example of a pause in traditional literature and film, in *Bioshock*, the player is able to ignore them in favour of playing if she chooses and so they do not automatically function as a pause, but instead remain embedded within the game landscape unless the player chooses to pause and explore their relevance. Narrative, therefore, is integrated with the gameplay. More common in videogames than external analepsis - as in other media - is internal analepsis, used to provide relevant narrative information. In many media forms analepsis is more commonly known as a 'flashback', although in narratology Bal uses the term retroversion, avoiding 'flashback' because of [its] vagueness and

psychological connotations' (Bal 2009, 83). Many media, including videogames, utilise analepsis as part of the narrative delivery; the *Uncharted* franchise, the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, and *Heavy Rain*, to cite just a small sample of videogames use this structure to assist in the construction of their narratives. All of these games allow the player to control a character within this analeptic narrative delivery, featuring the protagonist (and even the antagonist in *Heavy Rain*) enacting events that take place prior to that of the main body of the game and narrative, but that take place within its narrative temporality.

In *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, when playing as Ezio, there is the opportunity to complete extra quests and missions that have no direct relevance to the game's plot, with one set of these missions being The Cristina Memories. When the player achieves a certain level of synchronisation with Ezio (that is, a certain percentage of the game is completed), repressed memories become available via Desmond's DNA. In the game, this is explained to Desmond via another character telling him, "One last thing: as you raise your synchronization by executing events the way Ezio lived them, you might discover some... repressed memories" (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2011). These repressed memories, dealing with Ezio's lover and their relationship, are not only internal analepsis, but are also meta-analeptic; that is, the portions of the games concerning Ezio are memories and are analepses, these further memories are also analepses within the analepsis being played. Furthermore, this second analepsis is an instance of internal analepsis, rather than external. The events within these particular memories occur after the beginning of the Ezio narrative the player interacts with, whereas the analepsis dealing with Ezio are external to the 21st Century narrative, as they do not relate directly to the first narrative, through character, diegesis or storyline. In the game, there are five of these optional, internal, analepsis to be played out, which

result in small cut-scenes; these cut-scenes are based on the novel adaptation of *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance* (Bowden 2009) and chart the interactions of the lovers throughout Ezio's life, from his first meeting her in 1476, to her dying in his arms in 1489. These memories, as already intimated, while expanding on Ezio's past, bear no relation to the game's ludic completion, or the fictional time of the game itself, and so can be considered in their entirety as internal analepsis; that is, all of these quests take place within the fictional time of the game. These are specifically narrative elements of the game, with no ludic function and their sole purpose is to bring about a narrative understanding of Ezio as a character.

Conclusion

Assassin's Creed 2, as I have shown, adheres to the rules of narratology as defined by Genette in *Narrative Discourse*. Despite Genette being concerned primarily with the written text, and the videogame being an audio-visual medium, the concepts he established through the analysis of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* serve as the basis for a narratological study of this medium. Not all videogames will adhere to a narratological reading – after all, not all videogames are narrative based. However, I have shown that videogames are capable of withstanding such a reading especially in terms of temporality—a contested area in defining a videogame as containing narrative. The next task is to consider how videogames surpass Genette's narratological analysis, and what further tools the scholar might require to fulfil an exhaustive narratological reading of a videogame.

Chapter 3: Narratives of Space in Videogames

So far, the analysis of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise shows that the temporal structure of many videogames can accommodate even the most complex aspects of Gérard Genette's narratological theory of temporality. And yet we have seen that they also exceed them. Genette's concepts predate many of these games and thus do not offer an account of the ludo-narrative hybrids that we find in them. Temporally speaking, game franchises such as *Assassin's Creed* can take over 100 hours to complete—far longer than most other media—during which time the player gains expansive and deepening insight into the protagonist, the diegesis, and the extra-diegetic narrative structure through direct ludic interaction with them rather than reading or viewing alone. Playing a videogame for numerous hours enables other kinds of narrative depth and complexity besides the complex temporalities articulated by Genette. *Assassin's Creed 2* (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2011) is not only set in the Renaissance period, its Italian landscape is further represented with historical accuracy (albeit simplified), offering the player insight into this period through representations of its architecture, furnishings, costumes, and characters such as Leonardo da Vinci and the Borgia family, who are loosely based on their historical namesakes. Beyond reading, viewing and interacting with characters, the player makes her way through the game world, uncovering spatial as well as temporal narratives as she traverses areas based on a historical map of Italy. This exploration requires mastery of the videogame space through direct interaction, a recognised and oft discussed feature of videogames. Yet this mastery and coverage of space furthermore creates a narrative complexity not commonly addressed by scholars and not found in other media.

The mastery of space has featured throughout videogame history; early games such as *Adventure* (Adams no date) and *The Hobbit* (Van der Heide 2012) draw heavily on and adapt the literary tradition of the quest, focusing on the journey of a hero through a landscape to find a treasure or goal. Mario is tasked repeatedly with rescuing the princess: the game focuses on the journey he makes to reach her, the obstacles he overcomes, and the enemies he defeats in order to liberate her. Indeed, most videogames focus on a journey from one place to another, echoing the quest narratives of literature such as *The Odyssey* and *Lord of the Rings*. In videogames, however, the player not only vicariously accompanies the protagonist on the quest (as is the case in other, physically passive media), she is the driving force that moves the protagonist on that quest through her control of the protagonist's movements. As Bob Rohak notes,

The game apparatus—a software engine that renders three-dimensional form an embodied perspective, directed in real time by players through the physical interface—achieves what the cinematic apparatus cannot: a sense of literal presence, and a newly participatory role, for the viewer [...] like the “Yes, that’s what I see” of successful cinematic suture, but goes further: it is ‘Yes, that’s what I *do*. (Rehak 2003, 121)

Whilst the reader or viewer may control the momentum and pacing at which she reads or witnesses a hero's quest in other media, hers is typically a linear journey (although she can revisit specific moments by rereading or rewatching). In videogames, this linear structure is regularly abandoned, as players must revisit particular parts of the quest to defeat obstacles ludically and may perform different actions when revisiting them in order to attain greater success, such as finding hidden items that were missed the first time. *Dante's Inferno* (Electronic Arts 2010), loosely based on *The Divine Comedy*, illustrates how the videogame quest differs from the traditional literary quest.

Unlike the poem's Dante, the game's Dante can return to any of the circles of Hell he has already visited to collect items he needs to complete his journey into Hell's final circle. *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar Games 2010) goes further than this to allow players to roam the landscape at will, fulfilling missions and quests at will in any order, with only a small proportion requiring sequential completion (and these relate to the narrative more than the ludic elements of the game).²⁹ Role-playing videogames such as *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (BioWare 2014), *Skyrim* (Bethesda 2011) and *Fallout 3* (Bethesda 2008) also present nonlinear options to players. Evolved from earlier *Dungeons and Dragons* type games, which in turn evolved from fantasy fiction such as *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 2007 edition), these too go beyond spatial narrative structures in these older forms. All make mastery of, and progress through, game space the basis of both narrative and ludic completion. Without such mastery and progress through play, the narratives cannot be completed.

The importance of setting and landscape in videogames has been extensively addressed by videogame scholars and narrativists alike: Espen Aarseth, a noted ludologist, states that 'the defining element in computer games is spatiality' (E. Aarseth 2007, 44); narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan perceives that 'digital environments are spatial' (Ryan, *Avatars of Story* (Electronic Mediations) 2006, 238); and at least one book-length study has been made of spatiality in videogames, Michael Nitsche's *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play and Structure in 3D Worlds* (2008). The worlds created for videogames range from those based on real locations (such as *LA Noire* (Rockstar Games 2011) set in 1950s Los Angeles and the historical settings of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise) to the fantastic landscapes of *The Elder Scrolls* and *Dragon Age* franchises, to the post-apocalyptic renditions of *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013),

²⁹ This is a variation on the foldback structure discussed in chapter 2.

Metro 2033 (4A Games 2010), and *Dead Island* (Techland 2011). In each, settings and landscapes are instrumental and indispensable to narrative and ludic structures alike.

In my discussions of prolepsis and analepsis in the previous chapter, I alluded briefly to embedded narratives, indicating how they are part of the temporal structure of videogames, allowing players to engage not only temporally unfolding narratives but also different narrative temporalities within a single game. Henry Jenkins considers that games fit into ‘a much older tradition of spatial stories’ and that ‘game designers don’t simply tell stories, they design worlds’ (Jenkins 2003, 3). World design involves situating narratives within the landscape itself: for example, audio files, legible documents, visual objects, collectibles, and interaction with the non-player characters who occupy that landscape. Jenkins notes that ‘environmental storytelling ... creates the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience’; to further that immersion, designers ‘embed narrative information within their *mise-en-scene*’ (Jenkins 2003).

This mode of narrative delivery is also known as a pull narrative, in which designers ‘rely on the player to *pull* the narrative’ (Calleja 2011, 123) out of the landscape, generally allowing them to choose whether to interact with such objects and characters or ignore them and miss out on the narratives they convey. Pull narratives emerged in response to the perceived disconnect between gaming and narrative consumption that I addressed in my introduction and Chapter One; in embedding the narrative in the landscape, a game is able to function on both ludic and narrative levels, without either necessarily detracting from the other.

Exploring Rapture in *Bioshock* is an interactive experience; that is, the player can interact with most of the objects in the city: toilets can be flushed, chairs can be sat upon, and doors, even if they do not open, can be tried. The majority of *Bioshock*’s story is woven into the landscape through a variety of techniques; audio files are

scattered throughout the landscape and the player needs to discover these as she traverses the game world in order to fully understand the narrative. There are 122 audio files in total, ranging in content from personal diary entries to messages for other people; when these are found and a timeline of events constructed, they comprise the majority of the meta-narrative, leading to the point at which the player enters the game. Although the use of audio logs is not unique in videogames, their embeddedness in the game world means that the player does not lose control of the avatar whilst the narrative is delivered orally. Alternatively, if the player is not interested in the narrative experience, she can choose to ignore these elements and concentrate on the ludic aspect of the game. These audio logs, as mentioned, function as a narrative soundscape, providing a great deal of the narrative information.

Audio logs are joined by cut-scenes in *Bioshock*, which unfold like audiovisual film sequences set against the backdrop of the game's landscape. These reveal the actions of splicers,³⁰ the 'ghosts' that inhabit Rapture. Whilst these animations can be found all over Rapture, one particularly illuminating example appears near the beginning of the game. The player has just exited an elevator and been introduced to the plan for the protagonist (and player) to save another's wife and son. If the player walks slowly forward, she sees a shadow on the wall of a woman leaning over a pram (Figure 4). If not interrupted, the woman will speak the following words, sung to the tune of the lullaby, 'Mockingbird':

³⁰ The addict inhabitants of Rapture



Figure 4: 'Mockingbird' Cut-scene

When your daddy's in the ground, mommy's going to sell you by the pound.

When your mommy's up and gone, you're going to be the lonely one.

When you are the lonely one, no one will be there to sing this song.

Hush now, Mommy's gone and daddy too.... *(singing stops and character speaks instead)*

Wait, this is happening before. ... And none. Why aren't you here? ...

Why is it today and not then when you were warm and sweet? Why can't mommy hold you to her breast and feel your teeth?

(2K Games 2007)

It takes over 30 seconds to run through this animation, which can be listened to without interruption or ignored, as the player wishes, without any loss to the game playing experience or ludic progress through the landscape. These integrated cut-scenes provide fragments of the narrative, which, when added to the information from other sources, can be pieced together like a jigsaw and to make up the entire narrative of Rapture. This is something that Ken Levine, one of the main designers of *Bioshock*,

was clear that he wanted to create; he states that the usual model for games, is ‘game, cut-scene, game, cut-scene, game (Kumar & Nutt, 2008), does not integrate play and narrative, and therefore, he considers such a structure to be ‘an artefact from when our world was simple’ (*ibid*). By contrast, in his design, ‘the cut-scenes take up a lot of chaff space, because of storytelling stuff and little details and subtle emotions’ (Kumar & Nutt, 2008). Joining larger plot arcs, Levine uses the landscape to nuance and detail the broad strokes of the narrative and to bring more subtle arcs of affect into it. For example, some allow the player to gain an empathic understanding of the process by which Rapture has become dystopian; others enable her to perceive the splicers as the people they used to be rather than simply the enemy monsters of the shooter game. The splicer referred to above is represented as insane, but at the same time, she is shown to have been a mother with a baby and husband. This mother, addicted to ADAM like all splicers, may have (although this is conjecture and narrative interpretation) given her child to Ryan and the Little Wonders Educational Facility after the husband was killed (‘when your daddy’s in the ground, mommy’s going to sell you by the pound’). In the words of the lullaby, the splicer hovers between past and present times and spaces, yearning for the child to be with her in the now of the game (‘Why aren’t you here?... Why can't mommy hold you to her breast and feel your teeth?’) In the second line, she understands that the baby is not ‘warm and sweet’ like it used to be, but a cold and inhuman Little Sister, draining ADAM from corpses to feed the addicts. Whilst this is not carrying forward the plot of Rapture’s downfall, it nevertheless reveals the emotive impact of its systems and seeks to elicit a sympathetic response to the inhabitants, despite their murderous addiction to ADAM. Levine additionally perceives that the cut-scene is intended to create a sense of horror as well as sympathy:

Bioshock's story is "loss, loss, loss." Loss of dreams, loss of hope, loss of love. That's what makes it horror. That's why one of the first horror things you see is the woman with the baby carriage. There's no baby in there. She's lost her mind, and she's lost the thing she loves. (Kumar & Nutt, 2008)

Videogames use environmental storytelling to differing degrees, ranging from using collectible items representing traditional media, such as books to provide historical narrative information in the *Elder Scrolls* series, to using the environment in a way that requires the player to interpret historical events in *Fallout 3* (Bethesda 2008) through visual recognition of spaces and spatial navigation. The *Fallout* franchise of role-playing games bases its narrative and ludic premise on a post-apocalyptic version of the US, with the third instalment, *Fallout 3*, set 200 years after a nuclear war has ravaged the landscape, leaving most of the population dead and the planet heavily irradiated. 'The games provide a retro-futuristic, post-apocalyptic setting', writes Sara Mosberg Iversen of the 1950s inspired backdrop, while noting that whereas 'the atmosphere of ravaged civilization and the adult themes can be seen as merely a ploy for attention, there is reason to regard the games as a comment on currently relevant topics. The whole series invokes issues such as consumer culture, corporate power, propaganda, racism, and what it means to be human' (Iverson 2012), with the seemingly dead environment directly commenting upon those issues today.

In *Fallout 3*, the main narrative arc takes the form of a quest, and in pursuit of this quest, the player needs to traverse the landscape, not once, but several times, discovering discrete locations, characters, and remnants of pre-war America. The player controls a character of her own design who explores the 'Capital Wastelands', the ruins of Washington DC, in search of her (the character's) father (voiced by actor

Liam Neeson). Scattered throughout this landscape are many embedded micro-narratives that the player can discover, ranging in scope from vignettes that show the fate of a single family to more elaborate representations such as journals and side-quests that offer the player insight into some of the wider post-apocalyptic cultures that have grown up in this alternate America. Thus ‘while many locations do not offer much in terms of quest opportunities or loot they often present a variety of atmospheres and embedded stories’ (Iverson 2012). Sarah Grey also addresses the atmospheric qualities of the landscape in this game, noting that they invoke ‘a sense of helplessness, pathos, and fear as well as subverting expectations’, causing the player to consider her own societal place, and enabling her ‘philosophical contemplation’ (Grey 2009). While the search for the father continues some of the traditional quest narrative structures, this game foregrounds political and cultural narrative ideologies.

This form of narrative delivery, known as embedded or Environmental storytelling, then, fulfils a variety of narrative functions. In *Fallout 3*, when the player first guides her character into the landscape from the relative safety of Vault 101, she discovers an environment that is worn by time and destroyed by the war upon which the game franchise is premised. Spread over more than 140 locations, the player must discover the narrative of this future Washington through spatial navigation and environmental engagement. In addition to the game’s ideological narrative trajectories, there are ludonarrative ones; Jenkins lists four ways that environmental storytelling can be achieved: evocative spaces, enacting stories, embedded narratives, and emergent narratives. All four appear in *Fallout 3*. Evocative spaces are those that ‘draw upon our previously existing narrative competencies’ and ‘allow [the player] to enter physically into spaces’ (Jenkins 2003); these precede the player’s involvement with the game. Recognisable locations assist this process in *Fallout 3*; the player is traversing a

futuristic Washington DC, and as such can find present-day actual locations that have become eroded or destroyed in the game, such as the Washington Monument (Figure 5), the Capitol Building, the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, and even the White House, placing the player in an *unheimlich* setting—familiar, yet defamiliarised through the effects of the war and the time that has passed since the war (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: The Washington Monument In *Fallout 3* (Left); The Monument Today (Right)

Enacting stories reflects the difference between the narrative timeframe and the story timeframe as defined in chapter 2 of this study. Juxtaposing the terms ‘broadly defined goals’ and ‘localised incidents’ in his discussion of enacting stories, Jenkins considers these to be ‘stories which respond to alternative aesthetic principles’ (Jenkins 2003). In *Fallout 3*, the gameplay narrative involves the player guiding the protagonist (known as The Lone Wanderer) through the landscape to find her missing father. Whilst doing this, she also discovers a variety of quests, conflicts, conversations, and locations that construct the wider, historical narrative. The geography of the game has been constructed in such a way that the player, even whilst concentrating on gameplay, cannot help but discover features of this wider narrative. As the elements of the wider

narrative's plot are deposited within the geography of the landscape, the player comes into contact with 'obstacles [that] thwart and affordances [that] facilitate the protagonist movement towards resolution' (Jenkins 2003). Gaming and narrative thus coincide as well as diverge in this structure.

Embedded narratives in videogames differ substantially from those of other media such as film and novels. In these media, an embedded narrative is one that occurs within another, where a frame is used to embed a secondary narrative within a primary one (as in a narrator recounting another narrator's story), and is a primarily temporal and perspectival structure, such as in the film *Inception* (Kiss 2012). In videogames, however, an embedded narrative is often constructed within the landscape or setting, to create 'affective potential or communicate significant narrative information' (Jenkins 2003). As the player enters a space within a game world and looks around, she may not only gather narrative information, but also experience emotions 'where the space has been transformed by narrative events'. This dynamic is illustrated in *Fallout 3* when the player enters a deserted house and discovers the skeletons of a child, (and further exploration reveals a dog) she may experience emotions of loss, sorrow, or eeriness. In the house there is also a functional robot. If the player activates the robot, it will read a bedtime story to the skeleton child³¹ and will approach the dog and try to prop it up to walk it. Here, narrative elements are embedded within the location. The player must interact with the setting to discover them. Not only this, she must connect them to other events embedded in other scenes to reconstruct the past of the game world.

³¹ This story is titled *There will Come Soft Rains*, and is a 1920's poem about nature reclaiming the planet after the fall of humanity and was used in a short story by Ray Bradbury, which in turn featured an automated house going about its daily routine, unaware that its inhabitants have been destroyed by a nuclear war.

Of the four methods of environmental storytelling, emergent narratives are the least common in videogames. Emergent narratives are ‘not pre-structured or pre-programmed’; they are constructed primarily by the player in ways similar to Janet Murray’s account of ‘procedural authorship’ (Murray 1997, 152). All the same, Murray reminds, the game designer, not the player, is responsible for ‘writing the rules for the interactor’s involvement’ (Murray 1997, 152). This, she asserts, is not player authorship, but player agency; emergent narratives unfold as the results of decisions and choices made by the player—yet these results are a veneer obscuring the underlying programming (Murray 1997, 126).

Since Jenkins’s, Murray’s, and other narratological forms of spatial storytelling in videogames post-date Genette’s narratological theories, they underscore the degree to which new media call for new narrative theories. Unlike traditional narratives, which Genette could and did account for, videogames are not limited to using space as a setting for narrative; it is also a space for play. Nor are players simply viewers, hearers, or readers of narrative space: they enter it and travel through it, the game’s protagonist allowing the player a vicarious immersion into a fictional landscape and narrative alike. In conclusion, the first part of this chapter has shown that in order to make narrative progress, players must interact with and navigate the game space ludically: the narrative cannot progress without mastering the game space. It has highlighted a new relationship of narrative consumer to narrative space, a much-discussed concept in videogames.³² It has demonstrated that direct interaction with the setting, rather than mere observation of it, heightens the immersion of the player in the narrative and that ludic interaction as and with game characters within narrative spaces allows more intense identification with fictional characters and with the narrative more generally.

³² See, for example, Murphy (2004); Fernández-Vara, Zagal and Mateas (2005); von Borries (2007).

These general points can best be illustrated and deepened through the study of a heavily narrative videogame, *Dear Esther* (Pinchbeck 2012), which forgoes many ludic tropes and furthermore foregrounds the relationship between the player and the landscape (which in this game includes the soundscape), thereby accentuating the ways in which the spaces of game worlds produce and reveal narrative.

Letters to Esther: Experimental Narrative Techniques in *Dear Esther*

Dear Esther. I am on a stone jetty, the sun is setting, and I am alone on this island. I cannot interact with anything; all I can do is walk, look, and listen. As I walk, I hear a voice speak, reading fragments of letters to you. It becomes clear, as I listen to the fragments that I am following the path that someone else has already trodden; the author of the letters has preceded me in my traversal of this island. I walk on, the fragments of letters becoming more confused; the mental state of the writer deteriorates as time passes, until I have a vision of climbing an aerial tower, and plunging to the ground. I fly over the island, over all the locations I have travelled through, until once again I am at the stone jetty, and the screen fades to black, with the words ‘come back’ ringing in my ears. Then I am back—back at the stone jetty; the sun is setting and I am alone.

As my brief walkthrough (which summarises all of the gameplay and narrative in the style of the game) shows, *Dear Esther* differs from conventional, mainstream videogames, but rather, is part of a growing category of games known as first-person walker games, a genre whose sole activity comprises of traversing a landscape, often at

a walking pace. Rather than engaging in combat or competition, the player is asked to interpret a landscape in conjunction with fragments of letters read by an unnamed protagonist. The narrative of *Dear Esther* is delivered not only in the form of fragments of letters to the eponymous Esther made audible and legible to the player, but also through close observation of the landscape, which includes the sounds produced by and in that landscape. Designer Dan Pinchbeck's research into 'media, digital, and technological arts practice using emergent technologies' (Pinchbeck 2012) prompted him to design a game that was totally devoid of conventional ludic interaction (such as shooting, fighting, and puzzle solving), leaving 'nothing [] but story to engage a player' (Biessener 2011). This means that the player is immersed into the game world through her eyes and ears, rather than her quick reflexes or the learned ludic techniques of popular videogames. Pinchbeck recounts 'an epiphany moment', after which he asked himself, '[W]hy am I looking at virtual environments when games are much more interesting[?]'. He turned instead to stories as the focus of gameplay, reasoning that 'they already use content, character, and plot to manipulate the player experience' (Oxford 2012).

Dear Esther was originally released in June 2008 as a 'mod'³³ for the popular game, *Half Life 2*. Adopting the structural elements of that game, including its physics engine,³⁴ graphics, and sounds, Pinchbeck created an independent game. *Dear Esther* was entirely remade and rereleased in February 2012 with extra content and an amplified, richer landscape. Pinchbeck's design allows the player to concentrate solely on the three remaining elements of the game: the narrative, the setting, and the soundscape. These three elements are commonly the forgotten or unnoticed elements of

³³ 'Mods' are pieces of software that have been altered by the end user to make them work in a way other than initially intended. This process includes but is not limited to adding new gameplay elements, narratives, and new environments.

³⁴ The physics engine is part of the software of a game that provides an approximation of physical reactions, such as 'rag-dolling', which approximates how a body will flop when dead.

a videogame, yet their importance in the representation of videogame narratives is as vital as their comparable elements in other media such as film. In *Dear Esther*, these elements combine to tell a ghost story; the barren landscape of a deserted Hebridean island is complemented by a gothic score, which players attest evokes feelings of solitude and increasing uneasiness as the game progresses and the disparate elements of the narrative begin to knit together.

As the player makes her way around, over, and even under the unnamed island, three stories are revealed: stories of a Scandinavian hermit named Jacobson and of an eighteenth-century explorer named Donnelly join the narrator's own story of a man who has lost his wife, Esther, and his struggle to come to terms with her death. The game reaches a climax with the suicide of the unnamed narrator, which he hopes will reunite him with Esther in the afterlife. Structurally, the narrator's voice reads extracts of letters to Esther written by him after her death, detailing his actions and the chain of events that brought him to the island, and the extracts are triggered when the player arrives at particular locations on the island. Each trigger point can release up to three separate fragments, with different information available in each. This means that the game requires multiples 'plays' in order to become fully aware of the entire narrative, the player repeatedly forcing the narrator to relive his suicide in order to glean his story, haunting the landscape with his continued presence, with no sight of redemption, only a unidentified female voice whispering 'come back'. The narrator himself appears to have an awareness of the looped structure of the game, telling Esther, 'I have lost track of how long I have been here, and how many visits I have made overall' as the game opens at the edge of the sea, in front of a clearly disused lighthouse (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Opening shot of *Dear Esther*

As a ghost story, *Dear Esther* makes extensive use of doubling, a common feature of gothic literature. The narrator is ‘doubled’ with the three characters Donnelly, Jacobson, and Paul. Donnelly is an explorer who wrote of his experiences on the island in the eighteenth century when looking for the remains of a hermit named Jacobson, an early eighteenth-century sheep farmer who died on the island. Paul was involved in the car accident that killed Esther and, as the game progresses the narrator confuses the actions of himself and Paul. Finally, there is a very evident doubling of the narrator and the player, who retraces the footsteps of the narrator and relives his final days, haunting the space of the island.

At the beginning of the game, the letter fragments being related to the player are lucid, narrating the events that brought him to the island, the theft of a book written by Donnelly from the Edinburgh library to serve as a guide to the island, visiting Paul before he leaves the mainland, and attempting unsuccessfully to come to terms with Esther’s death. The player journeys through the island with the narrator, who reveals fragments of his letters to Esther along the way. But, after the narrator recounts breaking his leg (although there is no change in the structure of the game; the player and the narrator travel onwards as before), the narrative becomes increasingly disjointed; the

letters become more and more confused as the narrator succumbs to blood poisoning,³⁵ confusing the player's understanding of the narrative. The narrator articulates his confusion in terms of one of his doubles, revealing that he is 'increasingly unable to find that point where the hermit ends and I begin'.

As the game progresses, the mental state of the narrator deteriorates, aided and emphasised by the epistolary structure, creating a concomitantly confused state for the player. Rather than building to a coherent narrative whole, the letter fragments begin to muddle facts; this descent into clearly unreliable narration means that the player is increasingly uncertain as to whom is responsible for which narrative actions and questions the reliability of earlier information. For example, the narrative begins by stating that Paul is responsible for Esther's death. When delirious however, the narrator suggests that it was not Paul but he who caused Esther's death, his words, 'He was not drunk Esther, he was not drunk at all' an implicit admission of Paul's innocence and his own guilt. When delirious, the narrator reveals potential truths and feelings of guilt that his conscious mind refuses to admit, although the player can never be certain that these statements are truer than his calmer ones. Therefore, the player engages in multiple replays and navigations of the island's space in an effort to discover and understand the narrative and to grasp what has happened and is happening on the island, as the narrator's words as he travels the island offer the only narrative information, which alters with each new navigation of the game space. However, the unreliable and one-sided narration of the game means that there is no definitive answer to this question: the player must interpret the letter fragments to make sense of the narrative herself.

Whilst the information the narrator delivers becomes increasingly unreliable, the passage through the landscape continues; it becomes increasingly clear that the player is

³⁵ Blood is another gothic trope, its poisoned passage around the narrator's body causing his death. The blood trope strengthens the narrator's doubling with Donnelly, who had syphilis.

following the narrator's path as he contemplates and commits suicide, before being returned to the stone jetty, to begin his journey again. Where the verbal narrative falters, the landscape compensates. For example, the narrator admits to being drunk as he arrived at the island, the intimation being that he was driving drunk at the time of the accident. In the absence of certainty, the player discovers the chemical symbol for alcohol painted over the island in fluorescent paint—paint which the narrator says he has found. This implies that the part of the narrative he could not speak, he signified materially on the landscape. When he confesses that he has a disease—that of 'the internal combustion engine and the cheap fermentation of yeast', he links the alcohol fermenting in his body to the car's engine, again engaging chemical and material objects to convey his responsibility for Esther's death.

The setting of *Dear Esther* is a beautiful, deserted, Hebridean island, but even this is called into question by the ambiguous and tortured narrative embedded in that landscape. One possibility is that this barren, beautiful landscape is a product of the narrator's own mind. Playing through the game, the landscape foregrounded and interactivity limited, the player begins to question the external reality of the landscape and, like the narrator, finds herself 'slipping into the delusional state of ascribing purpose, deliberate motive to everything' (Pinchbeck 2012) in a landscape that may be a mental rather than geographical construct. In one of the opening narrative fragments, the narrator reveals: 'I sometimes feel as if I've given birth to this island', while another fragment asks,

Was this island formed during the moment of impact, when we were torn loose from our moorings and the seatbelts cut motorway lanes into our chests and shoulders? Did it first break surface then?

Most tellingly, the narrator repeatedly uses the motif of himself as travelling through his own body as he makes his way around the island, like the infection that courses through his veins. This landscape, it is inferred in one interpretation of the narrative, has been created by the narrator; it is a product of his own imagination; the island has been created in the aftermath of the accident that killed Esther, and is kept alive by his haunting of this space, either as he lies in a comatose state in hospital, or after his death. As further evidence for this interpretation, visually, the landscape is littered with detritus from the car accident and surgical equipment (Figure 7) that would not be present if the narrator had washed ashore, as he claims, not only supporting the concept of the island as his imaginative creation but also suggesting other locations that he has inhabited or is inhabiting. In the final passage of the game, the narrator reveals that he has ‘painted, carved, hewn, scored into this space all that [he] could draw from him’ and that following his suicide, he ‘will rise from the ocean like an island without a bottom, come together like a stone, become an aerial, a beacon’, implying once again that he has constructed and will continue to reconstruct the island and its contents, and will recreate all the events that will lead, once again, to his death.



Figure 7: Surgical Equipment on the Island

Whether the player places the island in the mind of the narrator, in a purgatory he inhabits, or as an actual location in the Hebrides, the landscape is a gothic space, with psychological effects: the barren yet beautiful landscape is as sublime as those found in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, and any number of similar texts. It inspires awe as the player walks around the island, and equally has the capacity to chill with its bleak emptiness.

There are other gothic aspects to the landscape that bear narrative as well as psychological traces. The player learns that the island was abandoned in 1778, so the broken buildings littering the island are at least this old, their presence creating a feeling of gothic gloom and ruin that pervades the landscape. The player passes but cannot interact with the evidence of previous inhabitation, ranging from a stone circle thousands of years old (Figure 8) to ruined buildings to an aerial that sends a red beacon into the perpetual twilight of the game. The landscape corresponds to Linda Bayer-Berenbaum's account of 'the Gothic landscape [which] plunges from extreme to extreme; from the height of an airy bell to the depth of a dungeon vault; from the mass of heavy stone walls to the delicate illusive spiderweb; from utter darkness to a candle's flicker' (Bayer-Berenbaum 1982, 22). The absence of conventional ludic elements forces the player to pay attention to minute details that are present in many videogames, but not noticed as she engages in battles, competition, and point scoring.



Figure 8: Stone Circle

The extremes discussed by Bayer-Berenbaum are evident in the game landscape, which ranges from a cliff edge to underground caverns (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Underground Cavern

Walking through these landscapes, the player moves from one extreme to another, from wide open space to confined darkness, from dizzying heights to subterranean spaces, following the narrator as he makes his way towards death. This landscape also adheres to Elizabeth MacAndrew's understanding of gothic spaces, in that

among its conventions are found dream landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination. Its fictional world gives form to amorphous fears and impulses common to all mankind, using an amalgam of materials, some torn from the author's own subconscious mind and some the stuff of myth, folklore, fairy tale, and romance. It conjures up [] settings--forbidding cliffs and glowering buildings, stormy seas and the dizzying abyss--that have literary significance and the properties of dream symbolism as well. (MacAndrew 1979, 3)

If we substitute the narrator for MacAndrew's author in this excerpt, this is an acceptable description for the landscape of the island, both as a figment of his imagination, and as a real environment he is haunting, his memories forming real objects, the surgical equipment 'torn from [his] own subconscious mind' (*ibid*). Just as literature and film

can use space symbolically and metaphorically and psychologically, so too can videogames.

Yet this and other videogames go further than literature and film to construct new modes of spatial narrative consumption through gameplay. Even stripped of most of the conventional modes of ludic play, the player's interactive exploration of the game world and the repetitive structures of videogames construct new narrative spatialities. Joining the passive reading of and listening to the narrator's voiceover of his letters and viewing the landscape (activities that resemble reading books and viewing films), the player must explore the landscape to discover the narrative. By comparison to most videogames, such exploration seems passive, a point that the narrator makes in one of the fragments he relates as he crosses the third beach of the island:

To explore here is to become passive, to internalise the journey and not to attempt to break the confines. Since I burnt my boats and contracted my sickness, this has become easier for me. It will take a number of expeditions to traverse this micro continent; it will take the death of a million neurons, a cornucopia of prime numbers, countless service stations and bypasses to arrive at the point of final departure.

Here, in spite of the equation of exploration with passivity, the narrator explicitly tells the player that a full understanding of the narrative will only be reached after 'a number of expeditions' through the landscape both for the narrator and the player and that the journeys will not be linear or straightforward. For the player, this will involve repeating the game many times, whilst for the narrator, it will mean multiple repetitions of the events leading up to his death, before he is able to end his haunting of the landscape and reach a 'point of final departure' and the end of the game. I will have more to say about

videogame endings in Chapter 8; here the point to stress is the need for a repeated ludic navigation of spaces and places in order to reach both psychological and narrative conclusion.

Dear Esther's narrative is not only conveyed by the verbal letter fragments and visual elements of the landscape; it is further conveyed by the soundscape of the island. Here too, while many elements resemble soundscapes in other media, videogames go beyond those operations through ludic interactions. The ideal method of playing *Dear Esther*, as with many other videogames, is in a darkened room with the sound playing through earphones. This allows the player to focus solely on the game world; blocking out external stimuli foregrounds not only the imagery of the island but also its sounds and the game's musical score, allowing them to take their place as integral parts of the narrative experience. The soundscape of any game can be divided into two: first, the intrinsic (or intramusical) contents of the score itself, which in *Dear Esther* include the use of colouristic tone painting³⁶ (forming an unsettling musical atmosphere). Second, there are the extramusical contents of the sonic landscape. These include ambient sounds (such as bird calls), interactive audible cues (such as footsteps when the player walks forwards), and vocal recordings. Music has a sonic space of its own making, as Jean-Luc Nancy argues (Nancy 2007, 13), and players must navigate these spaces as well as the visible ones. In *Dear Esther* the music engenders a time and space of its own. Even without the visual aura of the island's perpetual twilight, the sustained pedals and reverberating voices of the early soundtrack form an uncanny wash of ominous, haunting sound, while the minimalist, repetitive ostinati³⁷ of later musical pieces underscore a sense of directionless progression, lacking any indication of where the musical journey might end. Like the various versions of the letter fragments, each

³⁶ This is defined as 'The art of composing descriptive music' by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED Online 2015)

³⁷ A continuously repeated melodic or rhythmical musical phrase (OED Online 2015)

piece differs in style from the last, so that the listener cannot learn to anticipate the next sound, and hence can never feel secure in the musical space. This instability and uncertainty echoes and parallels the narrative and psychological uncertainties established by the words and images of the game (Saunders 2014).

There is also a rejection of logical causality in this sonic space. Music plays with little sense of its origins or motivations as the player walks through the island. A solo violin or the unaccompanied voice of a piano will often penetrate the diegetic sounds, pulling the player, as Isabella van Elferen says more generally about music in videogames, ‘along in the musical movement from the mundane to the divine or the occult’ (van Elferen 2012, 19). The lack of sonic causality further envelops the player in the ambiguous and indeterminate time frame of the verbal narrative, constructing a musical time parallel to, within, and yet outside the present time of the game. Against this timelessness the music *must* move – music is a temporal art form, it is ‘a present in waves, [...] a time that opens up. [...] It opens a space that is its own, the very spreading out of its resonance’ (Nancy, 2007, 13). Music cannot exist in an atemporal vacuum, and therefore its presence and progress undermines the timelessness the visual representation of the landscape suggests and the cyclical time frame of repeated play. Music forces the listener to engage with the game on a temporal level, and prompts her to repeatedly reinterpret the ouroboric³⁸ narrative of *Dear Esther* in an effort to reach a narrative conclusion.

Music is typically structured around forming expectations and deviating from them, before returning to the anticipated conclusion (see Meyer, 1967). Traditional western music offers, if not a complete and unified melody, then a musical structure that leads to some sense of resolution or closure. However, in Gothic music the divine

³⁸ Resembling or suggestive of an uroboros: therefore, Self-referring, self-reflexive, self-consuming (OED Online 2015)

and/or occultic will often be represented in fragmented or broken sounds, audible fragments evoking the genre's collective 'amalgam of materials, some torn from the author's own subconscious mind and some the stuff of myth, folklore, fairy tale, and romance' (MacAndrew, 1979). Such are the snatches of melody that are heard in *Dear Esther*. The refusal of this Gothic score to lead to a predictable outcome corresponds to the narrative and ludic structures of the game. The opening bars of the soundtrack reflect these structures, repeating the same phrase in a sequence that deviates each time by a semitone, thereby shifting from major to minor chords. This not only shifts the mood between hopeful and plaintive, it refuses to resolve in a cadence which definitively supports either mood. With no consistent, established harmonic key to anchor the player aurally, even at the outset, the ungrounded and constantly in flux music joins the visual and verbal indeterminacy of the game's narrative (Saunders 2014).

Extramusical, nonverbal sounds also collude with the narrative indeterminacy of the game. These are predominantly diegetic. *Dear Esther* is rife with the ambient sounds of the physical landscape: the crash of the waves on the sea, the sound of the wind across the island and the plaintive cry of a single seagull as it is disturbed. The only man-made sounds are interactive ones, generated by the footsteps of the player as she walks the island. Yet for all her agency in producing these sounds, the source of the footsteps the player hears as she walks is enigmatic: are they the footsteps of the player, or are they the footsteps of the narrator? The unspecified origin reminds the player of the narrator's prior claim on the narrative and the setting of the game world. If they are his steps, they form a supernatural echo that only the player can hear while rendering the player eerily inaudible and disembodied; if they are the steps of the player, they undermine the reality of the narrator and the distinction between narrator and player.

The source cannot be verified visually as in many other games; there are no visible feet to tie to the sounds. The uncanny rupture between the verbal and the visual here carries narrative indeterminacy beyond plot and character to an indeterminate relationship between narrator and narrative consumer.

In some instances, the division between diegetic and extradiegetic sounds becomes blurred. A nonverbal female voice can often be discerned within the score, her voice situated within a non-diegetic element of the game, but in potentially connoting the dead Esther, she hovers diegetically as another dead haunter of the landscape. Her musical tones, rooted in western religious musical traditions with Gothic variations, shape a religious undertone highlighting the island's position as a landscape of limbo, the place between life and death that the narrator, player, and now Esther suggestively inhabit.

In spite of diegetic and extradiegetic blurrings between intra- and extramusical sounds, the latter provide a degree of player interactivity not available in the former. Occasionally, the sound of a female voice whispering, 'Come back!' can be heard if, for example, the player sinks into the sea. By sinking into the sea again, the player can produce the sound. But the sound equally interacts with the player, calling her back to the beach and the endless repetition of the journey over and through the island. As the player passes specific landmarks, the score becomes interspersed with extra-diegetic sounds relating to the landmarks' origins, such as the shriek of tortured metal as the player passes pieces of car detritus, evoking a car accident. By re-passing these landmarks, the player can regenerate these sounds, haunting herself. In these and other similar ways, the interactive component of the gameplay allows the player to generate (or not) her own auditory hauntings via her relationship to, navigation of, and position in the landscape.

Both sides of this division individually, and eloquently, create narratives, but it is in their interaction with one another and the interactivity of ludic play that the soundscape exceeds simply representing uncanny and indeterminate narrative structures and begins to 'defy the borders of the screen and envelop game and player alike in its own, sonic version of virtual reality' (van Elferen 2012, 106). As Eero Tarasti points out, 'one may feel in music an intrinsic relationship with the primal mythical worldview whose atmosphere and mentality may emerge from the stream of music' (Tarasti, 1979, 38). In *Dear Esther* this emergence is compounded not only by multimedia sensual immersion but also by ludic interaction with those media. The player is enabled to leave behind her own reality and be immersed into the soundtrack as well as the visuals of the game: the ambient sounds, the disembodied human noises, and the musical score inhabit and even traverse the landscape along with her.

At first glance, *Dear Esther* seems to be a simple game, missing many conventional ludic and narrative aspects that players have come to expect in videogames. However, its visible landscape and audible soundscape render it a complexly indeterminate narrative and an immensely evocative psychological experience. The game is a sophisticated and deeply thought out piece of software; its narrative comprehension requires a great deal of interpretive effort from the player and yet always remains incomplete. Each element of the game is integrally tied to the landscape; the player must navigate letter fragments, landscape, and soundscapes repeatedly in an effort to arrive at a subjective interpretation of the narrative that positions the player as quasi-author of the game.

Conclusion

In each of the ways that videogame narrative is communicated in environmental storytelling, narrative is embedded in the design and organisation of the landscape and is constructed through the player's interaction with the landscape. *Fallout 3* utilises the landscape to bring about narrative cohesion for the player across a grand narrative that stretches back over two centuries, a narrative that can *only* be constructed through interaction with the landscape. A consistent geographical space across those two centuries in *Fallout 3* allows the player to recognise the baseline landscape and read its altered details across time to create the narrative. This temporal variation amid spatial consistency is used in conjunction with embedded narratives, which allow the player to decipher narrative elements of this defamiliarised landscape and reconstruct the events that created it. Furthermore, the interactive spaces in the landscape require the dual temporality of the narrative to be played out in order to be understood, with the characters' movement through the space being instrumental in constructing both temporal narratives. *Fallout 3*'s landscape design is filled with narrative, offering the player numerous opportunities to discover and interpret that narrative, should she wish to do so.

The use of multimedial space to create an evocative, indeterminate narrative that is equally a profoundly psychological narrative experience is evident in my discussion of *Dear Esther*. Whilst the construction of the two games and their narratives differ, this chapter has demonstrated that both rely on narrative techniques unique to

videogames, requiring new modes of narratological and narrative analysis beyond the methodologies applied to older media. Whilst older narrative techniques and concepts are useful for the study of videogames, which contain elements found in older narrative media, additional techniques that account for the ludic and interactive capabilities of the medium are required, both of which take narrative beyond its functions, forms, and consumption in other media. This concept is further explored in the next chapter, which deals with identify and identification in videogames.

Chapter 4: Identification and Identity in Videogames

Identification with fictional characters has a long history dating back at least as far as Aristotle's theories of catharsis and has been variously analysed across different disciplines, including media studies (Hartley 2011), political studies (Barrett and Zani 2015), anthropology (Thompson 2007), psychology (Andreas 2014), history (Jones 2012), literary studies (Zunshine 2015), philosophy (Colman 2014), etc. Even so, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Jonathan Cohen considered that, 'although the notion of identification with media characters is widely discussed in media research, it has not been carefully conceptualised or rigorously tested in empirical audience studies' (Cohen 2001, 245). Cohen himself favours a view of identification as 'a psychological phenomenon that is part of the development process' (Cohen 2001, 247). My own approach is a narratological one.

The primary aims of this chapter are to analyse how various narrative points of view construct, mediate, and refigure identification between consumers (players) and characters in videogame narratives and to continue my argument that, while videogames share many of the narrative features of other media, it is the combination of ludic and narrative elements that carries them beyond narrative structures in other media. According to Menno Deen, Ben Schouten, and Tilde Bekker 'identity is based on interaction; a fluid, active process, depending on context of actions and individual differences' (2015, 111). The heightened interactivity of videogames then, has the potential to carry degrees of consumer identification with this medium beyond other less interactive media. While most critics focus on the ludic aspects of interactivity and identification, Jeroen Jansz and Raynel Martis have shown a relationship between the

narrative strength of a videogame and the level of identification the player has with that game, in that ‘participants who played a game with a strong story line reported a higher level of identification than did players of nonstory-based games’ (Jansz and Martis 2007, 142).

I begin by highlighting two entries from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which define identification as both ‘the action or process of regarding or treating one thing as identical with another’ and ‘the state of being or feeling oneself to be closely associated with a person, group, etc., in emotions, interests, or actions’ (OED Online 2010). For the narrative scholar, this includes the methods used to create identification between media and their consumers, such as perspective, focalisation, narrative voice, and point of view. A great deal has been written on these mechanisms; narratologists have developed elaborate taxonomies differentiating points of view finely and complexly, most notably Gérard Genette (Genette 1980, 185-210). They furthermore disagree with and challenge each other’s models (see (Propp 2009 20th edition), (Bremond 1973), (Prince 2001)). It is not within the scope of this chapter to recount these debates in detail, especially since accounts are readily available elsewhere; for example, Mieke Bal offers a good summary (Bal 2009). However, I will provide a narratological groundwork for my argument concerning identification in videogames.

Narrative agency is a narratological term referring, in videogames, to such issues as the mastery of a diegetic space, engagement in temporality, and avoidance of death. Narrative agency arguably makes players more narratively and emotionally invested in a game. More specifically, gamers identify with characters in the game. The interactive nature of videogames means that players do not simply identify with characters by reading or viewing them and imaginatively and psychologically projecting onto them, as has been the case in older media; they are immersed in the narrative as active

participants, and often, as I argue below, identify more closely with the protagonist through techniques such as focalisation and point of view. More than this, according to Jane McGonigal, this immersion and identification with a specific character can furthermore have connotations for life outside the videogame (McGonigal 2011, 113-114). Rosa Gallelli and Rossella Domenica Fanelli also argue that videogames are ‘agents in the development of identities in children’ (Gallelli and Fanelli 2010, 105). Other studies have reached similar conclusions, finding that ‘children identified quite closely with game characters and that these identifications had consequences for the development of their personalities’ (Jansz and Martis 2007, 142). While these studies lie outside the scope of this narratological study, they do contextualise it.

Greater levels of identification are also encouraged by the immense amount of time invested in videogames, as a player may be identified with a single character for more than 150 hours of play, as with Ezio Auditore da Firenze of *Assassin’s Creed 2* (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2013), or the Lone Wanderer of *Fallout 3* (Bethesda 2008).

Consumer identification with a playable character is further intensified by the requirement to traverse videogame space as that character or characters. Unlike traditional narratives, videogames are not limited to using game space as a setting for narrative and play, nor are players simply viewers or readers of this space. In order to make ludic and narrative progress, players must interact with and navigate videogame space. This accepted and expected facet of videogames not only creates a new relationship of narrative consumer to narrative space, as we saw in the previous chapter, it further creates new modes of identification with characters. In some instances, the diegetic space goes beyond these functions to become *itself* a major character in games such as *Portal* (Valve 2007) and its sequel, *Portal 2* (Valve 2011), where the environment, a sentient computer known as GLaDOS, is the antagonist. Here the

mastery of diegetic space brings about the defeat of GLaDOS and, more pertinent to this discussion of identification, blurs the lines of identification with game worlds and characters.

Videogames further intensify identification between players and characters and players and spaces, by evoking a wide range of emotions in the player; *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) explores a number of emotional responses throughout the game, with the player being exposed to feelings of pity, fear, sexual arousal, guilt, relief, anxiety, and happiness at various points, creating an emotional range as complex as those found in other media. Moreover, videogames have begun to change the traditional understanding of catharsis by intensifying the player/character bond through interactivity. In *Poetics* (2008), Aristotle theorises that dramatic tragedies evoke an emotional response in audiences toward actions taking place on the stage and that ‘in contemplating [the imitation of an object or action] they find themselves learning’ (2008, 11) from it and engaging in the ‘purgation of these emotions’ (2008, 16), a reaction that Aristotle nominates catharsis. Elisenda Ardévol *et al.* go beyond catharsis to consider the pleasures of consumer-character identification, arguing that ‘videogame pleasure is based on blurring the distinction between the player and the character we construct in our play’ (Ardévol, et al. 2006, 3). This blurring means that videogames exceed Aristotelian theories of witnessing catharsis to interactive identification.

Interactivity also means that players are able to change the outcome of a narrative through gaming choices and actions, and with it the cathartic response to the narrative. *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), discussed in Chapter 6, is one game that does this; its appeal and that of the popular FPS (first-person shooter) genre generally may be that they produce a form of psychological release in the player; indeed, critics have

suggested ‘that playing video games releases aggression and gets it out of the system of the player’ (Richardson 2004) and is a way of relieving stress in life (TAMIU 2010).

Beyond these general observations, narratological theories of focalisation and perspective clarify and detail how videogames replicate and depart from modes of identification in other media. I begin with focalisation.

Focalisation

‘Narrative voice’, including point of view, is one of Genette’s five central facets of narratology, as developed in Chapter 2 of my thesis. However, its emphasis on speech is limiting in terms of addressing visual point of view and particularly confusing in media that use both verbal and visual signs, such as narrative films that engage with voice-over, and videogames. Genette therefore employs the term *focalisation*, meaning the focus of the narration, to ‘avoid the too specifically visual connotations of the terms vision, field, and point of view’, establishing two categories of narrative focalisation: *nonfocalised* and *internally focalised* narration (Genette 1980, 189). These categories are also found in Todorov’s narratological theory, albeit under different names, with Genette’s nonfocalised narratives relating to Todorov’s formulation, *Narrator>Character*, where the narrator ‘says more than any of the characters know’ (*ibid*), a position more commonly known as the omniscient narrator. Internally focalised narratives correspond to Todorov’s *Narrator=Character* category and can be further split into two sub-categories, *fixed* and *variable*. *Fixed focalisation* occurs when the narrative is delivered by a single character, and the narrative is restricted to the knowledge of that character; this creates a ‘narrative with [a particular] “point of view” and with a “restricted field”’ (Genette 1980, 189). *Variable focalisation* represents a

narrative delivered from a number of sources, such as the letters in an epistolary novel, and can be mapped onto Todorov's category of *Narrator(s) = Character(s)*, and as with fixed focalisation, the narrative remains restricted to the information possessed by the character-narrator(s). Finally, Todorov's formulation *Narrator < Character* signifies those narratives where the narrator knows less than the characters, resulting in a more objective focalisation and perspective, simply reporting events to the viewer, with no subjective insight into the characters.

Bal also follows these categories, again using different terms. Beginning with the premise that 'whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain vision' (Bal 2009, 145), Bal's distinction between *character-bound* (CF) and *external focalisation* (EF) correspond to Genette's internally and non-focalised focalisation. Character-bound narratives are self-explanatory, bound to a specific character or characters, whilst Bal illustrates externally focalised narratives with the example, 'A says that B sees what C is doing' (Bal 2009, 149). This example positions the narrator (A) outside the narrative, makes the character (C) the object of the narrative and the character (B) its subject. In many instances across media, readers/viewers are placed outside the narrative in the role of B, with the narrator relating to them, rather than being situated in the diegetic space. In written fiction, the reader is typically given a focalised perspective of events, with the narrator, A, telling the reader, B, of C's actions. Unlike Genette, Bal includes visual narratives in her thesis, counting reliefs, films, and pictures as narrative devices. In many visual narratives, the audience is positioned outside events as an observer, and using Bal's example, in film the camera can function as A, a third-person narrator, showing the viewer, B, the actions of C, characters within the film. However, Gerald Prince qualifies that, 'in the case of a movie, the camera (or whatever) does not focalise situations: it presents them' (Prince

2001, 46). This presentation constructs the perspective of the camera as more objective than a human narrator in fiction. The camera-narrator is generally not bound to the viewpoint of a single character, or even all of the characters put together, and is able to interact more freely with the environment and convey multiple characters' viewpoints, as well as an omniscient one: as Louis D. Giannetti writes, 'each time the director moves the camera—either within a shot or between shots—we are offered a new point of view from which to evaluate the scene' (Giannetti 1999, 387). These dynamics render the perspective in film and television sometimes externally focalised, positioned outside the narrative with the camera often alternating between objective and subjective points of view, as well as character-bound, showing the audience what characters see.

Sound as well as images in film can be character-bound, as is the case in noir films that use voice-over narration to present the thoughts of the protagonist. Such character-bound—or internal—focalisation also positions the viewer as B with the protagonist directly addressing the audience. The first-person film *The Lady in the Lake* (Montgomery 1947) presents such a focalisation, the narrative is delivered by the protagonist via point of view shots and voiceover, directly to the viewer, occupying both the A and B positions of Bal's formulation above.

Analysing the novels, films, and games of the *Tomb Raider* franchise offers a particularly focused way to consider briefly how focalisation changes across media within a narrative following the same plot and characters. The *Tomb Raider* novels use both character-bound internal focalisation—primarily focusing on Lara in language such as 'thought Lara', to allow the reader to know her thoughts—and external focalisation, with events presented both from an omniscient vantage point and from the perspective of characters other than Lara, as this example illustrates:

Reiss made a mental note to speak with Sean about the man, he was too jittery today, he would fold under any sort of pressure, Reiss knew that now... (Stern 2003, 68, original punctuation)

The *Tomb Raider* films privilege external focalisation, seldom providing access to Lara's verbal thoughts unless they are vocalised, instead showing her thoughts through nonverbal external focalisation (for example, facial expressions). The film also undertakes an omniscient viewpoint, heightened in moments such as the one shown in Figure 10 by making her a small part of the *mise-en-scene*.



Figure 10: Omniscient Camera View

As with written and cinematic narratives, videogames generally, and the *Tomb Raider* games specifically, feature both external and character bound focalisation, although the choice to engage both at once is less common than in other media. In *Tomb Raider*, the player focuses solely on a single character throughout, and largely occupies her point of view, and as such the resultant narration cannot be considered objective or omniscient: it is character-bound. However, the focalisation is not internal; the player is unaware of the thoughts or feelings of Lara, unless she imparts them to the player through words or facial expressions, although the latter is often withheld from

the player when she operates Lara from behind. Occasionally, (in the games prior to the 2013 reboot) Lara speaks as a ludic hint for the player, in the form of a comment such as ‘I cannot go that way’ or ‘maybe I could move that block’, but this is a far cry from her verbal focalisation in the novels. However, in the 2013 game, Lara’s verbal thoughts are vocalised through the epistolary use of her journal, automatically voiced at intervals when she rests at a campsite; together with the filmic style gameplay, the voiceover journal makes clear that videogames can now use focal techniques found in literature and film as part of their narration.

This was, however, not always the case. Focalisation in videogames has evolved since the earliest games. In his article *Focalisation in 3D Video Games*, Michael Nitsche writes that ‘*Super Mario 64* features a defining moment in the distinction between camera control and avatar control’ (2005). He goes on to explain that this game introduced a character, Lakitu, whose purpose is to act as the external focaliser. This character follows Mario, as the player controls him, recording his actions. Lakitu, Nitsche elaborates, ‘has effectively invaded most 3D exploration games, as this form of camera control has grown’ to become the norm, in the form of the ‘third-person point-of-view [...] stepping into a dramatic position in relation to the game’s events’ (*ibid*), an acknowledged position in film theory, albeit without the interactive elements of videogames.

Indeed, focalisation in videogames differs from its role in traditional media in its greater ability to allow freedom and choice of viewpoint. In many games, the player has the ability to alter the field of vision through the manipulation of the ‘camera’, separate to the protagonist’s vision, and so the player’s focus may not always be that which the game designer intends. Nitsche cites Isdale, Fencott, and Heim’s concept of using ‘perceptual opportunities’ and ‘attractors’ to channel the player’s attention

towards ‘areas of interest, or to situations that require action’ (*ibid*). Examples of this technique include the use of ‘eagle vision’ in the *Assassin’s Creed* franchise, which the player can activate to highlight interactable objects; more commonly in videogames, interactable objects are differentiated through colour changes. Presenting a continually changing background, filled with (in *Tomb Raider*, for example) tombs, detritus, flickering lights, cadavers and blood, the player’s attention continually shifts between multiple objects, and the shift to a suddenly appearing antagonist can cause a physical reaction in the player. Such a technique allows players to alter the field of vision as they wish, but gives the game designer the power to direct (or to push) the player viewpoint through his/her control over ‘space and event’ (*ibid*), a variation of the embedded narrative technique discussed in chapter 3.

Not only is videogame focalisation a ‘pushing’ technique, as with film, directing viewer/player attention to a specific element of the shot, it is also a ‘pulling’ one. The object the designer wishes the player to focus on becomes the directing force of the ‘shot’ through its difference to the surrounding landscape. But, focalisation goes beyond attention-attracting differentiation in videogames, as the gamer is frequently called upon to engage with and interact with focalised objects and such focalisation helps players to successfully complete a game. Focalisation is an essential part of ludology as well as narratology: it is instrumental in allowing the player to contextualise the actions taking place on the screen, to assist in creating strategies to overcome the obstacles and puzzles facing the character and to allow the player to fulfil specific game goals. Again, the interactivity of videogame focalisation sets it apart from other media focalisation techniques, complementing Chris Crawford’s definition of interaction as ‘a cyclic process between two or more active agents in which each agent alternately listens, thinks, and speaks’ (Crawford 2005). As the journey through a fictional gaming

landscape involves the player both controlling the focalisation and being guided by the game designer, videogames suggest that two new paired terms for focalisation may be required: player-centric and designer-centric focalisation and narrative and ludic focalisation. As with all paired terms, the pairs are not entirely separable; they overlap, alternate, and interact with each other. As gamers and game designers contend for and collaborate in control of focalisation, issues of authorship and point of view emerge.

Perspective

For the study of narrative, perspective differs from focalization. Focalisation, as we have seen, describes the focus of the narrative, and covers several aspects that include perspective, and refers, in Genettian terms, to the restrictions (or non-restrictions) of narrative information in relation ‘to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters, or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld’ (Niederhoff 2011). Initially, the concept of focalization was introduced as a replacement for the terms perspective and point of view, and Genette considers that focalization is comparable to both terms. However, Genette himself differentiates between focalization and the pre-existing terms, considering that focalization is a ‘selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*’ (Genette 1988, 74), whereas perspective and point of view in Genette’s assessment means to ‘present the events as they are perceived, felt, interpreted and evaluated by her [the character] at a particular moment’ (Niederhoff 2011). Whilst this is a narrow difference, it is, nevertheless, an important one in critically examining the way that narrative identification is constructed. In videogames, the difference between focalization and perspective becomes even more relevant. As this thesis elucidates, concepts of identity and

identification with and as characters in playable narratives can vary markedly depending on the perspective and focalisation that is used to create that narrative. Whilst this variation occurs in other media, the physical interactivity of controlling a character as she progresses through a narrative heightens the immersion that the player feels and, whilst the focalization of the narrative provides the information that the player needs to complete the game, the perspective is what heightens the identification that she experiences with, or as, that character. Each of the perspectives, whilst familiar to narrative scholars, are nevertheless subtly different in videogame narratives, and so must be considered separately to show how each perspective corresponds (or does not) to and exceeds its functions in other media.

Third-person Perspective

In prose fiction, the third person is a common perspective. This viewpoint positions the narrator relating events outside the action; eschewing the personal pronoun, she refers to the protagonist and other characters via third-person pronouns (he, him, she, her, it, they, and them). The opening of the *Tomb Raider* film novelisation, *The Cradle of Life*, itself an adaptation of the videogame franchise, offers an example of this perspective:

For the first time in almost a month, Lara Croft was comfortable.

She was back home, in the study of Croft Manor, sprawled out in
a red leather chair. (Stern 2003, 1)

The narrator of this extract is positioned externally to the events that are being reported, an observer of Lara Croft and her actions rather than a character in the scene with her. This narrator is omniscient, knowing, for example, that not only is Lara comfortable in the present, but also that she has been uncomfortable for the past month. This

perspective is commonly used in visual media as well as prose fiction; indeed, Giannetti observes that ‘omniscient narration is almost inevitable in film’ (Giannetti 1999, 387).

Videogames too offer a third-person point of view that is occasionally omniscient. More often, however, the third-person view is character bound and situated with the characters the player controls. Usually, the third-person perspective in videogame narratives is restricted to the viewpoint of a single character, although this is not universal; *Heavy Rain*, for example, is ‘told’ from the perspective of five different characters, all of whom the player controls periodically as the game progresses. A similar design features in the game *Assassin’s Creed 3*; for the first several hours, before taking control of the central protagonist Connor, the player controls a character named Haytham Kenway, who offers insight into, and provides narrative background for, the main protagonist. This game also features Desmond Miles as part of the framing narrative discussed in Chapter 2, giving the player three distinct, controllable characters, each with his own perspective on the settlement of the United States: the modern view of Desmond, the British Imperial view of Kenway, and the Native American view of Connor. The third-person perspective is thus variable rather than fixed and omniscient.

As with other narrative fiction, the third-person videogame can be divided into several sub-categories, dependent on such things as focalisation, distance, and character depth. For example, the most frequent focalisation of the third-person videogame is being character-bound, corresponding to Todorov’s *Narrator(s) > Character(s)*. In *Assassins Creed 3*, the narrator is the Animus; this machine controls the information imparted by the various characters and their specific portions of the narrative, delivering this information to Desmond, and by extension, the player. Using Bal’s formula, the Animus in the *Assassin’s Creed* franchise represents A and is presenting Desmond, B, with the actions of Connor, C. The player is external to the narrative, and its focalisation

is voyeuristically placed outside the narrative, the player observing Desmond, and so viewing Conor. Here and elsewhere, narratological terminology illuminates the complexity of narrative perspective in videogames.

Whilst some videogames give the player access to different characters, more often than not, the player controls a single character. In a third-person game, these characters are given clear identities in the form of names and distinct physical characteristics, and many have become household names, such as Super Mario, Spyro the Dragon, and Sonic the Hedgehog.³⁹ These characters dominate the videogame space/screen, with the player being responsible for their physical actions and progression through that videogame space. Videogame perspective departs from literature and film point of view, in that the player-narrator controls, rather than simply being told or shown their actions in videogames. The characters in a videogame can be likened to puppets with the player functioning as the puppet master; they are controlled by the player, but they are not the player. The metaphor is emblemised and realised by machinima (an amalgamation of the words machine and cinema), a form of digital puppetry that has risen from videogames, with the AI and physics engine being instrumental in its execution. This genre began with the videogame *Quake*, when gamers used the embedded 'demo-files' (files that are recorded by the game, to replay after the game has ended) to create films (Kirschner 2012).

Third-person games, spanning decades of videogame history, have evolved as technology has become more sophisticated, with the ability to render graphics in three dimensions. At the same time, its popularity as a perspective has waned somewhat, although the 'traditional' third-person perspective has not been lost, instead becoming a considered narrative choice, as with other visual media. The complexity of third-person

³⁹ These characters appear in franchises of the same name.

narratives requires the creation of sub-categories of third-person perspectives that produce different modes of player identification with characters. I begin with some of the earliest videogames.

Figure 11 shows the first Super Mario incarnation in 1985,⁴⁰ which places the character in the centre of the screen, with the player looking at him and his surroundings, much as film and television narratives allow the viewer to see a character moving within a visual frame.



Figure 11: *Super Mario World*

Placing the character in the centre of the screen allows the player to position Mario as the protagonist and identifies him clearly as a separate, third-person entity; he is *Mario*, controlled and manipulated by the player, but not an extension of the player's identity or body. Besides bearing a different name from the player (unless the player happens to be named Mario), and having physical characteristics that distinguish him from most players, the space around the character denotes a separation from the player's space, maintaining differentiation between the two perspectives via distance and point of view. In this game, as in other similarly structured games (such as *Sonic the Hedgehog*), the

⁴⁰ Mario first appeared as 'Jumpman' in the game *Donkey Kong* in 1981. It was not until 1985 that he became an eponymous character in his own game.

player is explicitly placed outside the game space and the on-screen events, even though she is directing the action via the game controller. The focalisation is clearly external: not only is Mario separated from the player, but the screen gives the player a relatively distant and objective view of the character in context and the action of the game. As with other visual media, the camera (A) shows the player (B), the actions of Mario (C), although the delineation between the player and the character is blurred through interactivity. The defined space around the character offers a third-person perspective that has endured amidst numerous technological advances, as shown in Figure 12, a screen shot from the 2012 game *Super Mario Bros U* (Nintendo 2012).



Figure 12: *Super Mario U*

Positioning the protagonist at the centre of the field of vision is not a new technique in moving visual media, as the early adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* (1903) illustrates. Filmed only 37 years after the first publication of the novel, this short film uses a fixed position to view the events, a technique that film adopted from a theatre audience's point of view.



Figure 13: *Alice in Wonderland*, 1903

As can be seen in Figure 13, placing of Alice in the centre of the screen throughout the 9 minutes and 35 seconds marks her as the predominant character. Not only does her central position figure her as the protagonist, the light clothing on the dark background also substantiates Alice's primary position and, although the stationary camera limits narrative point of view to some extent, the long shot permits the viewer to see Alice interacting with her location and other characters, whilst maintaining her dominant position in the film.

The positioning of the camera is very much the same for the third-person videogame as it is in *Alice in Wonderland*. Although the 'camera' of the videogame is not fixed, as it is in *Alice*, the view is centred on Mario, who remains the central focus of the screen, even as the player moves him around, with the camera moving to maintain this position,⁴¹ a technique known as side-scrolling. As with the lighter colour of Alice's clothing in the 1903 film, the colours employed in the game allow the player to instantly place Mario as the predominant character, with the red of Mario's clothing contrasting against the blue background in Figure 3, despite the small size of the character and the additional visual information contained on the screen. Focalisation in

⁴¹ The third-person perspective in these games also allows the background to remain stationary and the foreground to move with the character, in what is known as a two-and-a-half dimensional (2 ½ D) perspective. As with the third-person perspective, the 2 ½ D space prevents the player from identifying fully as the character, maintaining a distance between player and protagonist.

the third-person videogame, as in other third-person media, is external; Mario is separated from the player via placement and distancing techniques. It is also ostensibly more contextual, showing the player the area surrounding the character, and presenting the character as the object of events, rather than from that character's subjective viewpoint.

Second-person Perspective

Less common than third- and first-person narratives, the second-person perspective is a method of narration that directly addresses the reader as 'you'. Sharing some of the intimacy of the first-person narrative technique through its direct address, the second-person perspective simultaneously provides a measure of didactic distance with the narrative: 'you' are being told what 'you' are doing, not shown, as with the first- and third-person narratives. Aristotle distinguishes between mimesis and diegesis, with mimesis being the act of showing—of imitating—and diegesis the act of telling (Marusic 2009). This viewpoint in literature is, some scholars claim, counter-indicative to reader identification (Schofield 2003). Bal contends that the second-person perspective in narrative fiction involves the reader 'translat[ing] it into first-person format' and that 'the "you" is simply an "I" in disguise, a "first-person" narrator talking to himself' (Bal 2009, 29). She further asserts that 'the "you" can never be identified with the reader' and that 'nor is the reader the "you"' (Bal 2009, 30). Whilst Bal considers this perspective to be pseudo-first-person, it proved to be useful for the designers of text-based videogames, (Nestvold 2007).

In the early years of gaming, the second-person perspective was a popular method of narration, with text-based games such as *Adventure* (Adams no date) and *Zork* (Anderson, Daniels and Lebling 1979) addressing the player directly.

```

Copyright (c) 1981, 1982, 1983 Infocom, Inc. All rights reserved.
ZORK is a registered trademark of Infocom, Inc.
Revision 08 / Serial number 840726

West of House
You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front
door.
There is a small mailbox here.

>open mailbox
Opening the small mailbox reveals a leaflet.

>take the leaflet
Taken.

>read leaflet
"WELCOME TO ZORK!"

ZORK is a game of adventure, danger, and low cunning. In it you will explore
some of the most amazing territory ever seen by mortals. No computer should be
without one!
>

```

Figure 14: *Zork* Screenshot, Featuring Second-Person Perspective

As shown in Figure 14, the opening screen of *Zork*, the game itself acts as a legible textual narrator, responding to player requests and directly addressing the player as ‘you’. The second-person perspective allows the player to identify as the main character in the game and allows her to enter the narrative as a character. As with Choose-Your-Own-Adventure prose fiction, the reader acts as the central protagonist and makes choices to complete the narrative.

Ruth Nestvold considers the second-person perspective to be the dominant form in electronic fiction, with text-based adventures (also known as interactive fiction) being the foundation of this form (Nestvold 2007). In contrast to the prose fictional form, Nestvold writes, the second-person perspective in electronic media can ‘facilitate identification with the main character’ through ‘the power of choice in the story’ (Nestvold 2007). The narrator of hypertext texts and text-based games asks questions of the player/reader that need to be answered for the narrative to progress. An example of such an instance occurs near the beginning of the hypertext story *Afternoon*

(Joyce 1987) when the narrator asks, 'Do you want to hear about it?' If the player responds 'no' to this question, the 'page' turns to reveal the following text:

I understand how you feel. Nothing is more empty than heat. Seen so starkly the world holds wonder only in the expanses of clover where the bees work.

A 'yes' response provokes a different answer:

She had been a client of Wert's wife for some time. Nothing serious, nothing awful, merely general unhappiness and the need of a woman so strong to have friends. (Joyce 1987)

The 'you' in this second-person narrative is an active participant in the narrative (although the options are still clearly defined rather than emergent), with the ability to influence the direction and progression of the narrative, giving a veneer of authorship to the narrative process.

Whilst the second-person perspective waned with the ascendancy of pictorial videogames, it persists across the medium, usually in conjunction with another perspective. For example, pioneering first-person shooter games *Doom* and *Doom 2* (ID Software 1993 - 2005) both use the second-person perspective as part of their endings (Figure 15); here, the player is directly addressed by the videogame, the text on the screen reminding the player of the prior incarnation of the videogame perspective as the reward for defeating the alien enemy.

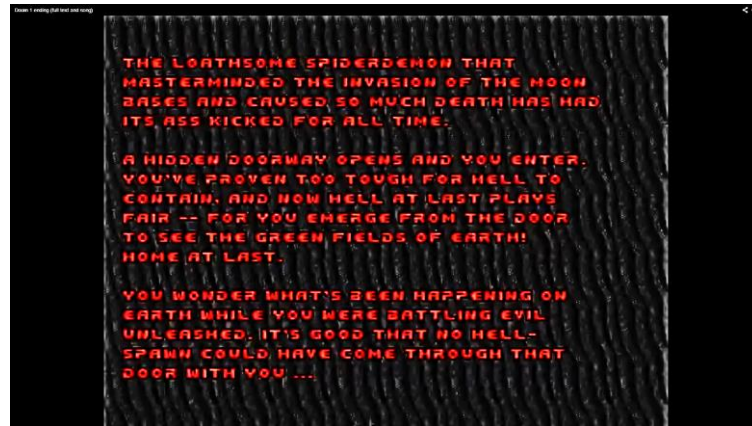


Figure 15: *Doom* Screenshot, Featuring Second-Person Narration

Despite the second-person perspective having an ongoing presence in videogames, there has been some debate amongst players as to its role in pictorial videogames; some perceive this perspective to be equivalent to an over-the-shoulder camera view, discussed later in this chapter. This is not the case, however. The *Battletoads* game (Stamper and Stamper 1991), for example, has the player fight the first Boss battle from a dislocated second-person perspective: that is, through the eyes of the Boss. The player has control over all of the actions that the protagonist makes, but the player sees the character that she is controlling, the actions being taken, and their results from the viewpoint of the Boss rather than viewing the figure of the Boss from the perspective of the protagonist. *God of War 3* (SCE Santa Monica Studio 2010) also utilises a dislocated second-person perspective, in which the player has to solve a puzzle through the eyes of a nearby statue. The use of the second-person perspective is rare in pictorial (as opposed to text-based) videogames and is used significantly less than either the third-person or the first-person perspectives.

First-person Perspective

In contrast to the third-person perspective, the first-person point of view enters prose narratives through the personal pronoun, 'I'. Narratologists have identified a number of subcategories within this narrative perspective; explicit first-person monologues and dramatic monologues are two such examples. *Alan Wake* features the use of first-person narration; Wake refers to himself as 'I' throughout the game and the game begins with a voice-over by him:

My name is Alan Wake. I'm a writer. (Remedy Entertainment
2010)

While the use of the personal pronoun excludes complete external focalisation, because the 'I' of the narrative typically relates the events in retrospect, the narrator 'has a wider perspective than the narrated or experiencing I [the character I], who previously inhabited the time and space of the story level' (Nunning 2001, 218). It is this *retelling of events* that lies at the heart of the narratology vs. ludology debate, supporting Juul's claim that 'you cannot have interactivity and narration at the same time' (Juul 2001) when narration is a retelling and the videogame events are happening *now*. The grammatical tense, the positioning of a narrative in the past, present, or future is something that has been contentious in media discourse as proponents of traditional and verbal media seek to deny new and visual media more than the present tense. George Bluestone, in *Novels into Film*, contends that 'the novel has three tenses; the film has only one' (Bluestone 1966, 48) that of the present, and this was an accepted facet of film studies for a time, although it has since been refuted (Deleuze 2005, 35). Detractors of narrative in videogames engage a similar argument, maintaining that 'the now of the game prevents it from being a representation of something happening in

another time' (Juul 1999, 33), while narrative is a recounting of information, situated in the past and so incompatible with the present of gameplay.

A constant first-person perspective is not commonly found in film, although film frequently makes use of first-person point-of-view shots, showing the viewer events from the perspective of one character within the narrative. Known as the subjective camera shot, the first-person camera takes the view of the protagonist, with 'the camera serv[ing] as the "eyes" of the character, and narrative information rendered from a single, optical point-of view' (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 2002, 88). However, as we saw above, *The Lady in the Lake* (Montgomery 1947) is a rare example of a film shot entirely from a first-person perspective. While the concept of a consistently first-person film was exciting, the technical difficulties in its execution became apparent, such as representing the protagonist's interaction with characters. As Giannetti says of this film, 'there [are] several actions where the device simply broke down' (Giannetti 1999, 387), including the irony that 'in trying to situate the film's narrative from Philip Marlowe's point of view, the film ends up quashing the voice of [] the most iconic first-person narrator in all of crime literature' (Hinkson 2011). Whilst the first-person perspective in film was intended to allow the viewer the impression of helping Marlowe to solve the crime—the film poster explicitly states this, with the by-line 'You and Robert Montgomery solve a murder mystery together'—the problems with the technology are often more conducive to alienation than to identification with the protagonist. Critics determined that *The Lady in the Lake* 'disproved the theory that by supposedly looking through the eyes of the character we would then assume the character's identity' (Hinkson 2011), and moreover, the viewer remains positioned in the role of the passive observer, unable to influence the narrative. *Blair Witch Project* (Donahue 1999) and *Cloverfield* (Caplan 2008) are two more films that use the

subjective camera throughout, offering the viewer a first-person perspective, although the handheld video camera can be disorienting, and may or may not encourage identification with the protagonist, depending on the viewer. Whilst the first-person perspective has not been successful in film to the point that it dominates mainstream productions, other than the niche space it occupies in ‘found footage’ horror), the interactivity of the videogame allowed the first-person perspective to be successful and accepted.

Popularised by *Doom* (ID Software 1993 - 2005), the first-person perspective has become increasingly prevalent, utilised by many videogames, especially those designated as ‘shooter’ type games, such as the *Modern Warfare* franchise (Sledgehammer Games 2009 - 2011), *Halo* (Bungie Games 2002), and *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), all economically and critically successful games, spawning sequels and franchises whose revenue runs into tens of billions of dollars (Dunning 2015). Known as FPS, this perspective situates the player (and consumer) of the videogame in the role of a first-person shooting protagonist, offering the player a view of the events and information as if she can see through the eyes of the character (Figure 16).

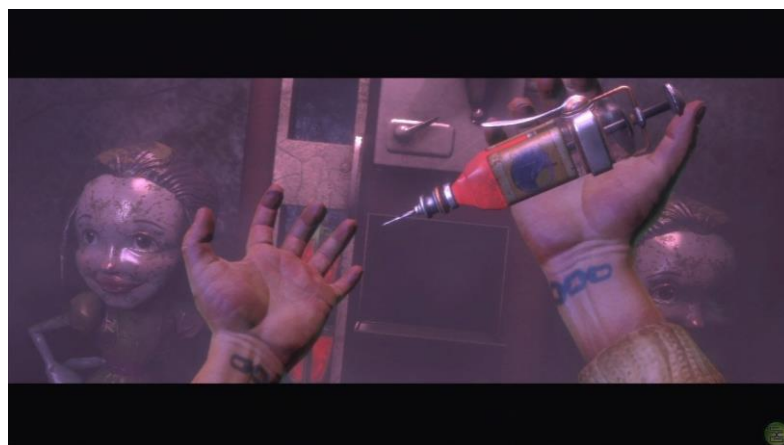


Figure 16: First-person Perspective in Bioshock

Besides being suited for aiming weapons in shooter games, the first-person viewpoint places the player in a situation where she must discover the *narrative* as if she were the protagonist. This perspective means that there is very little distance between the player's perspective in the narrative and that of the protagonist, a concept discussed by narratologists as narrative distance, whereby the proximity of the two, to each other, denotes how closely the player may identify with, or as, the protagonist.

Just as sub-categories of first-person perspective have been created by narratologists and applied to other media, so too there needs to be differentiations made between them in videogame analysis. The first-person perspective can be divided into two primary forms, which I nominate 'quasi-anonymous' and 'identified' first-person perspectives. In order to encourage identification across a wide array of consumers, many games using this narrative perspective do not offer identifying features and names for characters. The anonymous perspective is one that, as the name implies, leaves the protagonist relatively anonymous; that is, he or she has few of the distinct features that usually individuate characters such as Mario. Anonymity inflects both verbal and visual signifiers. The anonymous first-person protagonist frequently uses monikers rather than proper names, such as the MasterChief in the *Halo* series or the soldier in the *Doom* franchise (known as the Marine or DoomGuy), establishing a verbal differentiation between the player and the protagonist, and positioned midway between an entirely anonymous and an identified protagonist. In giving the protagonist a common noun rather than a proper noun as a name, the identity of that character is not unique. The moniker MasterChief, for example, refers to one of the highest ranks in the US Navy (United States Navy 2013) rather than identifying a specific individual MasterChief via a proper name; this allows the player to more easily merge her own identity with the characters. By contrast, the use of a proper name, such as Ezio Auditore da Firenze in

Assassin's Creed 2, marks the character as a separate, individualized, differentiated entity, creating a greater narrative distance between player and protagonist and limiting the ways in which the player identifies with or as the protagonist. Accompanying this verbally generic identifier, the MasterChief is visually hidden from the player's gaze by the all-over bodysuit and helmet that he wears, hiding any identifying features, even if The MasterChief somehow does become visible to the player.

In many games, the player sees the back of the character's head rather than through the character's eyes, and so is removed from identifying absolutely as the character. The first-person perspective, however, allows the player to see from the viewpoint of the character (known as the field of view), with the screen representing the shared viewpoint of player and character. The first-person perspective shown in Figure 16 depicts the hands as they would be seen by the protagonist himself, allowing the player to identify closely with the character, since this perspective mimics what individuals usually see of their own bodies in life, reinforcing the first-person perspective as well as to some extent anonymising the protagonist in terms of physical characteristics.

The first-person perspective variably allows players to superimpose aspects of their own identities onto the anonymous game protagonist, to maintain a separate identity from the identified protagonist. In the *Doom* franchise, the anonymous first-person perspective allows the player to project her own characteristics onto the game protagonist; designer John Romero says, 'There was never a name for the DOOM marine because it's supposed to be YOU' (2002, original emphasis) By contrast, in other games, anonymity can function to lessen identification with a specific character. *Dear Esther* (discussed in Chapter 3) uses the anonymous first-person to create ambiguity around the identity of the protagonist: the player is given the challenge of discovering

the identity of the protagonist from the incoherent information presented through the game. At no point in the game is the player explicitly given the identity of the protagonist, yet playing the game allows a character to emerge, heavily mediated by the player's interpretation of the events contained in the letters to Esther, which, again, provide no reference to her external physical attributes.

Unlike the anonymous first-person perspective, the identified first-person used in games such as *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007) and *Dishonored* (Arkane Studios 2012) presents a protagonist with a clearly specified identity, albeit occupying the same viewpoint as the anonymous first-person protagonist. In these games, the construction of the character's identity can be part of both the ludic and the narrative aspects of the videogame. As with *Dear Esther*, the identity that the player constructs for the character is dependent on narrative information discovered through playing the game and on choices that the player makes for the character as part of the game's ludology.

Bioshock, set in the underwater dystopian city, Rapture, requires the player to make simple but morally weighted choices, and is examined in depth in chapter 6. The central choice in the game is whether to save or to kill genetically modified children, a choice that is presented to the player a number of times through the game. Whether the player chooses to save or 'harvest' (a euphemism for kill) the Little Sisters⁴² leads to a different identification for the player and protagonist at the ending of the narrative—and the game—either as a saviour or as a despot. The first-person perspective in this game, alongside the protagonist's lack of identity, lends itself to the *player* making these decisions rather than the character, which in turn heightens the immersion that the player feels in the game and the narrative. Another videogame that uses this method of play is *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012); the moral choices in this game are not

⁴² Little Sisters is the collective name for the genetically modified children, denied individual identity within the game. Each child is known as a Little Sister, and she has as her companion a Big Daddy—another genetically modified human.

as simple as those of *Bioshock*, and the repercussions of these choices are felt throughout the narrative, with the protagonist's ability to interact with other characters defined by them, and the personality that the player constructs as these decisions are made changing both the identity of the protagonist and the nature of the player's identification with him.⁴³

Decentred Point Of View

Whilst most videogames use a single perspective, this is not a universal structure: as in film and literature, many videogames mix third- and first-person narrative perspectives. *Deux Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Montreal 2011) uses a first-person perspective during play, yet presents its cinematic style cut-scenes in a third-person omniscient perspective. The opening cut-scene explicitly places the character in the perspective of the protagonist, as the 'closing shot' of the animation pans around the scene and merges the viewpoint of the player with that of the character to create a first-person view. In this game, as with the previous *Deux Ex* games, there is a deliberate attempt by game designers to create an 'immersive simulation game in that you are made to feel you're actually in the game world with as little as possible getting in the way of the experience of "being there"' (Spector 2000), an aim largely enabled by the first-person perspective. This viewpoint contrasts with the narrative outlook of *Assassin's Creed*: instead of controlling a separate character, the intention is for the player to immerse herself in the game as if she were the character and part of the diegesis.

Whilst first- and third-person videogame perspectives are to some degree similar to those in other audio-visual media such as film and television, there is another

⁴³ *The Walking Dead* is examined in chapter 2 of this thesis.

perspective, unique to videogames, which encompasses aspects of both the first- and third-person viewpoints; this is a dominant perspective in contemporary videogames. *Alan Wake*, the *Tomb Raider* franchise, the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, and *American McGee's Alice* all offer examples of this combined perspective. The visual presentation of the videogame perspective is a mixture of the following camera and the over-the-shoulder shot', which offer clearly defined and externally focalised perspectives in film. Encompassing aspects of the third-person perspective, the character is frequently seen on the screen, indicating narrative distance between player and protagonist. Structurally, however, the player is offered a visual and auditory perspective similar to that of the first-person, with the player positioned as if above the shoulder of the protagonist, rather than situated as if viewing the scene through the protagonist's eyes and ears. This provides a slightly decentred position that allows the player to see everything that the protagonist sees, but slightly askance from the protagonist's view and, importantly, with a wider field of vision (Figure 17).

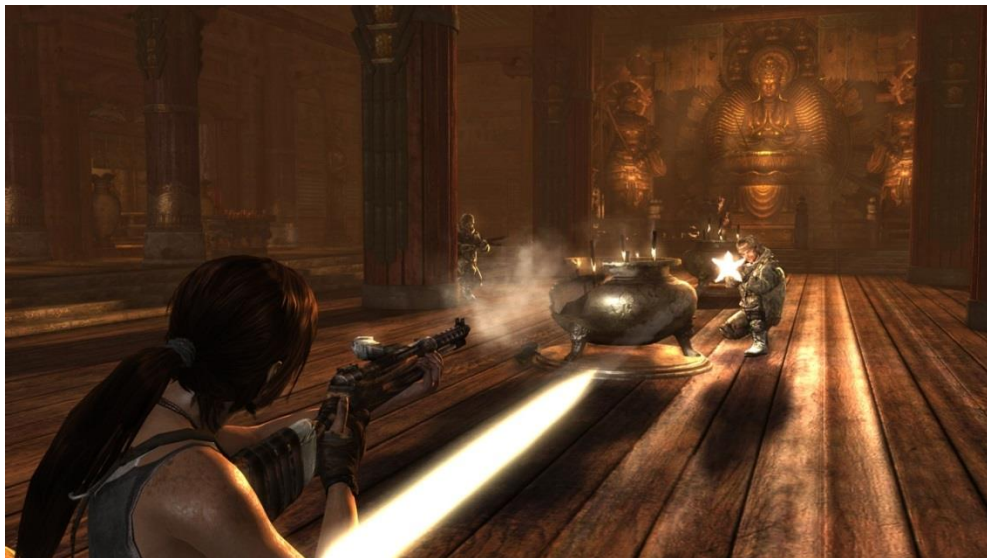


Figure 17: Looking Over Lara's Shoulder

The decentred perspective, therefore, clearly identifies the character as a separate entity, akin to the third-person perspective, but places the player in much closer proximity to

the character's view, allowing the player to identify almost—but not quite—as the character. When coupled with the interactivity of controlling the character, this perspective functions much like the proverbial good/bad angel on the protagonist's shoulder, with the player in some cases acting in the role of the angel/devil—making moral choices that affect the character and/or subsequent events within the narrative.

Whilst videogames rely on movement and images, they are emphatically *not* films. Focalisation in videogames, therefore, does not just mirror film, but includes nonfilmic methods of focalisation; failure to include these has resulted in some videogames containing excessive linear, passive audiovisual cut-scenes, which not only interrupt the play, as Juul complains, but also detract from the player's augmented ability to identify with, or as, the protagonist by comparison to films. A comparison of novel, film, and videogame within a single franchise illustrates the contrasts between the decentred view across media.

Evolution: The Decentred View in *Lara Croft*, the Novel, Film, and Videogame Franchise

In novel, film, and videogame, the *Tomb Raider* franchise uses the decentred perspective as the predominant viewpoint, albeit with different degrees of first- and third-person identification. In the game, the over-the-shoulder perspective dominates, with the player able to interact with the environment and control the actions of the character; in the film, the third-person perspective is the chief vantage point: although the videogame that preceded the film has clearly influenced the perspective of the camera angles and movement, and the focalisation has been adjusted to work with the conventions of the film medium. As we saw above, the novel combines a third-person

external focalisation with an internal, character-bound focalisation, as the following example shows:

What she saw was an illustration of Alexander’s journey across Europe and Asia—his triumphal march across the known world, laid out in pictures. The images were reminiscent of something— a memory tugged briefly at her consciousness, and then flitted away. (Stern 2003, 38)

The extract shows the predominant perspective as being third-person, evident in the use of ‘she’ and ‘her’ to refer to the protagonist, Lara Croft. The first sentence shows the external viewpoint, with the presented information delivered as if the narrator is observing and reporting events. However, the second sentence of the extract presents the reader with Lara’s thoughts, and so moves away from the objective view of her actions to the subjective view of her mind, so that the viewpoint becomes internally focalised on Lara. In the written adaptation of the film, the author is able to represent the feelings and thoughts of Lara in a way that neither the film, nor the videogame, chooses to do.



Figure 18: Over-the-Shoulder Shot

The film adaptation of the videogame *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Jolie 2001) uses over-the-shoulder camera shots to mimic the perspective of the game. These shots ‘suggest the [narrator’s] point of view’, but are at the same time ‘also physically separate from it’ (Monaco 2009, 211), as in the decentred view of the videogame. Predominantly presented from a third-person perspective, the film however does not use over-the-shoulder shots constantly: instead, the more objective third-person perspective characteristic of cinema means that the camera focuses on the protagonist as the object of the film. However, during the film’s action sequences, the camera switches between over-the-shoulder shots (Figure 18) and reverse angle shots (Figure 19), creating an ‘insistent and intimate shot-countershot technique’ (Monaco 2009, 211) that occupies many points of view. Within the context of the film, switching between shots allows the viewer to both identify with the protagonist as subject, and to see the protagonist as screen object. This unfolds in contrast to the decentred videogame perspective, which predominantly shows actions from the viewpoint of the player; the film, therefore, allows the viewer to experience a relaxation from the relentless identification of the videogame perspective, and to experience a more objective identification of the protagonist as observed object rather than identified with subject.



Figure 19: Reverse Angle Shot

Unlike the film adaptation of *Tomb Raider*, the angle of the ‘camera’ in the videogame is principally set in the over-the-shoulder shot position, with the player having the ability to change the field of view as desired in a 360 degree view around Lara. Therefore, this new perspective combines the identified first-person and the third person to create a hybrid point of view. Clearly defining the character in the third person rather than the first-person, there is, nevertheless, a high level of identification with the character, with the player’s view being extremely close to the protagonist’s perspective. In the decentred perspective, the player is largely character-bound, but not totally so.

Whilst these narrative techniques can encourage the player’s immersive identification with the character she controls beyond the degree to which she may identify with literary or cinematic protagonists, the videogame format allows the game design team to determine the degree of immersion and identification that the player has with game characters. Gerald Cupchik (2002) argues that symbolically presented events allow more control over ‘emotional distance’ than representationally presented ones—as a reader, Cupchik argues, ‘you’ control how you see a character, object, etc., whereas in a videogame or film, this is part of the production process, and has been decided by a designer/director. While Cupchik’s argument is debatable (written characters are also designed and directed by authors and editors), emotional distance when reading can be more readily varied through controlling the pace at which the narrative is delivered. In film, for example, although the narrative pace is decided by the director and editor prior to viewing, displayed in video, DVD, or online streamed formats; a film can be interrupted, rewound, fast-forwarded, and viewed in slow or fast motion. However, films projected centrally in cinemas are not under the control of

viewers and critics tend to focus on this older viewing format, arguing that by contrast, readers of written texts can unilaterally control the pace of reading, frequently returning ‘to earlier parts of the text, rereading a portion of the text to clarify or re-experience what is described’ subsequently (Mar, et al. 2010, 822), as well as using pause, the interruption of the narrative, when a written fiction is too large to consume in one sitting. The greater length of videogames, discussed in detail at various points in this thesis, means that pause has to be used in videogames even more so than the reader of the average length work of written fiction or the viewer of the average length film.

The greater length of videogames is another factor that can render the intensity of narrative identification beyond that of other media. Individual videogames can take more than 40 hours to complete, with franchises taking many times longer.⁴⁴ The far lengthier investment of videogame consumption, in addition to its interactive aspects and intimate perspectives, can encourage more intense identification with and emotional investment in characters.

Richard Wollheim identifies two kinds of identificatory modes of imagining in literature and film: ‘central imagining, in which we take the point of view of a character in the story, and acentral imagining, in which we take on the perspective of an onlooker’ (Harold 2010, 282). In videogames, the two kinds of imagining are manifested most clearly in the division between the first- and the third-person perspectives. For Harold, central imagining is ‘the first step in emotional engagement’: ‘imagining a character centrally puts us in a position to feel empathic, sympathetic and even antipathetic emotions for her, depending on the character and her situation’ (Harold 2010, 282, 284).

Harold amplifies his argument by citing Noel Carroll’s *Art, Narrative, and Emotion*, which contends that ‘narratives trigger emotions by recreating the conditions

⁴⁴ *Assassin’s Creed 2* took more than 100 hours to complete fully, in my primary playing experience

that having the emotions would create' (Harold 2010, 285). He claims further that visual media are able to evoke the *physical* responses to emotional reactions: 'the film camera can zoom in closely with a trembling camera to prompt fear, or dolly out and fill the frame to light to suggest joy', a process that can be heightened in videogames using technology such as haptic interfaces.⁴⁵ Reminiscent of the 'feelie' technology in *Brave New World* (Huxley 1932), these interfaces are able to recreate tactile sensations that map onto the emotions felt by the character and are more tangibly experienced by the hands-on player of the game than the viewer of a handheld camera. A particularly illuminating example of this can be found in the PlayStation 3 game, *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010). This game uses the PlayStation control pad in innovative ways, including using the haptic feedback device to recreate emotively loaded physical sensations at a number of junctures in the game. At one particular point, the player controlled character, Ethan Mars, must choose whether to shoot another character. Ethan is not a proficient, or experienced, shooter and his inexperience as well as his emotions are reflected in the way the control pad reacts to the situation. As the player attempts to take aim, the control pad begins to shake violently, in turn making it harder to hit the target. This mimicking of the physical sensation of fear and anxiety can make the player, who acts for and with the protagonist in the scene through technologies and interactivity, feel anxious and incompetent, mirroring the sensations of the character.

Identification, Replay, Avatars, and Authorship

The first-person perspective can be used to suppress identification with the anonymous first-person, allowing a character to be killed frequently without much emotion through

⁴⁵ These interfaces include the feedback control pad and steering wheel.

the use of the camera viewpoint inscribing the first-person perspective for the player. Games such as *Assassin's Creed* and *Max Payne* function in this way, with the character being created for the player to interact with, rather than having the ability to superimpose characteristics on them. In first-person shooter games, ludic actions (as well as the narrative information associated with them) must be repeated until the player has learned the skills required to complete this part of the game and narrative. Ludic play, then, can have the effect of slowing the narrative, with the oft repeated sections functioning as regressions and repetitions, allowing the player to revisit earlier events to re-experience them, as well as to fulfil the ludic functions of the game and learn a particular skill set. They can also lengthen the time that players spend identifying with characters, creating a push-pull effect when it comes to narrative distance.

By contrast, games of progression, including the *Lara Croft* franchise, are frequently critiqued for their lack of replayability;⁴⁶ that is, once they are completed, the ludic challenges overcome, and the narrative discovered, the player may not want to reengage with it. Generally, progressional videogames put the player in a position of suspense; there is often a mystery to solve and part of the successful conclusion of a game includes the discovery of this narrative. In a game such as *Heavy Rain*, the player controls not one but several characters, fragmenting her points of identification, and the mystery of this game tasks the player with discovering the identity of the antagonist, who is one of the characters that the player controls, although she does not know this; the player builds an identity for all four characters with whom she can interact and at no point is made aware of the identity of the antagonist, until it is revealed by the narrative. This has been considered a flaw in the game by players 'because the developers are trying not to give away his identity until the last 3 or 4 chapters, and you are controlling

⁴⁶ Timothy Frattesi *et al.* define replayability as 'is the collective reason for replay' (Frattesi, et al. 2011)

him throughout the game' (kiwiatlarge 2010). Players report that as they are able to 'veer into his [the murderers] thoughts (metalheadjake12 2010)' during play and there is no evidence at all in them of the murders he has committed, this creates a disconnect for her. However, other players find that replay with the knowledge of his identity as the killer allows a greater understanding of his motives. As in *Bioshock*, however, replay allows the player to detect clues hidden throughout the game and grasp evidential information that supports the narrative disclosure that was unnoticed, or considered unimportant, in the first-time player position of suspense. The point to stress for this chapter is that subsequent replays change the player's identification with the antagonist, as happens in films such as *Usual Suspects* and *Sixth Sense*.

More generally, videogame designers are increasingly using multiple endings and achievements⁴⁷ to heighten replayability, which Frattesi *et al.* call 'the replayability aspect of completion' (Frattesi, et al. 2011). However, the lack of suspense and the potential diminishment of identification with a previously unknown antagonist both affect the desire to replay a particular videogame. Scott Shelby, once he has been unmasked as the Origami Killer, is not a character that I, as a player, would wish to interact with again; the identification I had previously is replaced with a questioning of myself, my narrative perspective, and my processes of narrative identification, diminishing my desire to replay the game. In addition to intensifying identification processes, videogames can thus intensify a sense of alienation from characters.

Yet, replaying videogames can also produce positive new points of identification. Although most discussions of narrative identification concern identification with characters rather than authors, since the player influences the action taking place within the game through play, and this play can change the outcome of the

⁴⁷ Achievements are virtual rewards for completing actions and achieving specific goals.

game, both ludically and narratively, players do not simply identify with the characters they control, they also identify as authors. Janet Murray makes the distinction between the author and the interactor⁴⁸ of a piece of electronic narrative (Murray 1997, 153). In *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, she considers ‘authorship in electronic media [to be] procedural’, meaning that the designer is charged with

Writing the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the texts themselves. It means writing the rules for the interactor’s involvement, that is, the conditions under which things will happen in response to the participant’s action. It means establishing the properties of the objects and potential objects in the virtual world and the formulas for how they will relate to one another.

(Murray 1997, 152)

Whilst the player of a videogame can put the pieces of the narrative together, sometimes in several different ways, the constituent parts of the narrative are created by the game designer. This makes the player a quasi-author, creating a variation of the narrative that may be unique, but nevertheless formed from the game content provided by the game designer.

How the player functions as quasi-author and how that authorship influences identification with the narrative depends on the type of game. In *Half Real* (2005), Juul distinguishes two types of videogames: games of *emergence* and games of *progression*, with emergence games being the historically dominant form. Emergence games use simple rules, although it requires immense amounts of effort to gain proficiency in playing the game. *Tetris* is a typical example of a game of emergence; it is a puzzle game

⁴⁸ Murray uses the term interactor where I use player.

with the shapes each consisting of several squares that are falling down the well. When playing a *Tetris* game, the player turns the squares or moves left and right, trying to arrange the shapes in a line. When a line of squares makes a line from edge to edge, it disappears and all the pieces move down by a square. When the well is filled up, the player loses (Absolutist 2013).

Similarly, *Space Invaders* (Nishikado 1978) involves moving the game avatar left and right across a fixed screen, firing missiles at moving targets (Figure 20).

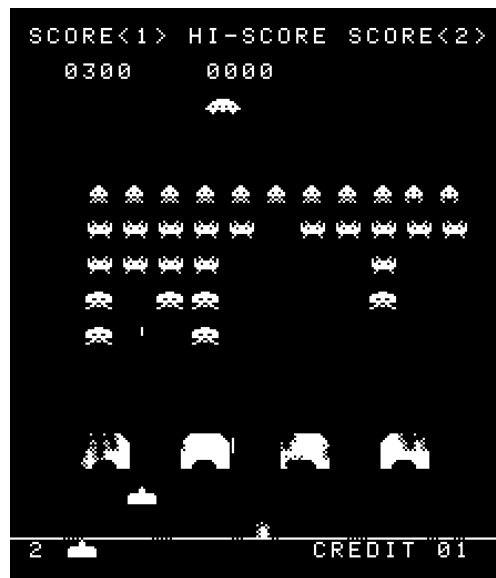


Figure 20: *Space Invaders* Screenshot

Narratively, the title *Space Invaders* suggests that there are invaders from space and the player is charged with repelling this invasion. Despite this suggestion, the game is not a narrative game. There is an inferred beginning (the invasion) and middle (the action of the game), but there is no ending: the invaders move progressively quicker until the player succumbs to the space invaders and the game ends. There is no other

possible conclusion.⁴⁹ Thus while players have ludic agency in emergence games, they are not tantamount to authors of narrative.

Narrative games are usually progression type games, where the ‘game designer explicitly determines the possible ways in which the game can progress’ (Juul 2005, 56). Generally speaking, as Juul notes, if a ‘game guide is a walkthrough (describing step by step what to do) it is a game of progression. If the game guide is a strategy guide (describing rules of thumb for how to play), it is a game of emergence (Juul 2005, 71). Videogame walkthroughs vary from detailing the actions that the player must make to succeed ludically, such as ‘climb along the yellow rail to the left to reach the underside of the train’ (Bradygames 2009, 24), to resembling works of narrative fiction. The walkthrough for *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment 2010) is presented as if it were a piece of textual fiction, rather than detailing ludic instructions, although it is doing so:

Wake left the car in a state of agitation. He staggered forward toward a rough-hewn wood pole. He gazed up into the illuminating glow of a lamp on the left side of the road. It seemed comforting: like a Safe Haven subduing the creeping sensation of fear.
(Hodgson 2010, 24)

The present-tense instruction embedded in this past-tense narrative tells the player to reach the lamppost on the left and to enter the light, which is a ludic safe haven. That the walkthrough is presented as a novelisation of the videogame, a third-person retrospective narration of Alan Wake’s quest to save his wife, substantiates Juul’s premise that games of progression can be rewritten as a step by step guide, as well as my central argument that videogames contain extensive narratives akin to those in

⁴⁹ Incidentally, this structure is also problematic for Juul’s six-point classic game model, which requires a game to have a variable outcome, which neither *Tetris* nor *Space Invaders* has, as the only conclusion is that the player loses the game.

traditional media, as describing step by step the events in a game such as *Alan Wake* can be remediated as a novelisation.

Games of progression, then, can closely resemble traditional narrative structures in other media. The structure of the progressional game is, as its name suggests, a progression—from the beginning, through a middle, to an end, a structure that has characterised traditional media since Aristotle’s famous propounding of it as essential to theatre (Poetics 2008). Even videogame franchises that span numerous games, such as *Assassin’s Creed* have a progressional structure, with many game franchises developing sub-plots or episodes that are self-contained as well as connected.⁵⁰ Whilst the player may feel as though she is identifying as author of a game narrative, the ability to create a walkthrough that encompasses all plays of the game refutes the player’s role as independent author, instead reaffirming the designer as the authorial presence in the narrative and author of the game’s predetermined aspects. Even so, the player does influence how the narrative progresses within these constraints. The *Mass Effect* franchise (Bioware 2007 - 2012) is a futuristic set of games that centres on the character Shepard, a soldier who leads the defence of the Galaxy in a series of missions and quests. The core elements of the game are fixed; the pursuit and destruction of the ‘Reapers’, a life form that aims to destroy all other life in the galaxy; however, the player has the option of enlarging the game and the narrative, through the quests and missions and through interaction with non-player characters, allowing the player to enter into optional relationships with other characters that change the personality of Shepard and the reactions of other characters to Shepard.

Another example of the player’s ability to identify as a quasi-author is found in *Heavy Rain*. Here, the ending of the game narrative depends on the choices that the

⁵⁰ *Assassin’s Creed* uses the framing narrative of Desmond Miles to allow the franchise to span 5 separate game episodes to date.

player makes throughout play, such as whether the identity of the serial killer is discovered and which characters survive to the end; these combine to give a total of more than twenty possible conclusions to the game, ranging from the Origami killer going free and all other characters being killed to everyone surviving and the killer apprehended. These options are not minor variations on a theme, but significantly contrasting narratives. While the player is instrumental in selecting the composite parts of the conclusion, and therefore plays a quasi-authorial role, each of the endings is predetermined by the designer simply by the fact it is already loaded into the software that is being played. Thus, while the player is free to make choices, she may only choose from among what has already been programmed. The point to emphasise here, is that when players function as quasi-authors, they change the identities and modes of identification of and within videogames.

Of course, identification in videogames refers to more than the identity of a specific character within a narrative. There are many games that allow the player to create an avatar for use within the diegesis. Usually (but not exclusively) this means that the avatar is able to resemble the player within the diegetic world should the player so choose. In a game such as *The Sims*, the creation of an avatar to represent the player lends itself to an individual creation, as there are literally hundreds of combinations of characteristics to build the character. The player is able to make specific changes to the character as part of the construction, with some game allowing the player to create non-human characters. A player, therefore, may use an avatar that does not physically resemble herself at all; however, the ability to create a character allows the player to invest in the character and so heightens identity and identification with that character and with the authorship of the videogame.

The narrative perspective of videogames has much in common with older media, utilising similar perspectives, albeit to different degrees, and creating similar modes of identification, intensified by the multiple media available to it and the interactivity, choice, and agency involved in consuming them. The differences between focalization and perspective become evident when considering them in terms of videogame narratives, even as the similarities become clear, challenging Genette's assertion that focalization is synonymous with perspective. Just as in other media, the perspective that the player is given in a videogame changes how she sees the character she is controlling, how she identifies with or as that character. Alongside this, the player's heightened ability to identify with or as a character over changes the way that she views that character, and allows the superimposition of the player's own world views, including those around gender, sexuality, choice, and ideology in ways that are not enabled by other media, as this chapter has shown. This is the focus of the second part of this thesis, which treats ethical, ideological, and political aspects of narrative, considering how these issues are replicated by or changed from their manifestations in other media within videogames.

Part 2:
Gaming and
Narrative Ideology

Chapter 5: Ideology, Identity Politics, and Identification

Narrative does not live by formalism alone and narrative in videogames extends beyond formal features and narratology to ethical, ideological, and political modes of narrative. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska write that we ‘view cultural products such as myths or popular films as devices through which societies try to work out difficult issues in one way or another, directly or implicitly’, going on to explain that ‘what these products appear to offer in many cases is an imaginary way of resolving problems that may be impossible to resolve in reality’ (King and Krzywinska 2000, 12), and this is, therefore, central to the representation of rhetoric and ideological messages in media of all forms, including videogames. There are continuities between games and life just as there are continuities between other modes of narrative and life, and videogames present players with situations that ‘represent how real and imagined systems work’ (Bogost 2007, xi), in which they interact with fictional situations that simulate ethical, political, and moral scenarios in ‘real’ life, and offer players the potential to ‘change fundamental attitudes and beliefs about the world, leading to potentially significant long-term social change’ (Bogost 2007, xi). Miguel Sicart argues that videogames are ‘ethical objects’ that in turn make ‘game players ethical agents’ (Sicart 2009, 4), and there is a growing body of criticism that consider the role of ethics in the videogame industry (see, for example Zagal 2011), particularly the levels of violence found in increasingly photorealistic games.⁵¹

Videogames can be understood and analysed as texts that represent not only complex narrative structures, as I have shown in part one of this thesis, but also

⁵¹ Chapter 7 examines the role of Ethics in videogames.

complex ideas, histories, worlds, and value systems. Through their interactive nature, videogames invite the player to explore worlds, discover the narratives they contain, and engage with their belief systems, values, and ethics. As other media do, videogames allow consumers to investigate philosophical ideas and cultural ideologies. Ideology, the ‘systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics, or society and forming the basis of action or policy’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2014) in videogames, is presented through cinematic sequences, verbal and spatial narrative, gameplay, and game rules, offering the analyst opportunities to study videogame narrative rhetoric conceptually, and to probe the ideas espoused by these ‘texts’, both explicitly and implicitly.

Rhetoric, the ‘study and uses of written, spoken, and visual language [...] to organize and maintain social groups, construct meanings and identities, coordinate behaviour, mediate power, produce change, and create knowledge’ (SDSU 2013), is becoming increasingly prominent in videogames, as once again, videogames carry consumers beyond the rhetorical positions they occupy in older media. Author and game designer Ian Bogost attests that ‘videogames open a new domain for persuasion, thanks to their core representational mode, procedurality’ (Bogost 2007, xi), defining procedurality as ‘author[ing ideological programming] code that enforces rules, rather than authoring the representation itself’ (Bogost 2007, 4). It is this that allows videogame players to actively investigate a particular rhetorical position via gaming, through choice and narrative interpretations, and so construct ideas and opinions through active participation, rather than being presented with an ideological standpoint to accept or reject, as is the case when narrative takes the form of print or audiovisual media. Procedural rhetoric then, is ‘the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions’ (Bogost 2007, xi). *Playing* interactively according to

game rules, therefore, is integral to how narrative ideology is constructed and unfolds, distinguishing its functions from other media.

The ability of videogames to make an ideological argument that is engaged by potentially millions of players has long been recognised.⁵² Since the release of *Death Race*⁵³ in 1976 (Egenfeldt-Nielsen and Smith 2003), concern has been widely expressed that videogames ‘increase a person’s aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviour both in laboratory settings and in actual life’s (Dill 2000), with games such as *Doom* and the *Call of Duty* franchise being considered at least partially responsible for the Columbine High School massacre (Ward 2001) and the 2013 attack on the US Naval base in Washington (Bucktin 2013) (Figure 21).



Figure 21: *Daily Mirror* Front Page, 18 September 2013

⁵² *Grand Theft Auto 5* grossed \$1,000,000,000 (one Billion US Dollars) in the first three days of sales, approximately 17 million units (Mayak 2013).

⁵³ *Death Race* involves driving over gremlins to score points; gremlins driven over scream and a cross appears indicating their death. A controversy arose because the gremlins resemble stick humans, and the game was said to promote car-based violence. (International Arcade Museum 2013)

However, psychological and education studies are not as clear cut as newspaper headlines and social critics would intimate, with recent research claiming that ‘playing the videogames [*Mortal Kombat*, *Halo*, and *Grand Theft Auto*] actually had a very slight calming effect on youths’ (Nauert 2013). Whilst this is an important aspect of player response to and identification with videogames and protagonists, my thesis addresses the subject from a narratological standpoint rather than a sociological or psychological one, although of course the various approaches can overlap. This chapter and the next consider the ways in which videogames presenting a didactic ideology differ from other media presenting similar philosophies due to their differing narrative structures and modes of narrative consumption. In videogames, players have the potential to *change* rather than simply agree or disagree with a presented ideology. The potential for change extends beyond the diegetic world of the game to real world decisions. For example, studies have shown that playing educational games such as *Store*, *Guess Who*, *Granny Smith*, and *The Restaurant*⁵⁴ led players to change real-world health related behaviour (Baranowski, Buday and Baranowski 2008).

Videogames are also able to influence other aspects of players’ real world attitudes, as they may carry political ideologies from the fictional world of a game in the real world of their everyday lives. Bogost offers *Animal Crossing*, an ‘animal village simulator’ (Bogost 2008, 117), as an example of ideological videogame rhetoric carried into social reality. *Animal Crossing*, he argues, ‘simulates the social dynamics of a small town, complete with the material demands of keeping up with the Joneses’ (Bogost 2008, 119). It contains a system that allows players to engage with economic issues, such as supply and demand, long-term debt, and ‘the repetition of mundane work necessary to support contemporary material property ideals’ (*ibid*). This is a popular

⁵⁴ All of these examples are food and/or exercise health-based games.

game design; the app based game *Fallout Shelter* (Bethesda Softworks 2015) is similarly based on economic and husbandry principles, with players engaging in simplified management, including growing food, cleaning water, and creating power to run a successful fallout shelter. Whilst these ‘casual games’⁵⁵ can be played by young children without didactic reflection (Bogost uses his own five-year-old son as an example of such a player), there is a subliminal ideological process at work within the game, as players are made part of ‘a full consumer regimen’ (Bogost 2008, 118), which leads to unconscious as well as conscious identification with particular economic beliefs about wealth and its distribution..

Even simple games like *Animal Crossing* and *Fallout Shelter* suggest that contemporary games are more didactic in their presentation of ethical and political ideologies than early games were. Due in part to technological restrictions, the first videogames were concerned primarily with ludology—that is the playing of the game—and only secondarily with narrative (see part 1). Although earlier games feature both storytelling and the use of real settings, they are not didactically rhetorical, in that they are not overtly trying to influence or to change the beliefs of player. As the medium has matured, games increasingly used narrative and ludology concurrently to examine ideological as well as narratological issues within a fictional, safe⁵⁶ environment before committing to them (or rejecting them) in the social world. This scrutiny has taken many forms and covered a variety of issues: *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Montreal 2011), for example, interrogates the philosophical principles of transhumanism, whilst *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) considers personal ethical issues, situating the player as a father who must break legal and moral conventions in

⁵⁵ Casual games are games that can be played quickly and easily, with a small learning curve and generally no need to save the games progress.

⁵⁶ The player is physically safe, in that she is interacting with fictional characters and situations, without any real world physical danger.

the pursuit of his own kidnapped child, a dilemma expressed in the question, ‘How far would you go to save someone you love?’, the game’s tagline (IMDB 2010). Similarly, but on a broader ethical scale, the *Mass Effect* (Bioware 2007 - 2012) franchise considers, amongst other issues, the social interactions of different people, cultures, and lifestyles, including gender and sexuality, a theme that has dominated the *Tomb Raider* franchise over its lifespan through the varying manifestations of its female protagonist, Lara Croft.

Gendered Identity and Identification

The presence of strong female protagonists has not been a prominent part of the videogame canon; throughout videogame history, the protagonists of videogames have been predominantly male: Mario, Sonic, Ezio Auditore, the MasterChief, and Soap McTavish⁵⁷ are some of the most famous videogame characters, their masculinity foregrounded, regardless of the gender of the player. Rosa Gallelli and Rossella Fanelli suggest that ‘girls were for a long time not taken into account in the design of videogames’ (2010, 105). There have been many female characters in games, but these are usually part of the supporting cast, such as the damsel in distress; Princess Peaches of the Mario franchise is a famous example of this type of passive and subordinate character, although Ewan Kirkland writes that her ‘ability to float through the air is her main functional distinction from the male avatars’ (2010, 2). This is an ability that James Newman considers positively, despite her lessened ability to jump and carry items in the game (Newman 2005, 129). Even games that feature a female protagonist, such as Lara Croft of the *Tomb Raider* franchise, were originally created for the male

⁵⁷ Soap McTavish is the protagonist/ main character of the Call of Duty games.

player, which has led to a 'struggle to place Lara Croft in a traditional Media Studies feminist framework' (Kirkland 2010, 2), and to a disconnect between the apparent female empowerment that the game was supposed to enable, as her feminist qualities became increasingly diminished in favour of her exaggerated hyper-sexualized physical attributes.

Despite the preoccupation with Lara's body, a strong female protagonist in a videogame has come to be known as 'The Lara Phenomenon' (Jansz and Martis 2007) and seen to support feminism. Introducing such a character in the lead role of a videogame 'marked a significant departure from the typical role of women within popular computer games' (Kennedy 2002). The original development company, Core Design, based the character on their earlier creation, 'Rick Dangerous, himself little more than a carbon-copy of treasure-hunter Indiana Jones' (Meltzer 2013) and intended that the character was to be 'more of an Indiana Jones persona' (Khaled 2010). The decision to introduce Lara as a strong female protagonist was not a feminist one, but arose from copyright restrictions; even so, her incarnation coincided with the 'ladette' movement and the rise of 'girl-power' in the UK (Kennedy 2002), so that Lara quickly became a character that existed outside the videogame world, appearing in advertisements for Lucozade (Campbell 1999) amongst others.

However, the initial claims of feminine empowerment in videogame play quickly waned in the face of 'Lara's status as an object of sexual desire, a factor that the marketing/advertising of Tomb Raider was keen to reinforce' (Kennedy 2002), subjugating the Lara Phenomenon and the promotion of female characters to a position of dominance to the male dominated videogame industry's perpetuation of sexualised feminine ideals, whilst justifying such sexual objectification as feminine empowerment. The decision to make Lara female and endow her with famously impractical breasts

established her as a sex symbol, ‘an animated conglomeration of sexual and attitudinal signs – breasts, hotpants, shades, thigh holsters’ (Poole 2001). With her physical statistics of 34D-24-35 being ‘unrealistic’, critics worried that Lara would, far from liberating women, ‘lead to further stereotyping and objectification of woman’ (IGN 1996), a concern upheld by Jeoen Jansz and Raynel G. Martis in *The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games* (2007). Such stereotyping did not change in twelve years of sequels, as Figure 22 makes clear.



Figure 22 Lara Croft, 1996-2008

Although Lara is to some extent bimodal, that is, she ‘manage[s] to engage a large following of both young men and women’ (Kennedy 2002), this view is somewhat contentious amongst some scholars, since her physical appearance, sexually stylised and exaggerated, marks her as a specifically heterosexual male-centric figure and object of male scrutiny, subverting the feminist empowerment that she represents.

Laura Mulvey, writing about film in 1975, states that ‘in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness’ (Mulvey 1990); this equally describes the role of Lara Croft in the *Tomb Raider* franchise to 2008. However, the interactivity of videogames carries such identifications further than film. Whilst Lara is designed with no differences in physical

ability than male characters, her hyper-sexual physical *appearance* subjects her to the male gaze to the point of parodying it. The creation of a ‘Nude Raider’ patch⁵⁸ that allows the player to dress her in a translucent body sock carries these dynamics towards pornography (see Figure 23).

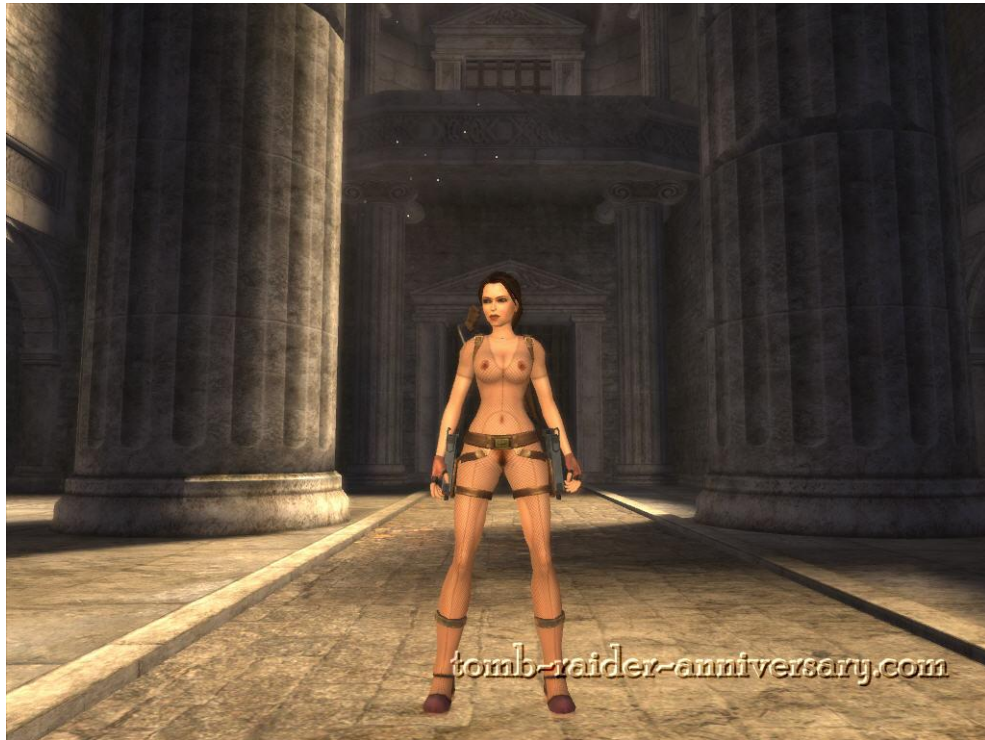


Figure 23: Activated 'Nude Raider' Patch

The representation of Lara as a sexualised being stands in stark contrast to her intended appearance by Toby Gard, the artist who originally designed her. He wanted the character to represent ‘a real difference from other female game characters that were basically sex objects’ (Howson 2006). A great deal has been written on the role of Lara Croft as an object of sexual desire (Kennedy 2002), much of which supports Lara being the subject of the male gaze, and her status as a role model for the female player (Mikula 2003); I refer readers to these and other critical works on the subject. This

⁵⁸ A patch is a piece of programming that is designed, usually to fix problems in game design, but also to change parts of the game according to player desires.

chapter attends to the 2013 ‘reboot’ of the *Tomb Raider* franchise, which has brought about a change in the character, both in terms of her physical appearance and abilities.

Unlike the prior incarnations of Lara Croft, the 2013 version is not the exaggerated sexual being players recognise; physically, she is more photorealistic, less sexually exaggerated and idealized (Figure 24). Her clothing is more suited for adventure and exploration, with the revised character forgoing the hotpants and tight clothing in favour of full trousers, although her vest shows more cleavage than most of the earlier incarnations. Even so, her chest-waist-hip and legs to torso ratios are no longer biologically impossible. These changes make the character less ‘shaped by a desire to embody male sexual fantasy’ (*ibid*) and open up ways for other players to identify with her, not just heterosexual ‘males between 15 and 26 years of age’ (*ibid*), the game’s original target audience. Specifically, the removal of impossible body ideals allows the heterosexual female player to more readily identify with the character.



Figure 24: Lara Croft Comparison 2013 and 1996

Scriptwriter, Rhianna Pratchett, who was involved in the creation of the 2013 game, states in an interview that she wanted the game to be about more than the gender and sexuality of the protagonist, citing this preoccupation as ‘one of the problems in the past with old Lara. It became all about her gender, particularly about her boobs (Lejacq 2013).’ Consumers of the game had also previously weighed in on the changes. Birgit Pretzsch’s Master’s thesis cites an email conversation with Dr Simon Sherville, in which he summarises an internet survey, in which he asked players about their ‘attitudes to on-screen characters such as Lara’, and more than 200 responded. He found that

There was a slight bias towards being attracted to Lara amongst the straight men, there was a major bias toward being attracted to Lara by the gay women, few straight women were attracted to Lara but there was enough of a grid effect in evidence, and the bisexuals were gloriously split down the middle. ... Many women were offended by Lara or men’s reaction to her. (Pretzsch 1999)

In between designers and consumers, reviewers across the manifestations of Lara responded differently: in marked contrast to critical comments about previous incarnations of Lara, Carol Pinchefsky, a writer for *Forbes* and the *New York Times*, considers the new Lara to be inexperienced and determined, wounded and afraid, and because of these traits, argues that she demands the respect of the player (Pinchefsky 2013).

This is a difference that the game narrative takes pains to uphold. The 2013 gameplay does not focus as much on Lara’s sexuality and gender as prior incarnations. The game does not subject her to gender ridicule; during the fight sequences, the (male) enemies are horrified that their ranks are being decimated, but there is no derision apparent in their voices when uttering comments such as ‘that girl is kicking our asses’

(Crystal Dynamics 2013). Nor is there a single instance of Lara being called a chick, a bitch, or any other derogatory term used to represent females, just as in previous games. That said, her representation continues to be gendered and sexualized, albeit in terms of birth symbolism and imagery, however, as both gameplay and narrative focus on Lara as she makes a journey of rebirth from being a naïve young woman to becoming the powerful protagonist of the *Tomb Raider* franchise. While some maternal imagery is gendered, the imagery of birth and rebirth need not be, since males and females alike experience them. The new Lara Croft game, then, seeks both to rework and to depart from prior notions of female sexuality and gendered identity.

Birth and Rebirth – Maternity in *Tomb Raider*

The reboot of the *Tomb Raider* franchise does more than acknowledge the gender bias of the previous games in offering a more realistic character in physical terms; Lara's pornographic sexualisation is replaced by a representation of her as both a gendered maternal figure and a figure who is reborn in the game on equal terms with male characters to become the strong protagonist of the *Tomb Raider* franchise that her original creator intended to be.

Birth and rebirth are, according to Ewan Kirkland, common themes in videogames, represented by 'womblike spaces' and the 'visual and symbolic construction of videogame worlds as maternal caves' (Kirkland 2010). Whilst the *Tomb Raider* franchise is not part of the horror genre that Kirkland addresses, the same symbolism of maternity is evident in the game design, set design, and narrative trajectory of the 2013 game, *Tomb Raider*. Extradiegetically, it is a rebirth of the *Tomb Raider* franchise and a reconstruction of the Lara Croft character. The game is a

prequel to the existing franchise, charting the first expedition of Lara Croft and her naissance as a Tomb Raider and as such marks the 'birth' of the character and suggests that this more foundational and original representation is authoritative in identifying her. Diegetically, the rebirth of Lara Croft is a motif repeated a number of times during the game. *Tomb Raider* opens with a cut-scene: the ship on which Lara is travelling is wrecked and Lara almost drowns. Within the first two minutes of the game's opening, Lara is shown both completely submerged in water and emerging from it, a clear instance of birth symbolism, as 'water [is] related to birth, regeneration and purification' (Cirlot 2002, 79) both symbolically and literally.

Lara nearly drowns twice; both drowning sequences show her completely submerged in the sea, the saline water filling her lungs, calling to mind Kirkland's exploration of the horror genre's preoccupation with womblike spaces and passages through water and narrow corridors, mirroring birth. The first time, as the wrecked ship is being torn apart, Lara becomes trapped by rising water that carries her down the inner corridors of the ship. As she sinks, her hand outstretched, she is rescued by an anonymous male hand, which pulls her from the water. This is a temporary reprieve, however; the ship is still sinking, and she must escape. As the ship disintegrates around her, Lara sees her rescuer in another part of the ship and jumps towards his outstretched hand. This time, it does not hold her, and she falls back into the sea, her second near death experience. As Lara falls deeper into the water, she curls into an almost foetal position before she is washed up on the beach, coughing up the water she has swallowed and completing her first cycle of birth in the game. The passage down the ship's corridor, submerged in salty water, and the coughing, first breaths chart the symbolic self-birthing of Lara Croft in this reboot of the franchise.



Figure 25: Lara Emerging from the Tomb

After this preliminary sequence, much of the subsequent gameplay consists of exploring tombs and the landscape as Lara attempts both to escape from the island and to save her friend, Sam. Apart from the obvious aural similarities between the words tomb and womb, the tombs are connected to the outside world by tunnels, which Lara and the player who operates her spend a significant time traversing.⁵⁹ After the introduction and the opening cut-scene, the first game sequence is set in a dark cave, from which Lara must escape. Suspended by a rope and wrapped in cloth, reminiscent of the umbilical cord and amniotic sac in pregnancy, Lara frees herself from their confines to escape the tomb in which she is trapped, traversing long, dark, liquid filled tunnels, emerging bloody but triumphant from the mouth of the tomb/womb (Figure 25) having fought off an aggressive male opponent in an inversion of the competitive race to insemination. This is Lara's second self-birthing that resists male agency: a rebirth not only as a self-rescued survivor but also as an aggressor: it is during this episode of the game that Lara makes her first kill to avoid being captured and killed herself. Her birth as a survivor is co-dependent on the destruction of another.

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note, however, that the tombs are all optional in the 2013 game. The player does not have to explore these spaces, refuting the understanding of the game's title – *Tomb Raider*.

The main narrative path of *Tomb Raider* features Lara trying to prevent her female best friend, Sam,⁶⁰ from being the victim of a supernatural plot by the indigenous male High Priest of the island to use Sam's body as a vessel for the rebirth of local divinity, the Sun Goddess. This rebirth would bring about the spiritual death of Sam; that is, her body would remain, but her spirit would not, as it would be replaced by that of the Goddess. This plot is symbolic of the 2013 game's attempt to challenge the objectification of female bodies and to preserve those aspects of female identity that are not reducible to secondary sexual characteristics. It is preventing this objectification of the female body that brings about Lara's ultimate rebirth in the final 'boss battle'⁶¹ of the game. Lara restores order, using the trademark twin pistols of her character for the first time in her career. Arthur Asa Berger writes in 2002 that 'women with guns have...appropriated or stolen the male phallus and thus are objects of dread and anxiety—they are castrating bitches who want, it seems, both their femininity and guns/phalluses, the twin sources of masculine power' (2002, 91), and whilst Lara does usurp this symbol of masculinity; these images of female appropriation of the phallus and their subsequent use to destroy men, still objectifies Lara sexually; this is at odds with the rest of the game's narrative of female emancipation and independence, and it is therefore significant that despite the twin pistols being Lara's trademark weapons, they have been missing from the game, until the very end.

To end the game, the player controls Lara as she defeats the High Priest and destroys the Goddess's body to save her friend, which allows them both to escape from the island. This is the birth of Lara Croft as the player knows her, a view supported by the achievement 'A Survivor is Born', which is a virtual reward earned for successfully

⁶⁰ Sam is a descendant of the Sun Queen.

⁶¹ The Big Boss is the culmination of videogame play in this and other games and is usually the hardest enemy in the game to kill.

completing the game. Rescuing Sam marks Lara's birth as a saviour figure; her triumph over the male antagonist (High Priest Mathias) positions her as independent from patriarchy, and as such able to fulfil a traditionally male role: saving the princess. Replacing the male hero, Lara tells the androgynously named Sam, positioned like Princess Peach as the traditionally female rescuee, 'You're safe now; it's OK,' to which Sam replies: 'You saved me, I knew you would' (Crystal Dynamics 2013). Subverting traditional notions of the hero's reward, Lara does not exact sexual or romantic favours from Sam in return for saving her; indeed there is no indication of a romantic relationship between Lara and Sam, thereby negating a trope that traditionally serves as narrative reward and ending for videogame and other narrative heroes: (hetero)sexual behaviour.

Sexual Identity and Identification in Videogames

Yet not all videogame players are heterosexual and those who are may not be able to identify with a protagonist of another gender. Such problems in identification between players and characters are exacerbated in explicit sexual scenes. *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) and *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (Ubisoft 2010) feature fairly explicit sex scenes. In both instances, the 'action' is shown from a male perspective, regardless of the gender of the player. *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* situates the player in a passive role, through a cut-scene, watching the protagonist, Ezio, and his female companion engaging in sexual activity; in this regard, it does not substantially differ from film, although interacting with the protagonist in other episodes may create a greater degree of identification than in film. By contrast, *Heavy Rain's* scene is interactive: the player controls Ethan Mars, the protagonist, as he and Madison Paige

(another playable character) discover a physical attraction to each other. Whilst the player has control of both of these characters at different times, at this point, the player can only control Ethan. This means that the player, regardless of his or her own sexual or gendered identity, becomes interactively engaged in virtual sexual relations with a woman. Whilst there is an option to forgo this scene in the game, forgoing it excludes a number of narrative endings to the game.

Clearly, such interactive narratives, which force players to identify with the characters they control (even Mulvey offers alternative identificatory positions for women in film) raises issues for player identification: a gay man or a heterosexual woman may feel uncomfortable engaging in virtual sexual activity with a woman; even those who do not are unlikely to feel the identificatory arousal that heterosexual male players can access. Such ruptures in identification not only potentially ‘spoil’ the enjoyment of the game and cause offence; they also lessen the identification and immersion in the narrative that videogame technologies and design seek to foster. In this way, narrative ideology can undermine the advances of technology and narratology achieved by videogame designers.

Identity Politics and Identification in Videogames

Yet there is an alternative view of such ruptures in identification between players and protagonists. While identifying with another sexuality or gender might not be what a player would ordinarily choose to do in real life, videogames offer players ways of exploring the experiences and feelings of others in a hypothetical and virtual context. Potential identifications extend beyond sexuality and gender to race, nation, class, age, and other, identificatory divisions. A game such as *The Sims* (Electronic Arts 2001)

caters very well for such explorations, albeit with a few drawbacks. *The Sims* allows the player full authorial control over the design and identity of the character being played; this includes the character's sex, age, race, gender, and the way that these identities engage in relationships. Allowing the player to choose the identity of the character (rather than foisting an already gendered, raced, sexed, etc. character upon the player) allows players to engage with these variations and identifications more deliberately and willingly. The same process can be seen in role playing games such as *Mass Effect* (Bioware 2007 - 2012), *Dragon Age* (BioWare 2014), and *Fallout 3* (Bethesda 2008), all of which allow character creation, and rely on the player creating the character they wish to play. Here then, the ability of the videogame to allow player identification with others, and to strengthen understanding of those unlike themselves, comes to the fore, and as with the novel before, fictional interactions with, and as someone else teaches the player aspects of her own humanity and allows her to become more compassionate through imaginative identification.

Self-Reflexivity in *Spec Ops: The Line*

Identity politics is only one aspect of identification in videogames. Some videogames use their narratives more generally to ponder identification with sociological, psychological, ideological, ethical, moral, political, and cultural ideologies, and to comment self-reflexively on their technologies and content, commenting on their own construction and the methods by which they engage players. Self-reflexivity is an established feature of older media (Stam 1992), including film and literature (Poulaki 2014) (Huber, Middeke and Zapf 2005). Within the context of this chapter, self-reflexivity is defined as any aspect of a videogame that points towards its own creation,

its conceptualisation, the processes needed to create it, and the methods by which it critiques itself. Self-reflexivity is frequently identified with postmodernism and postmodern texts, a narrative structure also engaged by some videogames, a movement that embraces instability and is characterised by scepticism and the rejection of cultural progress, and the implementation of metanarratives (Sim 2011). The videogame, still a young medium, is becoming increasingly self-reflexive, and videogames have also been seen by some critics to engage in postmodern reflections, particularly when they subvert traditional distinctions between reality and simulation or image. Simon Gottschalk's *Videology: Video-games as Postmodern Sites/Sites of Ideological Reproduction* offers a detailed study of the medium as a postmodern text (Gottschalk 1995).

Videogame players are encouraged to identify with ideological points and to reflect self-reflexivity in games such as *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), which uses the game's structure and narrative to consider notions of free will in society as well as free will as a gamer.⁶² *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* offers a consideration of the uses of computer and internet technology, including technologies engaged by videogames, to collect potentially sensitive, or private, information. *Heavy Rain* offers a self-reflexive consideration of the prevalence of violence within the medium. The reflection of violence undertaken in *Heavy Rain* offers is carried further in the 2012 game *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager 2012), a videogame that questions the morality of violence, setting intertextual examples and tropes from other violent games in dialogue with intertextual narratives in other media that self-reflexively ponder the ethics of violence in videogames.

At first, *Spec Ops* appears to be a clone of shooter games such as the *Call of Duty* franchise (albeit with a different perspective), using the same tropes and ludic

⁶² Free will is discussed in Chapter 6.

strategies as that franchise. However, the intertextual relationship of the game to other shooter games is complicated and deepened by its intertextual relationship with philosophical literature and postmodern film. The two kinds of intertextuality lead it to question not only the legitimacy of violent occupation in the social world, but also to question the violent ludic structures of the mainstream videogames it adopts. *Spec Ops: The Line* is a loose adaptation of both Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 1990) and the 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* (Brando), which offers a psychological exploration of the protagonist, Captain Martin Walker, as he makes his way through a ruined Dubai⁶³ in search of the 'Damned' 33rd Battalion and their commanding officer, Konrad, who have gone missing in the darkness of Dubai, much as the protagonists of *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* consider their actions against the backdrop of the atrocities of the ivory trade and the Vietnam War, respectively. The game opens with the player entering Dubai, controlling Walker, who is under orders to carry out reconnaissance to locate the 33rd Battalion and Konrad. Upon finding the bodies of American soldiers, Walker disobeys the original orders for reconnaissance, and instead decides that the team will enter Dubai and search for survivors. The ludic rubric is familiar to players of shooting games: aim, fire, reload, repeat, but where most of these games use this ludic structure straightforwardly and unproblematically, *Spec Ops: The Line* creates ludonarrative dissonance (defined in chapter 1) to subvert the usual empowerment fantasies in first-person shooter videogames, presenting repeated fight sequences that require the player to 'wantonly execute people, zombies, head crabs or splicers, which satiates some limitless desire for players to empower themselves while playing' (Hartman 2012). The volume of enemies requiring destruction is supplemented by the minimal skill required to dispatch them, undermining the player's

⁶³ *Spec Ops: The Line* is set in a speculative version of Dubai, which has been destroyed by a series of sandstorms that engulf the city, and as a result has become a dark place, reminiscent of Conrad's Africa and Coppola's Vietnam.

sense of empowerment by comparison to other games and potentially causing her to question the excess of violence required to progress. Ludonarrative dissonance is further achieved through subversion of conventional tropes, such as ludic progression. Typically, videogames require the player to learn skills, and offer a reward system for the successful implementation of those skills. As the player controls the protagonist's journey deeper into the ruined city of Dubai, she begins to perceive that the reward for the successful implementation of ludic skills is, in fact, a punishment: the game's tone becomes darker, and she is subjected to a series of scenes of escalating brutality as the protagonist Walker, whom she operates, degrades both physically and mentally as a result of his violence. Ludonarrative dissonance and negative reward culminate in one of the most disturbing scenes of the game, in which the player is presented with a scene familiar to players of *Call of Duty 4* (Figure 26). In the *Call of Duty* mission, Death from Above (the name of this mission is the same as the slogan printed on the helicopter Colonel Kilgore uses in *Apocalypse Now*, fusing and confusing the two modes of intertextuality in which *Spec Op* engages), the player takes the role of an aircraft gunner aircraft, providing support for the game's main characters, including the franchise's protagonist, Soap McTavish, as they make their way through hostile territory for extraction out of enemy territory. The mission calls for the player to target white 'hotspots'—areas of enemy militia and armament—to allow the ground crew to reach the extraction point, with an achievement for killing five or more enemies with one shot, highlighting the game's objective of killing as many people as possible.



Figure 26: *Call of Duty 4*: ‘Death from Above’ Mission

For players of *Spec Ops* who has previously completed this or similar missions in other games, the rubric seems clear: target the white areas with weaponry and eliminate as many enemies as possible. However, the game self-reflexively critiques this conventional structure, simulating a real munition—white phosphorus—that was debated by critics after it was revealed that the US military had employed this weapon in 2004 whilst fighting in Falluja, Iraq (Reynolds 2005).



Figure 27: *Spec Ops: The Line*, White Phosphorus Mission

As in *Call of Duty 4*, *Spec Ops* provides the player with white phosphorous to use against an enemy encampment; in the game, as in real war, this munition is used as an obscurant and will allow the protagonist and his team to pass this encampment. Within

the game, the NPC character Lugo (part of Walker's team) challenges the protagonist's use of the munition, citing its harmful effects, but is overruled by Walker, leaving the player with no other choice than to use this munition if she wishes to continue the game, even if she agrees with Lugo and does not want to. This section of the game closely resembles the episode it adapts from *Call of Duty 4*; both are completed via a computer screen within the television screen of the game (Figure 26 and Figure 27,) rather than through direct observation and interaction with the targeted area, and both are presented as a black and white screen. However, unlike most games that move the player on to the next mission with no residual visible consequences of her destructive actions, once the section has been completed, the player must guide Walker and his team through this temporary camp, where she must witness the result of using white phosphorus first-hand. Whilst providing cover for the movement of troops who use it, white phosphorus has a number of dire effects for its victims, including severe injury, as it penetrates clothing and burns through skin and bone and the smoke is toxic, causing severe irritation to lungs if inhaled. However, by far the most dangerous aspect of this projectile weapon is its incendiary effect, as 'wedges' of it become ignition sources that start fires throughout areas where such projectiles are deployed. Innocent civilians can become trapped in these fires (Forensic Architecture 2009), suffering all of the aforementioned effects at once, and dying a horrific death.

After using this weapon, Walker finds a dying member of the 33rd Battalion, who tells him 'we were helping'. This statement leads to the discovery that the encampment was filled with innocent civilians and that Walker ordered his team to fire upon guiltless, non-combatant refugees who were already victims of the war. The pathos of their suffering is highlighted by identity politics; the scene lingers on visual images of social categories deemed particular helpless in society and in need of

protection, such as a mother and child who have been burned to death by the phosphorus (Figure 28). This segment of the game aroused strong emotions in early testing, with players needing to leave the room and to compose themselves after seeing the image (Dyer 2012). Walt Williams considers that this moment offers the player an insight into the psyche of the protagonist as well as into real-world equivalents of that character: ‘if you were actually a soldier in that situation, you would have to make that very conscious choice of trying to move on and accept what you had done’ (*ibid*). Williams argues that the game asks the player to make a similar decision, ‘is this actually a game that I want to finish playing? And if I do, I have to accept what just happened and choose to keep playing this game’ (*ibid*).



Figure 28: Victims of White Phosphorus

The discomfort of playing this scene aims to deconstruct the player’s expectations of the shooter genre—its pleasures and its rewards—and to map her virtual violence onto real-world situations in which the innocent and powerless die along with the armed enemy. *Spec Ops* offers a commentary on choice in gaming and real life; repeated pieces of dialogue feature Walker telling other characters that he has no choice in the actions he is taking: for example, when he responds to Lugo’s challenge about the use of white phosphorus. Walker insists that there is no choice, despite Lugo’s assertion that there is

always a choice. The game sides with Walker diegetically and with Lugo extradiegetically. While the game does not allow diegetic choice, at each point in the game where actions are immoral, even by the standards of FPS gaming, the player *is* offered a choice: to quit playing. Her continuation of the game, much like Walker's continued journey into Dubai, is a choice, and each time she makes the choice to continue, the game 'rewards' her with more death, more destruction, more discomfort, and more uneasy complicity in Walker's unethical actions.

The extradiegetic sense that there is choice occurs within the game as well as in the option to cease playing it. The loading screens of the game repeatedly question the player's role in the game. Usually, in a videogame, loading screens offer the player hints and tips to assist in the successful completion of that game. However, *Spec Ops* subverts this usual trope, instead offering defensive, haunting, and sometimes bitterly ironic captions such as 'It takes a strong man to deny what's in front of him'; 'Do you feel like a hero yet?'; 'You are still a good person'; 'How many Americans have you killed today?', and 'To kill for yourself is murder. To kill for your government is heroic. To kill for entertainment is harmless' (Figure 29).



Figure 29: Spec Ops Loading Screen

Brendan Keogh considers the loading screens to be part of Walker's subconscious, an attempt to justify his actions (Keogh 2012, Loc 176 of 2850), reflecting the decisions Walker makes for himself and his team and how these decisions change the way that the trio interact with each other and with subsequent events. As Walker commits more and more atrocities, disobeying the commands of his superior officers to further his own aim of finding the missing Konrad, he abandons the justification that he is killing for his government. Keogh argues that Walker becomes less professional in his tone and manner, the group dynamic is lost as the team penetrate deeper into Dubai, and his behaviour becomes more erratic and brutal (Keogh 2012). His physical appearance changes alongside his mental deterioration; his skin is burned and eroded by the sand and the violence he encounters and initiates. Whilst I agree with Keogh's points, the captions do more than this; they reflect ironically upon the use of violence to construct heroism and the impossibility of restricting violence in war and war games solely to armed enemies. They also challenge the player's assumptions about her own implication in violent games. The last caption, 'To kill for entertainment is harmless', reflects not Walker's attempts at self-justification, but the player's. Moreover, the diction here abandons the usual videogame rhetoric of shooting as playing for one of shooting as killing, further pulling the player's actions out of the diegetic world into the real world. As Mitch Dyer of IGN comments after playing *Spec Ops*, the game presents the player with a number of questions: 'What is it you were wanting to feel when you chose to sit down and play a military shooter? What did you think you were at the beginning of this game? Why did you think it was okay to keep going and to keep doing these things?'

Ultimately, the game asks the player whether the only way to win *Spec Ops: The Line* is not to play: to turn off the game, refuse to interact with Walker and his team; it

further encourages the player to question her role in playing any shooter games and asks her whether playing these games makes her complicit in the violence that various protagonists inflict in them as well as the real world violence that they may simulate. *Spec Ops* does not didactically justify or condemn the violence it presents, but through intertextuality with texts that both do and do not question violence, hyperbolic gameplay that pushes military shooter game conventions to and beyond their limits, and rhetoric and imagery that link videogame violence to real world war, it asks the player to consider the ethics of videogame violence for herself, and whether turning off the game constitutes a legitimate gameplay strategy. In so doing, *Spec Ops: The Line* questions the actions and artifice of the videogame medium, offering the player the ability to do the same.

Conclusion

While videogames share modes of identification with traditional media, such as imaginative identification and visual projection, the active participation of the videogame player and her ability to manipulate protagonists ludically and make narrative choices for them intensifies the degree of player-protagonist identification beyond modes of identification available in traditional media. Videogame choices, furthermore, allows players to create the identities of the characters they operate to a degree. Additionally, the protracted time the player spends within a single narrative by comparison to reading a novel or viewing a film often facilitates a more intense identification of the player with the protagonist, just as Peter van Beneden argues of soap opera audiences and characters (van Beneden 1998). Certain videogames allow (or require) consumers to engage more intimately than other media with identity

categories that they do not themselves inhabit, seeing through their eyes and inhabiting their bodies. This may encourage greater dissonance or greater understanding of other identity groups—which will depend on the game and the gamer.

By contrast to their technological innovation and narratological progressiveness, most videogames are less innovative and politically regressive in their narrative ideology, particular their representations of gender, sexuality, and other identity politics categories. Throughout videogame history, videogames have reinforced gender stereotypes, with their predominantly male protagonists and the use of female bodies as an object for the male gaze. Here the technological innovations that allow games to interact with and manipulate female bodies exacerbate rather than mitigate the ideological regression. Furthermore, while relaxed censorship, deemed by some to be progressive and politically liberating, allows for explicit sexual interactions in videogames, and joins with technological innovations to intensify identificatory immersion in such scenes, the lack of protagonists representing anything other than heterosexual males widens the identification gap for female and homosexual players in games such as *Heavy Rain*. However, players of various sexual orientations and genders have reduced the conservatism of what has been written and coded in videogames; videogames designers such as Maxis, the creators of *The Sims*, have responded to this diversity by allowing all genders to marry in the game.

As well as identification with the gender, sexual, racial, and other identity aspects of characters in a videogame, players in some games identify with game characters taking on iconic social identities that reflect, shape, and debate cultural ideologies. Lara Croft virtually embodies not only gender and sexual stereotypes, but also their debates and discourses; a hybrid of empowered female and objectified sex object. The 2013 *Tomb Raider* begins to dismantle her heteronormative appeal, and

repurposes her augmented breasts in a maternal narrative. Moreover, in representing her birth, an experience common to males and females, it does not confine her to the female gender.

Identification in videogames goes beyond imaginative and projective identification with ideological characters, to identification with ideological points of view, not only about ethical issues in society but also about the ethics of videogaming. Some games reflect self-reflexively through the conventions of their medium and ask players to do likewise, pondering the impact of their choices and actions on the game world, its characters, visual and verbal imagery, and the diegetic and extradiegetic questions raised both didactically and implicitly by those game. My next chapter considers videogame ethics especially in relation to choice and morality more widely in society, through an exploration of the 2007 videogame *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007).

Chapter 6: The Purpose of Play?: Choice and Morality, in Videogames

Although choice has always been, to some extent, part of playing videogames, through the player's ludic responses to narrative and ludic events, it has entered videogames more explicitly and didactically in recent years, with players able—and often required—to make moral, ethical, and aesthetic choices, rather than just ludic ones. Gamer choices can alter the narrative and ludic outcome of games such as *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012) and *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010), determine the protagonist's personality and actions in games like *Mass Effect* (BioWare 2007 - 2012), or even change how a player views the real world in a game such as *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007).

This chapter's focus is on *Bioshock*, and how it enters into discussions of choice and morality in videogames, especially on a political level. I begin by elucidating the definitions of ethics in relation to videogames and the systems of play that are found in them, before going on to examine how these are portrayed in *Bioshock*, a videogame adaptation of the 1957 novel, *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 2007) and considering how choice is used in the game to shock the player, and furthermore to call into question the player's own actions in the game.

The ethical system upon which many games offer choice is based on the western notion of morality, which is itself grounded in Christian religious concepts (Diener 1997), even in a society where religion no longer 'has a hold on important segments of contemporary society' (Burns 2008, 8). Psychological emotion theory defines shame and guilt, along with embarrassment and pride, as 'self-conscious emotions' that offer a 'moral barometer, providing immediate and salient feedback on our social and moral

acceptability' (Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek 2007, 4). Steve Butts, for example, examines 'two fundamental perspectives of morality' (Butts 2011) in his article, *Ethics Without a Net*: those of shame and guilt, both of which are present in western religious theology and writings, although Butts perceives shame to be the primary religious emotion. Guilt and shame are both negative emotions resulting from an individual's behaviour (Henniger and Harris 2014), with guilt being concerned with the act itself (it was a bad thing to do) and shame condemns the self for doing it (I am a bad person) (Henniger and Harris 2014, 81). When considered alongside this psychological model, which scholars have developed with complexity, the morality of videogames can seem simplistic by comparison, but the study of videogames is part of a growing cultural and scholarly concern with the ethics of making choices. Often, the morality systems in videogames allow only elemental good and evil choices: whether to save or harvest a Little Sister in *Bioshock*, for example. *Black & White* (Lionhead Studios 2001) is an early game featuring such modes of choice, situating the player as a God-like entity, with a God's eye view, with the mechanic of creating a 'creature' that reflects the player's construction of God as either good or evil and who enacts the will of that God. For example, a good creature will help the game-world inhabitants, whereas an evil one will destroy them. In this polarity of good (helping others) and evil (destroying them), morality shifts from the psychological consequences of violating moral codes to the social and cultural effects of so doing. The choice structure in this game, the option to be either a good or evil God, parodies the ethical stance of some Christians, who use the question 'What Would Jesus Do?' as their guide for social and moral actions (Sheppard 2013), challenging it with a humanistic definition of good and evil, where the effects on human beings define good and evil. It is often the effects of bad actions that produce the psychological effects of shame and guilt.

Shame- and guilt-based morality form the basis of many ethical decisions in videogames, as in life; Butts considers shame to be a (relatively) simple method of moral engagement, although he concedes its problematic and complex nature in some videogames, citing *Red Dead Redemption* as a salient example, where ‘you may feel like a complete psychopath, [...] but the rest of the world not only sees you as a hero, but is glad to pay you money for the blood-stained jerkins you keep bringing back to town’ (Butts 2011). This can create a rupture between shame and guilt in a player, as she may feel personally guilty for an action that is celebrated rather than condemned by others. Conversely, unintentional harmful actions may not arouse guilt in a player, while leading NPCs to pursue and punish that player-protagonist, complicating simplistic notions of guilt and shame, especially in games where being a successful player means committing acts that would be morally and socially reprehensible in the real world. Butts reminds us that many games consider ‘what you do [to be] more important than why you do it’ (Butts 2011). Inner beliefs, feelings, and even unethical actions are less important than the gaming objective: which is to successfully complete the game, by whatever means necessary (unless there is a specific reason such as an achievement for not killing). In *Grand Theft Auto IV*, for example, the need to win or complete the game supersedes the need to make ethical choices: there is no way to win the game without the player stealing cars, running down pedestrians, dealing weapons and drugs, as the ludic challenge reflects the unethical, illegal, elements of the game’s narrative in which protagonist Niko Bellic comes to the United States from Russia determined to be an upstanding American, but is instead drawn into life as a crime lord. The player becomes complicit in Bellic’s actions and has to operate similarly to this unethical character to survive or complete the game at all. However, this is not the case in all videogames. Games such as *Assassin’s Creed* (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2013) that

privilege the ethics, morals, or specific narrative trajectory of a videogame reinforce ethical ideologies, whilst others such as the 2007 videogame *Bioshock* offer the player a choice of political ideology.

Butts sees guilt-based moral choices in videogames as more ‘advanced’ (Butts 2011) than shame-based ones, with players having to account for their actions internally, rather than having the moral barometer of society to regulate their actions. Miguel Sicart argues that gamers use their *own* beliefs, values, and characters in making gaming decisions, not just those of the characters they play. This means that players use ‘their judgement to evaluate the situations in which they were immersed, and thus make choices according to the will of being a good human being’ (Sicart 2005, 15). As such, players of a videogame such as *Heavy Rain* or the more recent *Beyond: Two Souls* (Quantic Dream 2013) engage with their *own* understanding of good and evil to make ethical choices, which as we have seen in *Spec Ops: The Line* in the previous chapter complicates this understanding.

Ethics in videogames go beyond binary oppositions, as many games offer a ‘multivariate representation of ethical identity’ (Staines and Ryan 2011) rather than a simple good and evil binary. In some games, the repercussions of (un)ethical decisions are not discovered until later; players do not immediately know whether their choices will have positive or negative results. As videogame designers have become more deeply invested in the construction of choice-based games, they have offered more complex ethical scenarios and a wider array of choices, which culminate in a less clear, but more realistic, ethical outcome for a player. Videogame designers Emil Pagliarulo and Jordan Thomas point out that a game including choice needs to involve a ‘virtual world that somehow connects with the player and a set of choices that offer outcomes of significant moral weight’ (Zoss 2010). For these designers, one of the best ways to do

this is through presenting realistic characters in a game, as ‘the more believable the characters, the stronger the emotional impact’ (Zoss 2010) on the player, and the more she is invested in characters, the more the choices she makes whilst playing a game will matter to her.

‘We All Make Choices’: *Bioshock* and Ideological Decisions

Progressional games, those that engage strongly with narratological modes of narrative, are often those that are most concerned with exploring the use of ideological and ethical rhetoric. This is the case with the 2007 videogame *Bioshock* (2K Games), which places the player in a heavily ideological environment, a gaming adaptation of Ayn Rand’s novel, *Atlas Shrugged* (2007). Originally published in 1957, *Atlas Shrugged* is a calculated vehicle through which Rand articulates her philosophy of Objectivism. This philosophy, she explained in 1962, holds that facts are facts, regardless of the wishes, hopes, or feelings of man;⁶⁴ it also maintains that reason is man’s only source of knowledge, his only means of perceiving reality, and his basic means of survival. It further teaches that man must exist for his own sake, a quality that she describes as an ethical form of selfishness, in which he must put his own interests above all others, but not to the detriment of any other. The fourth tenet of Objectivism describes the political system that this philosophy breeds; that of *laissez-faire* capitalism, described as

a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. It is a system where no man

⁶⁴ Rand rejected the ‘feminist’ label, and considered herself to be a ‘male chauvinist’, believing that women should engage in male hero-worship. Gendered pronouns that favour the male are deliberately retained in my discussion of Rand’s philosophy (Binswanger 2015)

may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and no man may initiate the use of physical force against others. The government acts only as a policeman that protects man's rights; it uses physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use, such as criminals or foreign invaders. In a system of full capitalism, there should be [...] a complete separation of state and economics, in the same way and for the same reasons as the separation of state and church. (Ayn Rand Institute 1962)

Rand believed that altruism—putting the needs of others before one's own in a communist or socialist sense—was destructive and her fiction is an attempt to demonstrate this philosophy in action and to 'prove' what she believed to be a fundamental truth: that altruism would lead to the downfall of society. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand charts the decline and fall of such a culture, set in an alternate version of America as it becomes dystopian through extreme socialist ideology; she also presents an alternative, in the form of Galt's Gulch, a small, isolated community comprised of characters who believe in her philosophy.

Bioshock offers not only a gaming adaptation of Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, as adapted from *Atlas Shrugged*, but further presents a critique of her philosophy and ties questions of social and political agency and free will to similar issues in videogaming. Here, ludic play is inextricable from narrative ideology and, more than that, informs it in new ways.

Bioshock clearly adapts Rand's novel: its opening sequence illustrates the book's title: the doors to the lighthouse are decorated with a frieze of Atlas holding the world (Figure 30). Later, the player again encounters a statue of Atlas holding up the world and there are many statues reminiscent of Atlas throughout the game,

depicting men with their hands stretching upwards to the sky, thus signalling its remediated relationship as an adaptation of Rand's novel.



Figure 30: Atlas Holding Up the World

For the reader familiar with *Atlas Shrugged*, Rapture⁶⁵ too is instantly recognisable as an adaptation of Rand's utopia, Galt's Gulch. Both are hidden from the world: Rapture through its immersion in the sea (Figure 31) and Galt's Gulch by refractor rays in a remote valley in the US, their inaccessibility from the rest of society a symbol of their own ideological isolationism. Just as Galt's Gulch is an example of a perfect society in Rand's novel, founded on individual freedom, where the government serves merely as a police service and the community itself ensures that businesses and individuals alike are law-abiding, Rapture is a place 'where the artist would not fear the censor, where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality, where the great would not be constrained by the small' (Fuller 2007, 3). However, there are contrasts and continuities in this adaptation: the novel's version of the US is a dark, dead place that features primarily as moody backdrop to the narrative, whilst its utopia, Galt's Gulch, is a vibrant, colourful place (an attempt by Rand to code good and evil spaces using tropes from visual art and audiovisual media). Rapture, although dystopian and filled with

⁶⁵ This is one of a number of religious references in the game. Here, Rapture represents the inhabitants being taken from society and led to a better life, just as God is said to do to when he causes the Rapture, as described in John 14: 1-3: 'In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am'.

death, is full of movement and sound: water drips; voices re-echo and ghostly images inhabit rooms. The player must move through these oppositional game spaces into its dark corners in order to discover the narrative, mostly in the form of audio logs: in the game world, then, ludology and narrative are intricately intertwined, and their imagery and sounds are ethically and affectively coded.

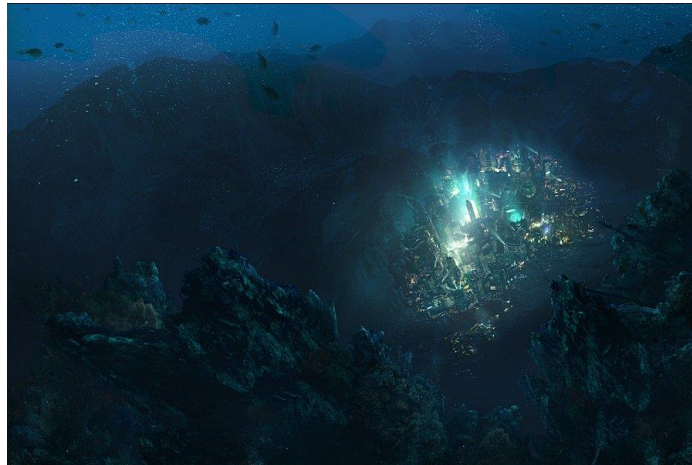


Figure 31: Hidden Rapture

Rand's ideology is also didactically represented. As the player and Jack travel down to Rapture in a bathysphere,⁶⁶ NPC character Andrew Ryan's voice narrates Rapture's ideology, telling the player that Rapture was born from his dissatisfaction with American left-wing politics in the Second World War. Finding that there was no place for 'men who believed that work was sacred and property rights inviolate' (Fuller 2007, 42), he decided to create one. This adapts the novel's creation of Galt's Gulch by its namesake, John Galt, as a place where a man 'hold[s] three things as the supreme and ruling values of his life: Reason—Purpose—Self-esteem' (Rand 2007, 1018) in contrast to and opposition to a mainstream society that requires a producer⁶⁷ or entrepreneur to

⁶⁶ An automated submarine that carries the player through underwater areas

⁶⁷ In Randian terms, producers are 'independent, rational, and committed to the facts of reality, [...] and to their own happiness' (Younkins 2013, 168).

be both sacrificed by society and to accept this as fair and just.⁶⁸ Both settings follow Rand's philosophy; however, where Galt's Gulch remains utopian, Rapture becomes dystopian. The freedom of the inhabitants to do as they wish engenders a society addicted to the drug ADAM⁶⁹ and its derivative, EVE. Just as Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis, causing the Fall from divine grace, so too the use of ADAM and EVE causes Rapture to become dystopian. Here the adaptation shifts from translation to critique and from narratological adaptation to contesting the original's narrative ideologies.

Ludology assists these narrative shifts. At times ludology and narrative are divided in *Bioshock*. The first epoch of Rapture, from the 1930s until 1959, is utopian. Intriguingly, this is told as a narrative; the player does not game this section; it is a *fait accompli*, as in a novel or a film. The gameplay does not begin until after New Year's Eve 1958, by which time Rapture has become dystopian following the arrival of Frank Fontaine. A riot has taken place, and the ADAM addicted inhabitants have turned into destructive splicers.⁷⁰ By the end of the game, however, the audiovisual (spoken and imaged) narrative has caught up to the 'now' of the game play, and the metadiegetic elements of the narrative have joined with the diegetic;⁷¹ the two coalesce, once again affirming the complicity of ludology and narrative. The narrative segment of the game that exists external to the fictional time of the game is constructed primarily as embedded narrative;⁷² Jonas Waeber argues that embedded narratives, those that are constructed within the landscape itself and so can be interacted with at will, 'impose

⁶⁸ This is also underscores Rand's concept, 'the sanction of the victim'—being acquiescent to the infringements of one's own rights.

⁶⁹ ADAM is a drug created from the stem cells of a parasite, which replaces human cells with those of the parasite, causing side effects that act as 'superpowers'. However, the drug also causes cosmetic and mental deterioration in users, resulting in the need for more ADAM to compensate for the deterioration, but eventually leading to their destruction.

⁷⁰ Splicers are people so addicted to ADAM that their humanity has totally disappeared.

⁷¹ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of temporality in videogames.

⁷² Chapter 3 defines and explains the concept of embedded narratives.

themselves far less on the player, and this allows players to decide on their own how much of the game's story they wish to experience by seeking it out and playing detective to piece it together' (Waever 2009, 1).

Not only does *Bioshock* adapt *Atlas Shrugged*, it also builds a critique of the novel by adapting extradiegetic aspects. Andrew Ryan is an adaptation of Ayn Rand the author of the novel, as well as its hero, John Galt. The game designers explicitly link Ryan to Rand; his name is almost a masculine anagram of hers, and the two share biographical traits. Ryan fled the USSR for the US in 1919 and, after becoming increasingly disillusioned with US politics, built Rapture in order to house the Atlases⁷³ of the world, 'men who refused to say yes to the parasites⁷⁴ and doubters' and 'Men who believed that work was sacred and property rights inviolate' (Fuller 2007, 37). Rand fled the USSR during the rise of Communism at about the same time, eventually settling in the US, where she too became disillusioned with the rise of Communism in the US (Ayn Rand Institute 2013). There are similarities in the religious attitudes of both individuals; Rand believed that religious 'faith, as such, is extremely detrimental to human life: it is the negation of reason' (Ayn Rand Institute 2013). *Bioshock* shows Ryan to hold similar views: throughout his city, banners proclaim that there are 'No Gods or Kings, Only Man' (Figure 32), and religious paraphernalia has to be smuggled into Rapture, because it is forbidden there.⁷⁵ The game's highly ambivalent presentation of Ryan represents an undecided response to Rand and her philosophy, as I detail further below.

⁷³ In the novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, these characters, metaphorically speaking, hold up the world through their creativity and ability.

⁷⁴ The use of the word *parasite* to describe any character who is not of the same ilk as Ryan is taken directly from Rand's fiction, where, she postulates that any person who relies on another to survive is a parasite living off another's efforts.

⁷⁵ However, this is, itself, counter to the notion of freedom, highlighting a discrepancy between the ideology and reality of life in Rapture, where nothing should be forbidden.



Figure 32: Anti-Religious Banner in Rapture

Ryan not only maps onto Rand in this way, he also adapts John Galt, one of *Atlas Shrugged's* three protagonists. It is Galt who takes away the brightest minds from American society and gives them the individual freedom to follow their own passions in Galt's Gulch, with no restrictions. Ryan's utopia similarly offers a place where a man can be free from censorship and government restrictions to use his skills. Furthermore, Ryan also condenses characters in the novel known collectively as 'thinkers' of whom Galt is the spiritual leader, as can be seen through his speeches and public addresses. For example, at one point Ryan details how

I once bought a forest. The parasites claimed that the land belonged to God, and demanded that I establish a public park there. Why? So the rabble could stand slack-jawed under the canopy and pretend that it was paradise 'earned'. When Congress moved to nationalize my forest, I burnt it to the ground. (Fuller 2007, 18)

This narrative closely mirrors the actions of oil baron Ellis Wyatt in *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, 2007, 336). When forced to give the majority of his (pre-tax) revenue to the government because he is 'best able to bear the brunt of the national emergency' (Rand, 2007, 334), whilst still being expected to maintain his employee levels and other costs,

Wyatt sets fire to his entire oil field and disappears, rather than comply with this government directive. He thus figures as a hero of Objectivist philosophy—and yet the game calls his heroism into question, as well as Rand’s philosophy, showing the fatal flaw of Ryan’s—and Rand’s—society to be Ryan himself.

‘A Man Chooses. A Slave Obeys’: Playing Political Ideology in *Bioshock*

Gamers have a different relationship to Objectivist philosophy than readers of Rand’s novel, in that they navigate and investigate the fictional geographical space and interact directly with characters. Such interactivity means that players must engage Rand’s philosophy through direct action (and inaction); they cannot sit back and ponder it merely verbally or audiovisually. They are repeatedly offered a choice between instant and delayed gratification, which they are expected to determine in terms of the rational self-interest championed by Rand. Especially significant in terms of Objectivist philosophy and gaming, players make choices between a seemingly binary good and evil: whether to save or kill (harvest) Little Sisters, who are female children who have been deformed by placing a slug in their stomachs. It is this slug, in combination with the children themselves, which produces ADAM. Saving Little Sisters allows them to turn back into little girls, whilst harvesting them results in their deaths, and gives the player the ADAM inside the sea slug as well as what has been gathered by the Little Sisters. ADAM enhances the player’s powers, enabling her to be more successful in the ludic aspects of the game (although she is not negatively affected in the same way that NPC characters are). In narrative terms, the choices are clear: reduced and delayed gratification (saving the Little Sisters) lands the player in a utopia surrounded by them as family, while choosing instant gratification sees her in a dystopia, with fearful

destructive powers. While both choices would equally support Rand's theory of rational self-interest, in mainstream cultural terms, one ending is a conventionally happy, good outcome whilst the other is dangerously evil and uncertain. In ideological as well as narratological views of videogames, once again ludic play determines the narrative and is inextricable from it.

Rand's emphasis on free will makes *Bioshock* a perfect game through which to explore not only free will philosophically, but also to ponder free will in gaming. Whilst the ludic ethical choices that the player can make are binary and simple—choosing to save or harvest a Little Sister—the game gives the player more complex opportunities to engage with ethical narratives: she is offered the prospect of engaging with a political discourse and is given the freedom to decide its merits for herself, in keeping with Rand's belief in free will.

The game, however, is not a simple recreation of Rand's philosophy: it serves as a critique of it; the player is shown both positive and negative views of Objectivism rather than solely Rand's view. To critique Objectivism, rather than simply endorse or damn it, the game positions the player as the protagonist Jack. Predominantly a first-person shooter game (FPS), the player controls Jack as he seeks to escape the underwater city, Rapture. Unlike Rand's novel, but like most videogames, *Bioshock* is concerned primarily with the destruction of enemies, ranging from splicers to the main antagonist, Frank Fontaine, discussed further below. The combination of political, ideological, narrative and ludology creates a representational fictional form resembling that described by Kendall Walton in *Mimesis as Make-believe*. Walton considers the role of 'props', which include environmental objects as well as weaponry with which the player interacts, to be 'enormously important. They give fictional worlds and their contents a kind of objectivity [...], which contributes much to the excitement of our

adventures with them' (Walton 1990, 42). The objectivity extends from fictional worlds and their contents to their political and ideological contents. In the case of *Bioshock*, these props bring 'a kind of objectivity' to the philosophy of Objectivism, and indeed, some of the props in *Bioshock* are, in fact, sentences of Objectivist philosophy. As with the narratological structures of narrative, the ideological structures of this game are interdependent with and inextricable from ludology.

The game play of *Bioshock* is constructed within the narratological structures: Rapture is the play arena of the game; the player explores the city to find and destroy the splicers in order to reach Ryan (and later Fontaine) and to escape Rapture. In doing so, she discovers the background of what I term the 'story story'.⁷⁶ Without Rapture and the structure the narrative brings to it, Grant Tavinor notes, there would be no game (Tavinor 2009), just as there would be no narrative without the game play. Clint Hocking, however, disagrees, countering that the game offers players two contracts, a ludic contract and a narrative contract, a mutually exclusive combination, in that the narrative contract is at odds with the ludic contract, creating what he coins 'ludonarrative dissonance', 'forcing players to either abandon the game [...] or simply accept that the game cannot be enjoyed both as a game and a story' (Hocking 2007). What Hocking sees as ludonarrative dissonance, however, I perceive to be an integral part of the game's ideological exploration of moral agency, and agency in videogames. The rarity of cut-scenes in this game (it has only three in comparison to many other games, which can have 20 or more) makes the player feel her enforced passivity all the more when they do occur. She watches the character whom she has until now been controlling, and with whom she has identified, commit an action that is inconsistent with his characterization up to that point and one that she would not choose to do, given

⁷⁶ See chapter 2 for a full explanation of this term.

what has gone before in the game. The enforced passivity at this moment is agonising for most players, not so much because of ludonarrative dissonance but because of ethical dissonance and the *loss* of the fusion between narrative and play.

‘Would you kindly ...’

Bioshock, as well as being a FPS game, also uses the game’s narrative to subvert and question traditional ways of playing videogames. Miguel Sicart states in *The Ethics of Computer Games* that ‘following the orders given to players means “doing the right thing”’ (Sicart 2009, 2), and players frequently follow the directions given in a game with little or no reflection on the ethical reasons for doing so. Bioshock uses this familiar structure, throughout the first part of the game, the player receives guidance from a character known as Atlas, who prefaces his requests with the phrase, ‘Would you kindly’, as he leads the player through Rapture via a one-way radio (a common structure that guides the player through a videogame). Part way through the game, Atlas leads the player to Andrew Ryan’s office, so he (Ryan) can be killed in retribution for the murder of Atlas’s wife and child.⁷⁷ It is at this point that a number of critical events take place that question Jack’s role in the game, which seems to be that of an avenging angel, and concomitantly challenges how the player understands the narrative, and her own agency, and the role of the protagonist so far. First, the game takes away all control from the player, rendering her a passive observer of events in a rare cut-scene (a shocking moment in itself in a game that we have seen is significantly devoid of them). During this enforced nonparticipation, the player discovers that the phrase, ‘Would you kindly’, has been part of a mental conditioning undergone by Jack and that he is programmed to

⁷⁷ It transpires that Atlas’ wife and child are fictional, and have never existed.

obey any order prefaced with this phrase without any power to resist. ‘Would you kindly’ not only signifies the control that Atlas and any other person who utters the phrase to Jack have, but also serves as a strategy of what Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson call ‘negative politeness’ (1987), as Atlas presents a public ‘face’ to Jack (and the player) that is not what it seems. Developing Irving Goffman’s theory of face in social interaction (2005), Brown and Levinson define negative politeness as ‘redressive action... [where the speaker] wants to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded’ (1987, 129), and where direct speech and action considered negative is avoided.⁷⁸ In *Bioshock*, negative politeness allows Atlas to appear amiable and non-threatening, seeming to allow Jack freedom to act in his own interests, whilst at the same time seeming to assist Atlas to free his family (until the point that they appear to have died). The use of the phrase ‘Would you kindly’ and other similar derivations of please will ‘result in the plead request eliciting higher rates of compliance than a non-plead request’ (Firmin, et al. 2004, 32 (1)). Until the conditioning is revealed, Atlas has seemed to be a polite, kind, and pleasant person. Thus the realisation that this polite request is actually a highly coercive control phrase shocks the player, just as it does Jack; both learn of it simultaneously as they enter the cut-scene. The revelation causes the player to have to reinterpret her understanding of the narrative until this point in the game. When asked about their reactions to this revelation, a majority of players confirm that the repeated use of the phrase was not noticed, or that if it was, it was interpreted as an indication of Atlas’s benevolent character rather than an indication of his controlling nature and of its own coercive function (Facepunch.com 2009). The phrase, innocuous until this revelation, now begins to ‘inspire a retroactive horror’ in the player (Bossche

⁷⁸ Brown and Levinson write extensively on the subject in their work *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use* (1987).

2009), as she is shown a montage of its conditioning functions from the opening scene (Figure 33 and Figure 34) to the ‘present’ of the game.



Figure 33: ‘Would You Kindly’ in Introduction



Figure 34: Flashback to the Introduction and Entire Message

The player realises that, even as she thinks that she has been controlling Jack, all of the events to date have been devised and carried out with Jack operating as a pawn who must obey the instructions of another power than the player. More than this, the *player* has been complying with these requests, and with Atlas, because of the seeming lack of coercion in the phrase and its tendency to produce willing compliance. The player may well ponder her role as an obedient, albeit active, player in this game, with the ludology giving the illusion of free will, while the narrative (and the programming of the game) denies it. The structure is not limited to *Bioshock*, but extends to other games that make the player follow the instructions of designers, whilst believing that they are free to do

as they please. Thus game programming ties to cultural and social programming, and questions concerning the possibility of free will in contemporary society are informed by similar questions in videogaming.

Social or cultural conditioning refers to the role of society and peer groups in establishing normative behaviour, diminishing, and constraining individual free will (Bouton 2007). Unlike traditional fictional forms, however, *Bioshock* uses its ludic interactivity to immerse and implicate the player in these debates. The player has, until the revelation of Jack's conditioning, believed that she has been freely choosing to comply with the requests that control him. Discovering the illusory nature of her belief that she was operating on the basis of free will, she may question more generally whether humans can operate according to their own free will in society. The game drives this point home by forcing the player to watch, without being able to intervene, as Jack kills Ryan. Yet, this is no longer a case of player/character dissonance: rather, the temporary suspension of player agency and loss of narrative immersion mirrors Jack's reaction when he learns that he has been programmed to do Atlas's bidding; she recognises that she has been doing the same, following the instructions of Ryan's opponent, Frank Fontaine (aka Atlas). The game drives this realisation home with especial emphasis when Ryan taunts Jack repeatedly with 'A man chooses. A slave obeys' even as he is being hit by Jack. While Jack seems to have power and agency here—enough to kill another man—his victim taunts him with his actual lack of agency. This lack becomes especially relevant at this point as the player (and Jack) learn that Jack is genetically Ryan's son—and this act is patricide, further complicating the moral and ethical questions the game is asking.

Issues of ludic agency in relation to narrative outcome extend beyond the end of a character's life to ludic play's agency in determining the ends of videogames.

Videogames are teleological: that is, all the events and actions are purposefully designed to work towards an ending; even games that are part of a franchise such as *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2013) or the *Mass Effect* trilogy use a teleological construction, with each 'episode' having an ending of its own, as well as moving towards a final ending. Most videogames have a programmed ending already in place, authored by their design company, as there is no technology yet to create *Star Trek's* Holodeck, in which players can author any narrative they choose.⁷⁹ In most games, the player is not offered the ability to change the narrative in any substantial way beyond that authored by game designers, at any point; she is merely following a set of predetermined narrative events that dictate her ludic actions, even if she is offered the ability to make choices within that set of predetermined events (Beirne 2012). *Bioshock* critiques this determinism, giving the player the illusion that she is in control of the game, and then revealing that she is not, as we have seen. Here narratology determines ludology, another way in which they interpenetrate ideologically as well as narratologically.

Free will differs from the kind of choice offered to gamers, in that freedom of choice refers to an individual's ability to choose one of two (or more) equally available actions, whereas freedom of will allows the individual to refrain from choice—to remain indifferent to any choice available (Flikschuh 2007, 48). A game will stop when a player fails to choose; a player may be killed or may simply fail to progress. Paradoxically, a game based on a novel and philosophy championing free will drives home the realisation that there is no real freedom in videogames: that each story has already been written and the player cannot change that story, despite the intimation that the player is making the story via ludology. Alongside questioning the player's freedom

⁷⁹ Exceptions to this are primarily simulations, such as *The Sims* (Electronic Arts 2001) and *Fallout Shelter* (Bethesda Softworks 2015) that are open-ended, with little or no narrative structure.

and probing cultural conditioning, *Bioshock* widens the player's understanding of connections between free will in videogames and societies.

The Great Chain

I believe in no God, no invisible man in the sky. But there is something more powerful than each of us, a combination of our efforts, a Great Chain of industry that unites us. But it is only when we struggle in our own interest that the chain pulls society in the right direction. The chain is too powerful and too mysterious for any government to guide. Any man who tells you different either has his hand in your pocket, or a pistol to your neck.

—Fuller, *Bioshock Script*

There are other ideological issues that raise ethical questions besides moral choice and free will in *Bioshock*. Economics and work are also considered as part of the construction and critique of Objectivism. The Great Chain is a motif Ryan uses frequently in his speeches and musings regarding the economy of Rapture and is consistent with the economic elements of Rand's philosophy. While Rand uses her characters and dialogue in *Atlas Shrugged* to extol the virtues of a free economy, and the understanding that all men will participate in this system, providing for themselves, and creating employment for other men, at a *fair and just rate of pay*, Ryan's philosophy of the Great Chain of industry is visible in Rapture through statues and banners. Rather than being contrary to the concept of freedom, the idea of industry being the chain that

unites all men is, for Ryan, the foundation of Rapture and provides the basis for the city's economy, providing freedom for its inhabitants to pursue their own business and the wider economic interests of Rapture. The theory holds that as long as each person, each link in the Chain, is working for his or her own self-interest (and not contrary to Objectivism), then the Chain will be level and strong, as each business in the chain is regulated by the free will and choices of consumers: if there is no demand, or the business is not functioning as the market would wish, they will simply not use it, thereby eliminating it from the economy. However, when dishonest dealings such as smuggling or cheating a competitor enter the economy, this upsets the equilibrium of the Great Chain, since the dishonest business becomes a weak link that can then pull the Chain apart.

Despite Hocking's assertion that the narrative asks the player to 'help Atlas and you will progress' (Hocking 2007), a statement that marks a failure of Objectivist anti-altruistic principles, I contend that this is not the case. At face value, the two men are working towards a mutually beneficial outcome, perfectly acceptable in Randian philosophy as a trade between two men 'who earn what [they] get and do not give or take the undeserved' (Rand 2007, 1022). It is only when the player discovers that Jack has not been operating through free will that this is shown to defy Objectivist theory, and it becomes evident that Atlas has been acting for his own benefit against Jack's interests (also an anti-Objectivist stance), and that Jack's role has been that of Atlas's puppet rather than a free link in the Chain of industry. At this point, the player may become critical of the limitations of Rand's philosophy as well as the limitations of videogame technology.

Ludic Critique of Rand

It appears at first that Ryan represents the foundering of Randian ideology in *Bioshock*, a view held by critics such as Joseph Packer (2010). Ryan represents the ‘thinkers’ in *Atlas Shrugged*, choosing to leave the world to join like-minded people, bringing to fruition the utopian space that *Atlas Shrugged* promises. However, this Utopia is flawed and, by the time the player enters the story, Ryan’s rule has taken on a number of dystopian characteristics. As the player uncovers the narrative, she discovers that Ryan initially allowed free rein to entrepreneurs and free will to the inhabitants of Rapture, believing that there would be economic self-regulation, as Objectivism preaches. However, when his position as ruler of Rapture is threatened, Ryan begins creating laws contrary to Objectivist policy, leading to a power struggle that culminates in the New Year’s Eve battle and destruction of Rapture, as well as the apparent failure of Objectivism as a practical ideology.

Even with Rapture in ruins and the Utopian experiment failed, Ryan still adheres to some principles of Objectivism. Whether he retains or rejects them appears to be a function of how they serve his power. One principle he retains is the sanction of the victim.⁸⁰ According to Objectivism, the sanction of the victim is ‘the willingness of the good to suffer at the hands of the evil, to accept the role of sacrificial victim for the “sin” of creating values’ (Binswanger, 2011). Ryan chooses to die in an effort to break Jack’s conditioning, using the control phrase, ‘Would you kindly’ to order his own death. His final words, repeated many times, are: ‘A man chooses. A slave obeys’ (Fuller 2007, 35). Ryan’s death proves that Jack lacks free will. Like Ryan, in Rand’s novel, John Galt is willing to face torture and death rather than compromise his

⁸⁰This is a recurring theme in Rand’s fiction, found most explicitly in *Anthem* and *The Fountainhead* as well as *Atlas Shrugged*.

Objectivist principles, going so far as to instruct the governmental aggressors in how to fix their broken torture machine so they can resume his torture. In *Bioshock*, an audio file reveals that ‘Free will is the cornerstone of this city. The thought of sacrificing it is abhorrent’ (Fuller 2007, 22). However, when his power is threatened by Frank Fontaine, the game’s antagonist, Ryan compromises this central principle.

Frank Fontaine – The Destroyer of a Utopia

The primary antagonist of *Bioshock* is Frank Fontaine, a gangster who challenges Ryan’s rule in Rapture, posing in the first part of the game as Jack’s seemingly amiable ally, Atlas, and who orchestrates the events that lead to Jack’s presence in Rapture. The revelation that this apparently helpful character is actually Fontaine, who has faked his own death in order to take power from Ryan, and instigated Jack’s mental conditioning so that he will murder Ryan, therefore represents a betrayal of player expectations as well as a betrayal of characters inside the game narrative. As the player unwittingly helps Atlas/Fontaine kill Ryan, ‘Atlas’ argues that Ryan’s Utopia is a failed endeavour, relating a Marxist class divide and blaming Ryan and his philosophy for the deterioration and destruction of Rapture, saying, ‘He’s the one who built this place, and he’s the one who run it into the ground’ (Fuller 2007, 11). The player, when being given this information, has no reason to doubt Atlas’s words, and Ryan’s actions appear to validate this. Once unmasked as Fontaine, however, the likeable Irishman is shown to be a fiction and his words unreliable, in turn making the player question whether Ryan was really the megalomaniac Atlas-Fontaine indicated. After Ryan’s death, Fontaine is revealed as the primary antagonist, placing Ryan in the role of the victim rather than the antagonist role he has held. In a narrative medium where identification with the right side is essential, this is particularly disorienting for players.

This destabilization of player allegiance is enlisted to further the game's critique of Objectivism. Fontaine is in many ways the perfect Objectivist; his ethics are based in self-interest, valuing his own happiness and success above all others, initially earning Ryan's admiration and respect as a fellow Objectivist. However, he also personifies several negative aspects of selfishness: being manipulative and dishonest in his dealings with others, undermining the principles of objectivism⁸¹ and a fair society under the guise of freeing the inhabitants of Rapture from the tyranny of Ryan, he calls into question the practical implementation of Objectivism. And yet, Fontaine is equally cast as an antagonist of Objectivism, a figurehead who leads the underclass in a revolt, a clearly Marxist reference to the overthrow of capitalism by the proletariat. In spite of his claims that Ryan destroyed Rapture, the player begins to see that Fontaine too has brought about the downfall of Rapture, investing twelve years in planning and initiating Ryan's overthrow, calling it a 'long con' (Fuller 2007, 47), and replacing Objectivist ideology with a bastardised form of Marxism,⁸² resulting in 'violence, crime, and disrepair replacing the peaceful efficiency Rand attributes to Galt's Gulch' (Packer 2010, 215). Following these revelations, the trope of the conventional videogame monster is assigned to Fontaine (Figure 35), showing him as 'a menace [that] represents the threat of further chaos emerging' (Butler 2010, 10) in a city that is already failing to function.

⁸¹ Objectivists believe that, whilst they do put their own self-interest above others, they do not do so to the detriment of any other person. They deem altruism detrimental because it makes one person live for another's sake rather than his own.

⁸² Fontaine does not uphold Marxism; he is working for his own gain, and the lower-class inhabitants are useful to his plans to conquer Rapture, rather than for altruistic purposes.



Figure 35: Atlas/Frank Fontaine

Once revealed as the genuine antagonist, portraying Fontaine as the monster allows the game to present him as the physical embodiment of the ethics and morals he upholds, his first taste of ADAM revealing his monstrosity to the player and thereby making his status explicit.

Conclusion

Whilst it seems clear that *Bioshock* offers a consideration of Objectivism, there is some confusion over whether the game is a criticism of the philosophy, or whether it presents various views so that the player can make her own decision regarding it. It is true that the game shows Rapture, the realisation of Rand's philosophy, as a dystopia; but the game does not simply show this as a result of Objectivism, but rather as a result of the introduction of a destructive force, in the form of Fontaine's anti-Objectivist agenda, which undermines both the philosophy and its practical implementation. The game does not present a clear position, as Rand does in her novel, but offers the player the opportunity to explore the philosophy interactively within the story and story world, rather than observing the narrative from without, allowing her to form a decision reached interactively based on all the information she collects in the game, rather than requiring her to either agree or disagree with the verbal premises of an author or the

audiovisual representations of a filmmaker. *Bioshock* displays a political ideology that the player explores from a position more deeply embedded within the diegetic narrative; it also enters into exploration of other political ideologies and theories of transhumanism.

Beyond *Bioshock*, transhumanism is a major feature of videogames in general. From the Mario franchise on, super powers are central to almost every videogame. Just as *Bioshock* uses Objectivism to interrogate free will in videogames and, conversely, free will in gaming to interrogate Objectivism, so too it interrogates the role of transhumanism in society to raise gamer consciousness about the role of transhumanism in videogame narrative and ludology. While transhumanism begins as a positive force in Objectivist terms, the lack of regulation that Objectivist champions leads to it becoming a destructive and dystopian force. The drug ADAM could have been a power for good; indeed, the first time it is observed, it heals a disfigured hand. However, the use of ADAM leads to drug addiction, self-opportunism⁸³ over Objectivist rational self-interest, and death. Here the game interrogates the concept of free will and choice by comparing it to the use of addictive drugs, the compulsion to consume the drug overriding rational choice, so that free will becomes secondary to addiction. The transhuman capacities of ADAM represent a disruptive change that Rapture is ill equipped to handle, with this drug exacerbating the city's chief ideological weakness—that of absolute freedom. The drug's addictive qualities require regulation that Rapture cannot provide, due to its Objectivist ideology.

Ethical choice, as *Bioshock* highlights, is a facet of gaming that is becoming more prevalent. Offering the player a chance to explore political ideologies from within a fictional diegesis allows her to consider her own stance as a participant in the

⁸³ Self-opportunism is defined as placing expediency above the moral principles of the society, rather than considering the options available and making a choice based on the outcome of this consideration.

narrative, rather than observing another's actions and agreeing or disagreeing with them, as is the case in traditional media. In participating directly with the political aspects of a narrative, the idea that a videogame is solely a form of play and competition is once again called into question, as the didactic functions of the game are foregrounded, teaching the player about different ideologies and her own role as part of them. This is also a function that videogames bring to other real world issues, as the 2011 game *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Montreal 2011) shows, through its exploration of trans, and posthumanism, which are the subjects of the next chapter.

Chapter 7: The Only Way is Ethics: Videogames, Choice, and Society

In the previous chapter, I used the 2007 videogame, *Bioshock*, to show that videogames are capable of delivering a narrative carrying a detailed political ideology, which the player must comprehend and interpret through play. I now turn to two other ideological narrative themes that appear in videogames, where player choice is an integral part of the game. A common theme in videogames is trans- and even posthumanism, with examples ranging from *Pacman* (Namco 1980) to *Portal* (Valve 2007). *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Montreal 2011) presents a society where transhumanism is the norm, and where fully posthuman beings can access any piece of information they desire. On a more personal level, *Heavy Rain's* (Quantic Dream 2010) analysis of loss places the player in the role of a parent whose child has been kidnapped, attempting to invoke catharsis in the player through ludic and narrative interactivity and immersion.

Transhumanism describes technological and scientific processes that alter the human body and mind in order to create a 'better' person or to heal defects or injuries (Humanityplus n.d.); examples are prosthetics that can feel (Connor 2013) or glasses that offer augmented reality (DeSouzza 2013). Transhumanism is a familiar concept to most gamers, increasingly present in real-world society, as well as a popular trope in fiction, film, and television. As with so many other movements from traditional media to videogames addressed in this thesis, videogames allow for a heightened exploration of transhumanism, not only due to the interactivity of the medium, but also to the dependence on transhumanism for the super-powers that are features of many videogames. Characters regularly access an array of superhuman powers: early videogame character *Pac-man* uses power-pellets to chase and consume the antagonist ghosts; *Mario* (Nintendo 2012) eats mushrooms that augment his physical abilities,

whilst the *Zelda* (Nintendo 1986) franchise features treasure chests, whose contents can enhance the skills of the protagonist, Link.

Videogames frequently bestow transhuman characteristics on players, protagonists, and other characters. Robert Geraci writes that videogames are ‘an illustration of our human potential’, because ‘in games, we always come back to life, and thanks to what we learn in the process, we come back better than before’ (Geraci 2012, 736). Videogames are equally an illustration of transhuman potential: they offer a space ‘that enables transhuman experiences—the player gains transcendent powers and a potential for continued growth’ (Geraci 2012, 739). Many games use experience points (XP) as a measurement of skill and ludic success through the completion of tasks and battles. At defined points, this XP will be converted into the character ‘levelling up’: raising the skill set of the character, and this will increase the statistics of the character and offer new abilities. The association of XP with success and progression are often strikingly at odds with the destructive powers that transhuman abilities bestow on players. Whilst the presence of characters with superhuman powers is common in videogames, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* interrogates the ethics of ‘enhancing’ humans with augmentations in particularly illuminating and specific ways. Over the course of the game, the player is able to purchase further new transhuman augmentations with Praxis points (the game’s name for its experience points, which serve as its currency). The use of the term Praxis to denote these experience points also signals an ethical dimension to the game, and its use of transhumanism. Miguel Sicart notes that the term Praxis is ‘an act of choices and decisions, a voluntary self-evaluation and creation of a subject’ (Sicart 2009, 89) and the use of praxis points to evaluate and change Jensen’s capabilities places her as part of the ethical discourse surrounding transhumanism in this game, and more widely in society.

The title of the franchise gives players their first indication of the transhumanist theme of the game; *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is a prequel to the first game, *Deus Ex*, and its sequel, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. The shared phrase derives from the Latin expression, *Deus ex machina*, meaning ‘God out of the Machine’. Where the Latin phrase denotes a plot device contrived to save a seemingly hopeless situation, this franchise uses the name more literally: Warren Spector, the executive producer of the first two games, reveals that ‘the name was meant as a reference to the various factions who aspire to God-like powers’ (Deus Ex Wiki 2013) through trans- and even posthumanism and human ambition to become more powerful and God-like, creating a new breed of human from a machine-man hybrid, and implicating the player in this transaction as she *plays* the game on an electronic medium.

Nick Bostrom defines posthumanism as having ‘a general central capacity greatly exceeding the maximum attainable by any current human being without recourse to new technological means’ (Bostrom 2006, 1). Often, the terms transhuman and posthuman are used interchangeably. Most of the characters in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* are not machines and, therefore, not fully posthuman; rather, they are humans with cybernetic enhancements. This means that they have to deal with human ethics and human emotions. The game questions the ethics and values of augmentations, as the player observes first-hand the reactions of a variety of NPCs to Jensen’s transhumanist augmentations and uses of them, further investigating their role in the lives of other characters through side-quests, conversations, and news reports. The first part of the game chronicles the ‘rebirth’ of the protagonist, Adam Jensen, as a cybernetic human who is implanted on the brink of death with ‘augmentations’—technological modifications that grant him superhuman powers. He is not just restored to his original state, but remade as a killing machine, with blades built into his arms and

armour into his skeleton. As such, he immediately introduces tensions between the reconstructive and destructive operations of transhumanism. Entering a longstanding tradition of literature and film examining the ethics of artificial intelligence, one that spans Isaac Asimov's robot stories (Asimov 1939-2011), Arthur C Clarke's *2001, A Space Odyssey* (Clarke 1968), Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2* (Powers 1995), and many others, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* considers the role of fully posthuman beings in the game's society, and ethical questions of how Posthuman abilities are used for good or evil purposes. In the game world, newsreader Eliza Cassan, a seemingly human character, is revealed as a fully functional AI,⁸⁴ a program with self-awareness, feelings, and the ability to break her programming in order to assist Jensen.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution is, like *Bioshock*, a first-person shooter game, situating the player in the same visual and spatial position as its protagonist, Jensen. Unlike *Bioshock*, however, the game lessens player identification *as* the protagonist by giving Jensen a distinct personality, rather than allowing the player impose her own character onto him, even as the player sees through his eyes. Even though the player is able to influence the direction in which Jensen's character leans socially and politically, this is *Jensen's* narrative, and that it is makes a difference to how the player investigates and interprets the ethics and ideologies of the narrative. Since the player sees through Jensen's eyes but is not Jensen, the immersive effect of this game is more like walking a mile in his shoes than being him, and so allows for a more detached consideration of the ethics of transhumanism than if the player were allowed to project her own identity more fully onto his. Even so, the player is tasked with understanding how augmentation works in the fictional society through playing as Jensen and experiencing 'first-hand' the reactions to his abilities, rather than completely detached from identification with

⁸⁴ Within the game, her status as an AI has been hidden; she is considered to be a reclusive celebrity.

him. As Chapter 4 shows, the viewpoint the player occupies in *Deus Ex* allows the non-player characters to seem to speak directly to the player and their physical reactions to be seen as Jensen would see them, through an identified first-person perspective.

Human Revolution?



Figure 36: Post Augmentation Jensen

The ethics of transhumanism are immediately apparent in *Deus Ex*: game designer and lead writer Mary DeMarle researched and brought actual transhumanist technologies into the game (Munkittrick 2011), and Jensen is a recognisable figure in the tradition of *The Six Million Dollar Man* (Majors 1974-1978), *Robocop* (Weller 1987), and characters in other videogames, including *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007) and the *Mass Effect* (Bioware 2007 - 2012) trilogy, in which the protagonist returns from the brink of death a ‘better’ version of himself. Jensen is heavily augmented (Figure 36), and without that augmentation, he would have died, which figures augmentation initially as a good, salutary force. Yet the positive ethical value of transhumanist augmentation is

at the same time brought into question by the narrative, as he has been augmented without his consent. Jensen is, in the words of Devin Matthews, ‘both saved and cursed by augmentations’ (Matthews 2012, 2), having been saved from the brink of death by his employers, via ‘bio-technological innovations and a clause in his contract’ (Matthews 2012, 2), which means that if he is unconscious, he has no choice but to accept the technology.⁸⁵ Despite his implied consent in the contract, Jensen questions the ethics of transhuman augmentation early in the game, telling other characters, ‘I never asked for this’ on a number of occasions, implicitly presenting his lack of choice as less desirable than death. Subsequently, the player is given the choice that Jensen lacks in the construction of his transhuman identity; she can opt to give him more augmentations, continuing his lack of agency. However, the more augmentations he receives, the less he complains about his lack of choice. This raises the question whether is this because he is becoming less human, and therefore less concerned with choice, or whether he is simply accepting his conferred identity, accommodating himself to it as a human does to change, over time. The player is motivated to augment him further regardless of the answer to this transhuman, ethical, question, since he needs to be heavily augmented for the player to complete the game. Whereas in other games, the protagonist makes no objections, since his or her victory also depends on them, *Deus Ex* raises uncomfortable ethical questions from the beginning that continue and are accentuated as the game progresses.

Jensen’s forename, Adam, evokes his Biblical counterpart—the first man. Scientist Megan Reed uses Jensen’s DNA to take an evolutionary step in transhumanism that will allow augmentation without the need for the drug Neuropozyne (known as Nu-poz), which is required to prevent augmentations from being rejected.

⁸⁵ The same can be said of Shepard in *Mass Effect 2* and *3*, whose corpse lounges in space for a time, before being resurrected and given technological implants.

Like his biblical predecessor, Jensen is a prototype, genetically evolved to integrate the augmentations into his body without drug addiction. As the only human who does not need the drug to maintain his augmentation, Jensen's DNA has the potential to free society from drug dependence and the economic power of the drug companies. Although the player and Jensen are unaware of his ability to be transhuman without drug dependence until later in the game, this nevertheless becomes part of the information that the player must assimilate in order to make the final choice of the game, and more generally, to consider the ethics of transhumanism in the gaming society and its real-world counterparts, especially given that Jensen has the potential to lead humanity in a revolution against the corporations that control Neuropozyne, which make huge profits from the addictive nature of the drug.

Transhuman Economics

Whilst the game clearly engages with the ethics of transhumanism on an individual level, through Jensen and the interactions he has with other augmented characters, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* ponders transhumanism more widely as a socioeconomic issue in the futuristic American neo-liberal society that Jensen inhabits. Augmentations, in Jensen's society, are expensive and the recipient of any augmentation is reliant on the equally expensive Neuropozyne that prevents augmentation rejection and the death of the implantee, mirroring the use of immunosuppressant drugs after organ transplantation in the real world (Pellegrino 2011).⁸⁶ The game can be seen to comment on contemporary American politics, specifically the Democratic endeavour to reform US healthcare in the 2010s, through this economic theme. For the recipient of a liver

⁸⁶ As evidence of how much videogames are seen to reflect contemporary society, *The Sun* newspaper in Britain thought that Sarif Industries was an actual company and published an exposé on it in October 2013 (Huffinton Post 2013).

transplant in the US in 2013, the average cost to the patient was approximately \$577,100 for the procedure and up to \$9,284 per month for post-transplant care, some of which will be required for the lifetime of the patient (Sutter Health CPMC 2013). In the game world, transplantees and recipients of augmentations must also take Nu-Poz for life, risking death if they cannot afford the drug, whose distribution is controlled by the industries that make the augmentations, such as Jensen's employer, Sarif, and by illegal dealers who use the drug to control implantees. The ethics of the drug and augmentation companies are highlighted early in the game, when Jensen is asked to help a fellow employee at Sarif Industries who has been stealing the drug to give to addicts. The employee is being blackmailed by an anonymous third party, and asks Jensen to steal incriminating documents so that they can be destroyed. Jensen's quest to do so illuminates the dual nature of drug dependence—dependence on the drug for survival and addictive drug dependence. It is ethically interesting to note that in this game, one of these dependences is considered as good by society, whereas the other is bad, but that the two are conjoined in the same activity and substance, conflating the usual distinction between good and evil. The benefits of transhumanism here have a shadowy subtext in which the life-saving drug becomes destructive through its addictive nature, which undermines the quality of life. For example, this particular ludic quest highlights a celebrity whose money has been spent on augmentations and Neuropozyne and has been reduced to begging to pay for the drug. Other game characters who cannot afford to buy the drug on which they depend for survival die as a result, just as they do in the real world if funding for post-operative medicines is removed.

Although the use of donated organs for transplant is not usually seen as a transhuman treatment, the game nevertheless highlights the similarities between transhuman and biological transplants, suggesting that the ethical and economic

problems of transplants and drug industries today will not be remedied in the future by technology. In offering the player a choice of ‘playing’ Jensen so that he either helps his fellow employee or leaves him to deal with his own problems, the player has to choose between taking decisive action supporting the patients and their needs against those who profit from them, or maintaining the status quo by non-action. Crucially, *Deus Ex* offers no judgment or consequences for either choice: Jensen is not treated any differently regardless of which choice he makes as the game continues; it is left to the *player* to make the judgement upon her own choice. Ludic consequences in some videogames can heavily-handedly impose game designers’ values upon players, but here the only consequences are narrative ones: the game ends differently depending on the choices made. The lack of ludic consequences (i.e., the player does not lose or gain power either way) suggests that game designers may well be reluctant to take a position on such a controversial political issue in case they alienate customers and lose sales, or run against the interests of the game’s financial backers or those of future games, complicating the socio-economic analysis of videogames, as fictional and the real world ethics collide.

From the start, the designers of *Deus Ex* used the economics and ethics of transhuman technology only available to a wealthy elite as the basis for the game’s marketing campaign. They created a website, www.sarifindustries.com, on which the fictional company that Jensen works for promotes augmentations; within the gameworld, however, it has been hacked by an opposition group, The Humanity Front, who have posted a short documentary film exposing the economic cost of Neuropozyne and the additional cost to humanity caused by addiction to it. Once the player starts to play the game and interact with the narrative, these positions are explored through side quests that reveal human suffering under the system and the increase in crime in order

to fund ongoing consumption of the drug. In the fictional city of Hengsha, Jensen comes into contact with a prostitution ring, where he learns that the women are forcibly given augmentations to enhance the pleasure of their clients, making them reliant on the drug and their pimps for their continued existence. This creates a vicious cycle in which women, trapped by their need for the drug to survive physically and financially, are paid in drugs rather than money and become utterly dependent on the organized criminals who exploit them. This scenario replicates the economics of prostitution in real-world Southeast Asia as described by Lin Lean Lim (1998), where prostitutes are controlled by organised criminals who render them drug dependent. In the fictional world of *Deus Ex*, Jensen is asked to rescue a prostitute who has been kidnapped to be forcibly augmented; the player can choose whether Jensen helps the prostitute or leaves her to her fate. As with other side quests in this game, there is no significant ludic consequence if Jensen refuses to help the woman; however, there are slight ones: he will not gain experience points for successfully completing the quest, which in turn means he does not gain as many praxis points, and so cannot augment his own powerbase to aid in his main quest. However, when I conducted a primary playing experience of *Deus Ex*, choosing to help the woman, I found that I did not particularly need these points to complete the game. Even so, the fact that there is a slight advantage to helping the woman suggests that the designers found this ethical issue less potentially controversial.

The side-quests in *Deus Ex* are ethically ambivalent. Jensen's blackmailed colleague has been working for little or no personal gain other than to help augmented people; similarly, the woman in the prostitution ring is a victim and so helping either character can be seen as a heroic gesture. However, the quests involve actions that are not condoned by society—killing the blackmailer or killing the guards holding the

woman hostage—although killing is conventional in videogames. But that there are few ludic advantages gained by either or any of these choices presents the game world as a borderline amoral one, in spite of its overt flaunting of social and economic ethical questions.

Joining in the Debate

Deus Ex: Human Revolution owes much to the Renaissance period for its visual appearance, with the predominant gold and black colouring (Figure 37) representing what the game's art director, Jonathan Jaques-Belletête, describes as 'Cyber-Renaissance', a confluence of the futuristic cybernetic, transhuman themes of the game, marking a parallel between Renaissance advances and discoveries and those of the present (Schramm 2010). The Renaissance was the birthplace of humanism; beyond the allusive aesthetics and visual inspiration, the game connects to the Renaissance symbolically, suggesting that the game represents a new renaissance for the evolution of humankind from humanism to and via transhumanism.



Figure 37: The Striking Gold and Black Colour Scheme Omnipresent in the Game

The game's trailer depicts Jensen receiving his augmentations in a direct merger with a Renaissance painting, Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (Figure 38, Figure 39), in which a doctor shows his Renaissance pupils the inner skeletal

structure of a male arm. In case any gamer has missed the allusion, the painting to which the scene alludes hangs blatantly in Jensen's room in the next scene⁸⁷.



Figure 38: *Deus Ex* Trailer



Figure 39: *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*

Game designer Michael McWhertor attests that he drew inspiration from the 'high collars and balloon sleeves of Renaissance wear' in designing the game's costumes (McWhertor 2010). The transition between the allusion to the *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp* and Jensen in his living room features him rising from the Renaissance wooden table, with golden wings, taking flight for the sun, Icarus-like, before his melting wings bring him back to earth (Figure 40).⁸⁸

⁸⁷ The trailer represents a period six months after Jensen receives his augmentations prior to the beginning of the main part of the game when Jensen searches for the killer/kidnappers of Megan Reed and her colleagues.

⁸⁸ This trope emerges again when one of the antagonists likens himself to Daedalus helplessly watching his child flying too close to the sun.



Figure 40: Icarus Imagery in *Deus Ex*

In a deviation from more typical ‘teaser trailers’—short pieces of film used to entice viewers into becoming players—*Deus Ex: Human Revolution* instead asks the viewer to consider the role of science in human evolution, and whether we, like Icarus, are using technology to create more ‘perfect’ humans, with no concept or consideration of the dangers involved in the technology.

Beyond transhumanism, the presence of an AI in *Deus Ex* questions the role of technology in the production of a fully posthuman being, Eliza Cassan. The name directly references the prototype programme, ELIZA, created by Joseph Weizenbaum between 1964 and 1966 in America. This piece of software was one of the first computer programs to simulate artificial intelligence, intriguingly, at around the same time that videogames were being invented. The Rogerian automated psychoanalysis program has the appearance of sentience. Indeed, there are several accounts (possibly urban myths) detailing how people were fooled into believing that ELIZA was a person, not a program. In making Cassan a personified AI and showing her reach into the information technology to which we in society now have access, the game allows the player to reflect on the role of computer technology, the reach of the Internet, and the ability of computers to access personal information, as well as the continued evolution of posthuman technology as it moves towards ‘machines [that] can, for all practical purposes, become human beings’ (Hayle 1999, xii). Cassan’s lack of corporeality and

connection to all electronic information is feared in a society already so heavily invested in transhumanism. As an AI, Cassan is able to connect instantly to all electronically stored and transmitted information: email, conversations, personal data, and surveillance videos. At the end of the game, she summarises all the available information and it is on the basis of this that the player (and Jensen) make a final ethical choice that concludes the game. Here, the game allows reflection on ethical choices in a world where all information is available and that dismisses emotional factors in the choices being made. Many videogames represent choice as personal and partial, and this deviation from the usual structure constitutes not only a contrast in the usual videogame structure, but also between humanist and posthumanist ethics that the game is concerned with.

In the so-called ‘technology age’, the ability of electronically held information to be accessed by unknown sources is not confined to the science-fiction of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, but is a characteristic of any society that stores information electronically. There have been several high profile instances of governments and agencies stealing information for purposes of surveillance in recent years, most notably Wikileaks (Wikileaks 2013). This website publishes documents, emails, and classified media exposing information theft, claiming that such exposure ‘leads to reduced corruption and stronger democracies in all societies’ institutions’ (*ibid*). There have also been instances of corporations being ‘hacked’ by criminals and the personal information of several million individuals being stolen, including bank details, as in the 2011 PlayStation Network hacking (Arthur 2011) and the theft and publication of Ashley Madison website users (Associated Press 2015). Such hacking raises ethical ambiguities: the theft of information is considered to be criminal, but the publication of stolen information is in some instances presented as a righteous exposé of unethical

behaviour, including the theft of personal information by government agencies. The representation of Cassan as an individual able to access personal information within the fictional world may cause the player to consider the security of her own ‘online identity’ and the information about her stored by third parties. Cassan gestures to global internet companies such as Google and Facebook, which have been known to use ‘data mining’⁸⁹ to access information for advertising purposes that generate revenue for the companies. Questions have been raised, not only regarding the mercenary intentions of such companies, but also regarding how they use client information more generally and how securely such information is stored. Cassan represents the workings of real world companies and individuals, and the game encourages the player to explore various responses to the threat of having her own personal information made public.

‘Be Careful Adam, Because Everybody Lies’: Who to Believe In *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*

In order to provide a multifaceted view of transhuman technology and to allow the player to come to her own conclusions about it, the game engages different characters with markedly differing views on augmentation. The game features three antagonists: David Sarif, William ‘Bill’ Taggart, and Zhao Yun Ru, with whom Jensen interacts at different times. Each has a contrasting opinion of transhumanism and its uses. David Sarif represents the corporate view, believing that transhuman technology ‘can quite literally build a better person’ (Eidos Montreal 2011). However, since he supplies these

⁸⁹ ‘Data mining is primarily used today by companies with a strong consumer focus — retail, financial, communication, and marketing organizations. It enables these companies to determine relationships among "internal" factors such as price, product positioning, or staff skills, and "external" factors such as economic indicators, competition, and customer demographics. And, it enables them to determine the impact on sales, customer satisfaction, and corporate profits. Finally, it enables them to "drill down" into summary information to view detailed transactional data’ (Gordon 2013, 13).

augmentations and profits from them, his view is tainted by his own economic interest. In opposition to Sarif's claim, Bill Taggart, founder and CEO of the Humanity Front, champions humanism, contending that 'for each piece of yourself you surrender [to be replaced by augmentations] your humanity dies a little more' (Eidos Montreal 2011) and advocates government regulation and control of augmentations. Like Sarif, his views are determined by personal interest, but the interest is initially emotional rather than economic: the game suggests that his involvement in anti-augmentation stems from the murder of his wife by a Neuropozyne addict. But his interest is not solely emotional; the game also implies that he has gained public acclaim and celebrity through his campaign for regulation of augmentations.

Jensen, whom the player operates and with whom the player is most identified, works for Sarif, and is to an extent identified with his interests. However, having had no say in his own augmentation, he opposes corporate control over them and is at odds with Sarif. Conversely, while he initially opposes Taggart's views while working for Sarif, he comes to have more understanding of and sympathy with them.

The antagonist, Zhao Yun Ru, CEO of Tai Yong Medical, a rival of Sarif industries, expresses a third perspective on transhumanism. This corporate character represents ruthless ambition and a blatant lack of concern for others, using any means necessary to overcome competition, including military force and criminal hacking, regardless of the consequences for any other members of society. Zhao has at her disposal limitless finances and a private army (Belltower Associates) through which she can and does quash any opposition to her ambitions. Jensen frequently encounters this army, and has to defeat whole squads of it in order to progress. Whereas Sarif's, and Taggart's stances on transhumanism are supported by ethical claims, Zhao is unconcerned with ethics and solely concerned with economic gain. Her affiliation with

Belltower Associates, her wealth, and connections with the Illuminati mean that she remains above the law and any attempt at regulation. In addition to her lack of ethical nuance and ambiguity, her position as the greatest of Jensen's three major adversaries encourages the player operating Jensen to oppose her views.

By the game's end, the player has had a chance to explore each of the three perspectives that these characters represent. Just as *Bioshock* asks the player to consider the political ideology of Ayn Rand, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* asks the player to make her own judgement about transhumanism, and to make an ethical decision based on that judgement: what to do with its technology. There is no 'big boss' in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* that the player has to defeat to win the game; instead, the player is asked to decide the fate of humanity and to act upon her own judgement of transhumanism. The player's ethical judgement of transhumanism becomes the conclusive and deciding factor of the game. Cassan guides Jensen (and the player) through the options that will end the game. Summarising each of the three antagonists' philosophies and adding a fourth option of destroying transhumanism altogether (including any augmentations that characters, including Jensen have) and leaving humanity to itself, rather than allowing individuals or corporations to continue with the augmentations, Cassan asks the player to choose. However, beneath this seemingly simple choice between four options is more complex: there are twelve 'endings', which are made up of choices the player has made throughout the game, as well as the final choice; each ending produces a slightly different monologue from Jensen. Furthermore, regardless of which choice the player makes, after the end credits have rolled, Megan Reed appears in the office of Bob Page, who is a member of the antagonistic group the Illuminati, and remarks that she is looking forward to seeing the 'Nanite' project up close, suggesting that she has chosen to work for Page. Here, the decisions that the

player makes through Jensen are placed within the *Deus Ex* world mythology, so that although the game appears to be an exploration of transhuman ethics, its final conclusion seems to dismiss the consequences of ethical or unethical decisions, rendering them equal. Ludology here itself emerges as not moral or immoral, ethical or unethical, but amoral and a-ethical, in that the game concludes, and the player decides with no variable consequences, regardless of the ethics of her decision. Coming at the end of the game, there is nothing ludic to be gained by any of the potential decisions or ethical stances; the rewards are thus purely narrative, psychological, and ideological.

'I'm a Father Too ...': Personal Choices in *Heavy Rain*

Whereas so far I have been concerned with situating ethics within a wide cultural framework, (Jensen's narrative being concerned with society as a whole through the lens of individual experiences), *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) offers the player an exploration of cultural morality through a personal consideration. The focus, however, is not entirely individualistic: whilst the game positions Ethan Mars as the primary protagonist of the game, the player controls four characters at different points, each searching for a missing child, Shaun Mars, after his kidnapping by a serial killer. The detective narrative continues until the killer is revealed or all four characters fail to save Shaun; the decisions the player makes on behalf of each of the characters aids in the investigation and search. Ethan Mars's role in *Heavy Rain* allows the player to consider the actions of a single individual, both in a familial context and in the way his interactions affect his own morals, placing the player primarily in control of this father and asking her to make ludic choices for him based on her own reaction to events, decisions that have ramifications on the subsequent narrative.

The choices the player makes in *Heavy Rain* are not directed by the connection between the father and child, but also by the relationship between the player and protagonist. Elisenda Ardévol and associates argue that videogames as ‘audiovisual representations must be understood not as a voyeuristic pleasure, a passive exposure to images, but in terms of embodiment and identification’ (Ardévol, et al. 2006, 3); this is the experience that *Heavy Rain* seeks to provide. The game opens with the player controlling the body of Ethan and building identification with him as he helps his son celebrate his tenth birthday. This sequence (‘The Birthday’) both familiarises the player with the innovative control system and identifies Ethan as a caring husband and father. The design team of *Heavy Rain* places the gamer in a familiar and ordinary space—a space similar to that inhabited by many players. The player controls Ethan as he undertakes the mundane activities of showering, brushing his teeth, and helping his wife get ready for their son’s birthday party—a typical day in suburban America. Unlike most games, which already have protagonists engaging in superhuman activities at this early stage, Ethan has no super powers; the game thus emphasises continuities between the player’s world and the gaming world. Even so, Jose Zagal considers that *Heavy Rain* uses this everyday role-playing to allow players to ‘pretend they are someone else’ and to allow them to ‘think from the perspective of another person and [to] behave in accordance with the role expectations for that other person’ (Zagal 2011, 5). In these mundane, realist contexts, the player is tasked with making ethical choices for Ethan. These, Zagal believes, are determined in part by the player’s perceptions of the ethical nature of the game character. During ‘The Birthday’, Ethan has the house to himself, and can interact with numerous objects, or he can go to his office and work, with the player making small choices, such as whether to work or not. This section of the game also introduces the player to the unique game controls, where the controller is used in

unusual ways for a variety of actions, such as shaking it, or moving it violently to simulate a chopping motion. The player's choice—to allow him to procrastinate or to work—reflects on both the player's character and her perception of Ethan's character, and may construct him in her own image or represent a fantasy world choice that is at odds with her everyday choices. Player identification with Ethan is heightened by the ability to 'see' the thoughts of the characters being controlled; pressing a button on the controller allows up to four thoughts to appear as words on the screen that the player can choose to fulfil, thereby allowing her to identify with Ethan's thoughts and not just with his body moving in space.

These choices, though minor, are ethical ones: as Zagal writes, 'in an ethics of everyday life, it's the details that matter' (Zagal 2011, 12). In *Heavy Rain*, these details construct the initial ethics of the protagonist, and the player is asked to consider and reconsider these ethical choices as she progresses through the game. Zagal further notes that *Heavy Rain* 'highlights the ethical choices and decisions we make in our everyday lives' and 'is able to create player experiences that recreate the immediacy, emotional tension, and ambiguity present in many real-world ethical situations' (Zagal 2011, 2). It is the ability to make these choices that allow the player to become immersed in the narrative and the game, and to create an identificatory allegiance with Ethan as the game progresses (as explored in chapter 4), the narrative takes on a darker tone, and the ludic elements of the game become part its ethical structure.

The Setting of *Heavy Rain*

The player's consideration of ethics is intensified by that fact that the game is located in a real and contemporary geographical and cultural location, a suburb of Philadelphia.

We have seen that in the fictional world of *Heavy Rain*, there is an attempt to mirror the real world; there is nothing supernatural; there are no transhuman powers, no dystopian landscapes, and no unbelievable events that require the willing suspension of disbelief operative in so many other videogames. In using contemporary America as the setting, game designer David Cage provides the player with the connection to the virtual world that Emil Pagliarulo and Jordan Thomas deem necessary for a game that involves moral choices (Zoss 2010), the everyday world of middle class America in the prologue, and the more seedy ‘side of America that you don’t often see in Hollywood movies’ (IMDB 2012) in the main body of the game. For, as Henry Jenkins comments, ‘game designers don’t simply tell stories: they design and sculpt spaces’ (Jenkins 2004, 3), to create an audiovisual experience in which the player is physically and emotionally invested.

The idyllic normality of the prologue, which presents Ethan as a devoted, happy, and ethical husband and father, is shattered when his elder son, Jason, is hit by a car. In a futile effort to save the boy, Ethan throws himself in the path of the car during a cut-scene, and lies in a coma for six months. At the end of the credits that follow these incidents, the main part of the game begins, presenting a strong contrast to the game’s opening. Even so, this remains a realist and recognisable setting. It finds Ethan a different person in changed circumstances: estranged from his wife, living in a small apartment, struggling to be single parent to his surviving son, Shaun. Their deteriorated relationship is made manifest as the two sit eating dinner in silence. Ian Bogost finds this scene the most ‘emotionally powerful moment in the game’ because it unfolds realistically in real time, with designers refusing ‘to edit the scene down into a few moments of silence’, thereby rendering the ‘orders of magnitude more meaningful’ for Bogost than all the ludic actions of the rest of the game (Bogost 2010). Again, this sequence reflects the contemporary situation for many people in the real world. In the

US there are approximately 20 million children living with a single parent (Andersen 2013), and in the UK there are approximately two million lone parents with dependent children (Office for National Statistics 2012). As with life, the silence continues until the player chooses to end it, allowing for maximum identification with Ethan as a father whose life has changed and is placed in a domestic situation that he is unsure about how to handle.



Figure 41: Bright Setting Of Prologue

The contrasts of the two realist settings are, however, constructed, aestheticised, and rendered psychologically more resonant by the colour scheme of the two scenes. Figure 41 shows the colour scheme of the prologue, cast in a bright, warm palette with shining sun, whilst Figure 42 features the predominant colour scheme of the main game, which is noirish in tone, shadow, and colour; the sun has given way to rain, and even the clothing Ethan wears has become darker.



Figure 42: Noir Colour Scheme Of Main Game

Louis Giannetti notes that in film ‘colour tends to be a subconscious element’ and that it is ‘strongly emotional in its appeal, expressive and atmospheric rather than intellectual’ (Giannetti 1999, 24); this is reflected in *Heavy Rain*. The washed out brown palette further offers the player an insight into the depressed emotional state of the protagonist.

In the context of this darker scene and mindset, the player is required to make the choices as to how Ethan cares for Shaun: whether to cook a meal for and eat with him or to leave him to eat a reheated pizza; whether to help him with his homework or to ignore him and let him watch television all evening. These too are realistic choices, comparable to those made in actual families, and they begin to construct the ethics of the game, which will later become matters of life and death that rarely affect real families. At this stage, the game rewards players who make good parenting choices with a ‘Good Father’ award. Players who make poor parenting choices are yelled at by the son. Already the game is requiring the player to make decisions that are morally weighted with consequences.

The Trials of Ethan Mars

The game rapidly escalates into a less realist, more melodramatic serial killer thriller; even so, its key ethical issues remain focused on good and bad parenting and the decisions that the player controlling Ethan must make regarding Shaun. Shaun has been kidnapped by a serial killer known as the Origami Killer, who had witnessed Ethan trying to save Jason at the risk of his own life and seeks to test whether he would sacrifice his own life for the second son. Shaun is locked in a storm drain with rising water that will drown him unless Ethan can successfully complete five trials that will

save Shaun's life. The instructions for each trial are concealed inside an origami figure that names the trial: The Bear, The Butterfly, The Lizard, The Shark, and The Rat.

All of the trials in *Heavy Rain* are ludic; requiring the player to game them, once again reinforcing that there is a link between ludology and narrative, a link that extends to ethical narrative ideology. The first trial requires the player, as Ethan, to drive five miles at high speed down the wrong side of the freeway. As a ludic trial, this is a familiar one for gamers: games such as *Need for Speed* and *Grand Theft Auto* frequently involve driving at speed, avoiding pedestrians and other vehicles so that the required gaming skills are relatively simple. The second trial is also a familiar ludic task: the player must guide Ethan through two mazes, one comprised of a tunnel filled with glass shards, and the second made of electrical conductors linked together with wire. As mazes too are frequently used in videogames,⁹⁰ the player is not faced with unusual ludic challenges in these first two trials; however, in presenting familiar game tropes as trials which the player must complete in order to save a life, these common ludic events are psychologically more fraught than in other games, with another character's life as well as the player's depending on success. In other games, failure may result in the death of the player, but the player can revive and replay the scene. However, in this game, not only would his child die, Ethan the character would also die and his narrative game would be over. The defamiliarisation of familiar ludic tasks in this game raises ethical questions about their use in other videogames, questions exacerbated by the realist setting of this game. In *Grand Theft Auto*, such driving is normative; here the realist context makes it ethically weightier. The game furthermore implicitly critiques the ludology that has become commonplace and detached from realist ethical issues in

⁹⁰ See Alison Gazzard's PhD thesis *Paths, Players, Places: Towards an Understanding of Mazes and Spaces in Videogames* (Gazzard 2009) for more in depth analysis of the use of the maze in videogames.

other games and the readiness with which players accept the conventions of many violent games, as discussed in relation to *Bioshock* in chapter 6.

The challenge to videogame conventions continues in the third trial, *The Lizard*. In this trial, Ethan is to cut off part of his own finger, maiming himself to save his son. This trial, more than prior ones, uses the game controller to convey Ethan's psychological and physical response. The controller trembles in the player's hand as she prepares to complete the quest, mimicking the trembling of the protagonist; Ethan's heart rate quickens, requiring her to use the controller to regulate it. As a result, the actions that she is required to perform with the controller become more difficult. Here the player is offered a perspective not often found in videogames, and certainly not in most other media: a haptic and tactile manifestation of the protagonist's response to stimuli such as terror and stress. In most videogames, violence is an unemotional and relatively non-stressful part of play. Here, however, violence is directed at oneself and given a realist somatic response, one that implicates the player in the anxiety and suffering of the event. That this trembling controller affects the ludic success of the game is a brilliantly sharp ethical critique of the banality and normality of violence in most videogames. Furthermore, cutting off a finger makes the loss ludically poignant. Just as the film *Un Chien Andalou* (Bataille and Breton 1929) uses an eye being removed to 'assault the very organ we are viewing with, blinds us by proxy, and our physical disgust and fright are complicated in an obscure sense that some sort of ugly justice has been done' (Wood 2011, 277), *Heavy Rain* asks the player to amputate the very organ that she is using to perform the procedure with, as it is the fingers that the player uses to interact with the game through the controller.

The fourth trial renders the ethics of violence even more fraught: Ethan must kill another person in order to save his son. The victim is a drug dealer; killing him will

help to reveal the location where Shaun is being held, enabling his rescue. In most books, films, and games, this would be ethically acceptable, even normal. However, in this game, there are ethical complications to killing a ‘bad’ person in order to save an ‘innocent’ one. Within the drug dealer’s apartment, there is evidence of children, and the intended victim, pleading for his life, begs, ‘Please ... please don’t kill me man, I’ve got children.’ He then shows Ethan a picture of two girls, whom he calls Sarah and Cindy, once again begging, ‘I wanna see them again. Please’. This turns the seemingly ethically straightforward ludic trial into a moral dilemma: it turns a character identified as a bad drug dealer into one identified as a loving father, raising the ethical question, is it acceptable to destroy a member of another family to save a member of one’s own? If the player as Ethan chooses to kill the dealer, the words, ‘I’m a father too’, come out of Ethan’s mouth as he shoots, serving as a justification for the act, but after the shooting, his reaction to killing mimics a relatively real one: he falls to his knees and is violently ill. Where most games position the protagonist as unaffected by his/her own violence, this game departs from the norm, just as we saw in chapter 5’s examination of *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager 2012).

The final task requires Ethan to take poison. This task, in comparison to the fourth trial, is ethically and psychologically anti-climactic: it is ethically conventional for parents to die to save the lives of their child and drinking poison requires less bravery than cutting off one’s own finger with a trembling controller. Ethan drinks the poison to get the final piece of address and has an hour to save his son before he dies. However, the identification is not totalizing; the player is not exactly identical to the character she plays and is not deciding to kill herself or a character, but rather whether to kill the character she operates to save one that she does not. Critics have assessed that these trials, more than the trials in other games, have led gamers to consider their

own ethics. Zagal considers them to be ‘typical ethical situations’ which we (as the player) hope ‘we never find ourselves in’, citing them as ‘tense, dramatic, emotionally charged, and often require making a narrow, often binary, choice’ (Zagal 2011, 10). However, Valerie Valdes, a videogame player and critic, sees this game as marking her changing ethical values. Before she had children, she was unable to complete the fourth trial or to complete the game; after becoming a parent, however, she was ready to kill for the child (Valdes 2012).

Beyond these views that the realist setting of this game intensifies the relationship between player ethics and gaming ethics, the game causes players to question the ethics of violent videogaming more generally. The ethical challenges of this game have asked players not only to consider the ethics of parenting within and outside of the gaming world, they have also asked players to consider their actions *as players*, questioning made palpable, not just intellectual, by the trembling technology of the haptic control system.

Whodunnit?: Discovering the Identity of the Killer

A further part of the game’s complex ethical exploration is the fact that the killer is another playable character whom the gamer can control, although this is not revealed until the end. If Ethan dies, the player does not discover the killer’s identity until the final montage, in which the killer, precisely because he is undiscovered, escapes.⁹¹ The killer is Scott Shelby, a private detective who has purportedly been investigating the origami murders.⁹² Just as the drug dealer arouses sympathy through his family, so too

⁹¹ The player discovers the identity of the killer regardless of Ethan’s (or any of the other playable characters) survival to the ending of the game.

⁹² The revelation is made through an analeptic event, during a scene concerning Shelby, of which the player has no awareness of until the end of the game. Many game reviewers have sharply criticised this,

does the Origami Killer, who as a child watched his brother become trapped in a storm drain and drown, while he helplessly held his hand, with their alcoholic father refusing to come to his son's aid. Shelby thus seeks less to murder children than to redress his childhood trauma by finding a father who would do anything to save his son.

Such complex layers of sympathy are by no means limited to videogame narrative; traditional media also complicate ethics in this way. What is different is that the game takes approximately eleven hours to complete, during which time the player has become far more invested in the characters not only by the time spent with them, but also by engaging in ludology that constructs interactive relationships with them and closer modes of identification, as described in Chapter 4. The ethics of the game is further intensified by the fact that the player, whilst aware that one of these characters she plays is a murderer, does not know which. Therefore, at any moment in the game, the player, while ostensibly seeking to rescue characters from a serial killer, may in fact be playing the serial killer. This too renders the ethics less clearly good or evil.

Conclusion

Videogames, through interactivity that renders the player a quasi-author and quasi-protagonist, are particularly well placed to interrogate intersections between real-world and virtual-world ethics. As evidenced in this chapter, this interrogation can range from the ethics of ideological politics to the ethics of individual morality to family ethics in the context of wider social connections. The link between real worlds and virtual worlds may well intensify the application of narrative to social ethics. On the other hand, videogames also challenge the ethics of gaming meta-textually. Indeed, each of

such as David Houghton, who cites it as an example of bad writing, rather than bad gaming. (Houghton 2012)

the games addressed in this chapter consider not only narrative ethics but also the ethics of gaming itself, whether of how free gamers are to choose, or of the posthuman ethics of gaming created by technology, or of mainstream videogames normalizing of risk-taking and violence.

There has been much debate over whether videogames increase real world violence or whether they have an opposite effect, offering a virtual and safe outlet for violent propensities. This has not been the main concern of this thesis or chapter, having been ably addressed by sociological critics (Sicart provides a succinct appraisal of this in *The Ethics of Computer Games* (2009)). This chapter has been less concerned about the likelihood of players of actually undergoing posthuman surgery or killing themselves or others in the real world than with the ways in which videogames engage consumers ethically. Whether the haptic participation of players in ethical and unethical fictional events is more or less likely to lead them to similar actions in the real world is not within the scope of my research. My conclusion, however, is that this physical participation allows for a more engaged interrogation of ethical values than traditional media do, reinforcing my larger arguments that ludology carries consumers beyond other narrative modes of engagement. Bob Rehak notes that ‘the disavowal necessary to gameplay is like the ‘yes, that’s what I see’ of successful cinematic structure, but goes further: ‘yes, that’s what I do’ (Rehak 2003, 121). Videogames permit players to explore virtual ethical situations, carrying out physical actions in a physically safe real-world context, allowing them to *do*, and at the same time to consider the ethical and/or moral weight of these actions more intensively.

Chapter 8: Endings

All tragedies are finished by a death,

All comedies are ended by a marriage.

—Byron 2007, *Don Juan*

For every piece of media, there comes a point when it ends; every text, regardless of the medium it is delivered in finishes: the final page is reached and read, the film credits appear, or the player defeats the Big Boss and accesses the end cut-scene of the game. In its simplest form, an ending can be defined as the termination of something, such as a film, text, or game; however, critics have carried this definition of endings further to discuss closure, death, catharsis, the resolution of questions, and even retrospective understanding, thereby complicating this simple definition, and endowing it with meaning beyond being the cessation of an artefact, as I detail below. For videogames, ludology and technology enables, and even requires, a diversity of endings and therefore, theories of endings in traditional media are somewhat inadequate to define and explain videogame endings. Even so, existing theories of endings applied to other media are a useful starting point at which to begin the analysis of videogame endings. Indeed, many videogames are often more conservative in their endings than contemporary postmodern and *avant garde* fiction and film. This final chapter considers how videogame endings participate in the evolution of narrative and narrative theory and where they are conservative and regressive.

As we have seen, many videogames conform to Aristotelian narrative theory. In some ways, they conform to his theories of endings; in others, they do not. Aristotle famously requires a tragedy to have a ‘beginning, a middle, and an end’ in order for it to

be ‘complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude’ (2008, 19), a conservative arrangement to which most videogames adhere. The Aristotelian structure is the canonical form in film and visual media generally, including videogames (Friedmann 2006, 159). However, some recent games have complicated this Aristotelian ideal, with alternative and multiple endings increasingly popular, which requires reconsideration of what constitutes a narrative ending. In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines an end as ‘that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it’ (2008, 19). However, the tragic endings with which Aristotle is concerned in *Poetics* are not simply a narrative endpoint: tragic endings feature death as a central aspect, and the viewer response to that death, in the form of catharsis, is a central aspect of Aristotle’s theory.

Despite the term only occurring twice in *Poetics* (Belifiore 1985, 349), Aristotle’s definition of catharsis involves an author invoking ‘pity and fear’ and then using the drama of tragedy to bring about ‘the proper purgation of these emotions’ (2008, 14). Aristotle considers that in a tragedy, the ending does not instil pleasure in the form of happiness, but rather that ‘the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear’ (2008, 27). This is not to say, however, that the events in a tragedy bring about a real-world pleasure—instead it is in the imitation of actions that allow audiences to feel pity and fear as pleasure; as Aristotle says: ‘objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced’ because ‘in contemplating it [we] find [our]selves learning or inferring’ (2008, 10-11). Catharsis is a vicarious process: a feeling of pleasure brought about by being cleansed after (extending Aristotle’s theory beyond theatre) reading, viewing, or playing a narrative containing the imitation of fear and pity.

Whilst Aristotle's theory was written about theatre, theorists have carried it into other media. After the Second World War, the threat of nuclear annihilation pervaded western consciousness, a threat that was quickly reflected in literature, film, and criticism. For example, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson address ways in which classical Hollywood films 'lift the viewer to a high degree of tension or suspense' that coincide with the narrative resolution to bring about a feeling of emotional satisfaction at the close of the film (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 88). Some videogames, whilst negating the tragedy of death through its use as a ludic tool nevertheless attempt to provide catharsis as it is described by Aristotle. *Heavy Rain*, for example, as the previous chapter elucidates, attempts to place the player in the role of a parent whose child has been kidnapped, and to experience the emotions that the protagonist does, intensely so through immersion and interactivity.

Whilst the Aristotelian structure remains prominent, emotional responses to endings are considerably diluted in videogames. The Byronic couplet that forms the epigraph to this chapter articulates a prominent generic distinction between tragic and comic endings, despite its satirical context. However, videogames and their narratives are not bound by this conventional distinction, due to their ludic elements—their construction as *games*. Characters die dozens—sometimes hundreds—of times in a single game. In many videogames, death has become a surmountable and expected facet that complicates its narrative functions. The protagonist in a videogame is capable of being killed repeatedly and coming back to life, making death a minor setback, rather than the end of either narrative, or game. If the death of a character does not affect the outcome of a game, the player can become indifferent to death, lessening her immersion in the narrative and her emotional identification with that character, including weakening the cathartic response the player has to her death.

Similarly, whilst marriage can be part of a videogame narrative (see for example, *Skyrim* (Bethesda 2011), *The Sims* (Electronic Arts 2001), and the *Mass Effect* trilogy (Bioware 2007 - 2012)), it is more frequently a narrative aside than a fundamental part of the main narrative that provides a final culmination. Even games that appear to support Byron's comic ending, such as the 'save the princess' structure of the Mario games, refute marriage at their conclusion, with Mario simply rescuing her rather than marrying her, allowing her to be re-kidnapped in time for the next game. Like the player who dies repeatedly but never dies finally, Mario repeatedly reaches the princess but never marries her.

The ludic aspects of videogames then, complicate traditional narrative structures; the frequency of death diminishes the fear and pity players feel: death is less emotional, less shocking, less tragic, and less permanent for the player than for the audience of Greek tragedy. As often as players die, they can be resurrected, with no significant loss to the narrative or to gameplay. It must be noted, however, that this is not always the case, with some games featuring 'permadeath' as part of the ludic challenge. In games that utilise this, the player has one chance to complete the game; if the player dies in the game, the game ends with no opportunity to replay a specific part. Death in videogames provides different narrative, psychological, and emotional structures than death in traditional tragic narratives, as I detail in the next section.

Tragic and Comic Narrative Endings in Videogames

In Aristotelian tragedy, as in life, death is generally a permanent and final narrative event—once a character is dead, her place in the narrative is ended. Videogames do not work on this principle, refiguring the permanence of death in other media as a

temporary setback in the not yet final narrative progression. In contemporary videogames, players watch the protagonists they control being repeatedly killed through a variety of methods—*Tomb Raider's* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) Lara Croft dies in 24 distinct ways, each of which the player witnesses through cinematic cut-scenes. It is interesting to note here that the player is rendered passive at the point of death, just as in life; there is a transition made from player to watcher and the game itself converts from the need and ability for physical interaction to passive viewing.

Different skills are required to complete a videogame than to read a novel or watch a film; a player needs a variety of talents: manual dexterity, problem solving, and quick reflexes, as well as those required to interpret and understand a narrative. Early games such as *Space Invaders* used the inevitable end of the player's interaction with the game—the game over screen—as a means of recouping the cost of building the machine and further making a profit by enticing defeated players to replay and conquer the machine. This economic model was further refined by a 'continue' method of play, in which the player could purchase further play at the brink of death, averting death rather than having to begin the game again. A single *Galaxy Game*, as we saw earlier, the first coin-operated video game, cost approximately \$20,000 dollars to produce (Pitts 1997), and was a formidable, physical object, housed in a box up to two metres tall and as such represented a significant financial investment; allowing the player to purchase extra time in a game, therefore, encouraged a return on this investment, as well as allowing these games to outlive the gamer's interaction with them: she will be defeated and the game will continue *ad infinitum*. In this way, the game's structure serves as an eternal, unending narrative afterlife to which 'dead' players continually return to live again.

At first, games on home consoles followed the same structure as their established, financially successful arcade counterparts and so death retained a pseudo-economic motif, as early games adapted from coin operated arcade machines retained the titular screen that invited the player to 'insert coin to continue'. With the advent of home consoles and computer systems, designers began to anthropomorphise game characters, endowing them with human characteristics, including the ability to die, even if that death is temporary. This began to inflect death with emotion. However, even with the anthropomorphising of videogame characters, death remains primarily a marker of the failure of ludic skill and surviving death a marker of ludic competence. Platform games such as *Super Mario* and *Sonic the Hedgehog* require the player to survive to the end of a level in order to reach the next level, completing puzzles and engaging with the environment to do so. The player may collect extra lives in order to both elongate the playing experience and enable the completion of the game. As with arcade games, the narrative playing time of these games is relatively short; however, learning to play the game and had to acquire the skill set to complete the game can take many hours.

Death has become such an ingrained part of videogame culture that the player has learned to consider it an inconvenience that must be endured and an obstacle that must be overcome rather than a tragedy. The player of *Black Ops* will die countless times during play, sometimes incredibly realistically, and be instantly revived to continue to kill other characters, with only a sense of frustration at the interruption in gameplay. For the ludologist, death functions as a learning tool; according to Jesper Juul, 'to play a game is essentially a learning experience where the player acquires the skills needed to overcome the challenges of the game. [...] Practice makes perfect' (2005, 95). Losing lives and replaying levels allows the practice required for perfection

or completion, and gaining extra lives and continues is paramount for games that use this structure. The ludic function of death in videogames means that each time the player repeats a section of game, she learns the correct responses and physical movements needed to succeed, as in illustrated by the first-person shooter franchise, *Doom*. The first two games show the player the health of the protagonist through a physical rendition of his face (Figure 43), which becomes bloodier as his health deteriorates. Should the protagonist's health reach 0%, he will die and the player will be required to begin the level again. Here, although the player identifies as the protagonist by operating him (see Chapter 4), the damage inflicted on the character is seen by her as one sees another and the player has a role in preventing this—and his death.



Figure 43: *Doom*'s health status bar

The advent of longer, more narrative driven videogames brought with them the concept of the quick save; in a game that can take up to 65 hours to complete, this is an invaluable feature. However, the ability to save a videogame at any point also changed the way players view death; whereas death in earlier videogames meant that the player had to start the narrative and game again from the beginning, or from a predetermined point, the ability to save at any point rendered death a minor inconvenience, rather than a significant setback in the narrative and ludic progress of the game. *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) considers death – unusually – as the end point of character interaction with the narrative unless the player makes a deliberate choice to circumvent death through reloading a previously saved game; more frequently, a player will be offered the opportunity to restart the game and to continue as if his/her character's death

did not occur, or to use videogame terminology, to respawn⁹³. In *Bioshock*, the death of the protagonist simply means the player/character becomes reanimated at the nearest ‘vita chamber’, a safe point in the game, usually found near a dangerous location; here the player is able to continue with the exploration and construction of the narrative and gameplay, with no detrimental effect. Most, if not all, FPS games share this approach, with the characters being able to survive death many, many times.

Death in videogames is more than a player controlled character repeatedly dying and becoming reanimated, but also encompasses the deaths that the player instigates, through killing other characters in a videogame. For the player, death is part of learning to complete a game; she learns skills, strategies, and methods that will allow her to face the final enemy in the game—the Big Bad,⁹⁴ or as it is known in videogames, the Big Boss. Most videogames involve a series of enemies that become progressively harder to kill, and the player, through repeatedly dying and retrying, becomes adept at killing them. She will learn which weapons to use against what enemy, and what strategies will result in her staying alive, whilst facing seemingly insurmountable odds. This culminates in the final battle, in which all of these strategies will be needed to defeat the final obstacle—the Big Boss—a structure seen throughout videogame history: Mario faces a progression of enemies, until he meets Bowser for the final confrontation, after which he rescues the princess; Adam Jensen in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* defeats the antagonists, learns of their ideological beliefs, and has to use this information to make his final choice, their defeat allowing him to succeed. In a ludic sense, death in a videogame is used to train the player to learn to kill the Big Boss to complete or end the game, refuting and complicating the usual narrative conventions of death, tragedy, and catharsis. If Aristotle treats endings in terms of tragedy and catharsis, Kermode

⁹³ The character is reanimated at an earlier, usually safer, location in the game.

⁹⁴ This is an abbreviation of the term *Big Bad Wolf*, ‘mocking the sense of jeopardy faced by its protagonist’ (Short 2011, 89).

addresses them in terms of time and apocalypse. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode argues that writers ‘from Plato to William Burroughs [...] have persistently imposed their “fictions” upon the face of eternity’, focusing particularly on ‘how these have reflected the apocalyptic spirit’ (Kermode 2000 ed, Back Cover). More specifically, he argues that humans are born *in media res*—the middle of things into which one jumps (Baker 2001, 378)—and die *in mediis rebus*—the middle of things from which one starts (Baker 2001, 378) and that ‘to make sense of their spans they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems’ (Kermode 2000 ed, 7). The reason for this need, he argues, is that people need to ‘humanise the common death’ (Kermode 2000 ed, 7), and this is what writers attempt to do with fiction. Kermode also considers that ‘we [humankind] project ourselves—a small, humble, elect perhaps—past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle’ (Kermode 2000 ed, 8), thereby allowing the analysis and interrogation of what might happen after the End in the Post-Apocalyptic society that remains.

Yet gamers may well be more casual about death and less threatened by its power. *Dante’s Inferno* (Electronic Arts 2010), a loose adaptation of the first book of *The Divine Comedy* (Alighieri 1472), shows death in the form of the Grim Reaper being defeated at the beginning of the game, with Dante taking both his scythe and his power and descending through the circles of Hell, able to forgive or damn the souls residing there. This is blasphemous from a religious viewpoint, with a human able to absolve sin, provide redemption, and to escape the eternal damnation of Hell; but it is a blasphemy that reflects the diminished power of death in videogames generally; this disempowerment of death, is a common aspect of gameplay. Unlike theories where death is a narrative ending, here death dies at the beginning of the narrative.

Most videogames, due to their primary function as *games*, end with the destruction of the antagonist and the restoration of order, with the whole purpose of the game's narrative being to facilitate the death of the antagonist, extending the emotional satisfaction that readers and viewers of other media feel, as the player brings about ludic success and completion that coincides with and reinforces narrative closure. Along the way, minor antagonistic characters are killed, providing practice for the final battle and preliminary points of success and satisfaction.

Comic endings too allow for repetition. As we have seen, Mario rescues his princess at the end of each game, although the game stops at the rescue and does not conclude with the traditional wedding, a trope signalling rebirth and harmony. The rebuttal of this traditional structure allows the opportunity for replay and franchise renewal: Mario, for example, is able to save the Princess repeatedly.

The theme of saving the princess occurs in other videogames where it is tragic rather than comic, creating a hybrid that subverts Byron's binary. In *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013), the protagonist, Joel, must escort Ellie, a fourteen-year-old girl, across a post-apocalyptic America. Ellie is immune to the virus that precipitated the apocalypse, and as such is the primary hope for the future of humankind. The protection and rescue of the 'princess' in *The Last of Us* subverts the traditional happy ending as the player comes to realise that to rescue her is detrimental to the whole of humanity. In this videogame, the happy ending of the comedy is presented as a tragedy: Joel protects Ellie, saving her from death at the hands of the Fireflies, an anti-government militia group, as is expected in the comedic structure. The final scenes of the game see Ellie reach a hospital to aid the search for a cure to the virus. However, Joel learns that Ellie will be euthanized and her brain dissected. To prevent this, the player guides Joel as he steals Ellie's unconscious body from the hospital, killing

anyone who tries to stop him. Here, the game conforms to the rescue of the princess: Joel saves Ellie; however, this is then rendered tragic on an epic scale through the revelation that Ellie is the only hope for a cure, and that her survival sentences the human race to death. The tragedy of this ending is compounded when Joel lies to Ellie about her role in the cure. Once conscious, it becomes clear that Ellie is willing to die for the greater good, but Joel tells her that there were other people immune to the virus, and that her assistance in finding a cure is not necessary, swearing to her that this is the truth when she asks if he is lying. The truth is tragic but the lie creates a fiction of a comic ending which the princess believes: the ending of the game promises a tragedy of epic proportions, whilst at the same time we believe that Ellie understands there to be the promise of renewal that marks the closing of the comedy.

In spite of the epic proportion of the tragedy and the comic lie, which does little to mitigate it, the game also follows Bordwell and Thompson's view that 'narrative depends on the assumption that the action will spring primarily from individual characters as causal agents', with 'decisions, choices, and traits of character' making up a significant part of a narrative (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 94). Once the player reaches the end of the game, and is able to reflect on the actions she has undertaken with Joel, she becomes aware of his status as both tragic hero and villain. The game begins with Joel losing his daughter, Sarah, during the initial outbreak of the Cordyceps virus and becoming a cold, detached person, whose self-interest outweighs any altruistic endeavours in society. His initial involvement with Ellie is impersonal, even antagonistic, as he smuggles her out of a quarantine zone, so that he can exploit her immunity to the virus, earning food coupons and weapons that will aid his own survival. His motivation for rescuing the 'princess', then, is purely self-interested. As the game progresses, its dialogue, characterization, and the player's ability to control the game's

two primary characters create an emotional bond between the player and them. Not only are comedy and tragedy confused in this game, so too are the roles of the familiar aloof tough guy and the damsel in distress: Joel takes the role of the damsel in distress, whilst Ellie becomes the stronger character, willing to sacrifice herself to ensure a cure for the Cordyceps virus. Psychological factors also create changes and inversions in traditional character and narrative tropes. Although Joel, begins as cold and self-interested, he increasingly attempts to replace his dead daughter with Ellie, saving her not only in an attempt to save himself, but also to give himself a second chance at being a father, killing anyone who opposes him. His status as a tragic hero is gradually revealed to the player as she progresses through the game, but is made explicit with retrospection and hindsight at the game's end. Joel can also be read as the primary villain of *The Last of Us* through hindsight and retrospection. As the player controls Joel's movements in the game, her perceptions of him change, depending on whether she is controlling his actions or watching them through a cut-scene. Arguably, this game's confusion of comic and tragic endings and heroes and villains prevents player catharsis in Aristotelian terms.

Different modes of narrative presentation also affect player identification, emotion, and the capacity for catharsis. Games such as *Max Payne* (2001-2012) and *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog 2008 - 2011) present the protagonist as an empathic person in the cut-scenes and a unsympathetic killer during the action of the game; this trope is exploited in *The Last of Us*: the game tricks the player into thinking that Joel achieves growth as she moves through it, and that his relationship with Ellie is evidence of this, but as the closing scenes show, in spite of his growing attachment to Ellie, he remains as self-interested as he was at the beginning of the game; he will not allow Ellie's death

to save the human race, instead wanting Ellie to save him alone (although he too is doomed by this choice).

Life After Death

Earlier in this thesis, I briefly considered videogame endings in terms of the player's authorial role, arguing that videogames are teleological artefacts, explicitly designed to work towards an end. As with other media, the endings found in videogames are more than the moment when the game 'text' is completed and thereby a cessation of the action; they encompass a range of cultural, ideological, and theoretical conclusions and closures, allowing game designers and players a platform through which to consider these narrative endings. Whilst other media also allow consumers to consider their opinions and emotions in response to endings, videogames require players to consider the actions they have undertaken leading up to their endings; the interactivity of videogames further implicates players more deeply in game endings as participants rather than witnesses of them and furthermore to foresee subsequent events and consequences of those actions, after their own vicarious deaths, after the narrative ends, and after the characters die. In this way, players are more like actors than audiences.

Famous Last Words: Narrative Closure

As Kermode argues that we use fiction to make sense of our own endings, our own deaths, Jane Yellowlees Douglas, in her consideration of hypertexts⁹⁵ argues that readers use ‘the experience of narrative closure’; to understand a narrative text; as Aristotle argues that tragic endings give pleasure, Douglas argues that that the achievement of such closure is one of ‘the principal pleasures of reading narratives’ (Yellowlees Douglas 1994, 163). Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, offers the phrase ‘anticipation of retrospection’ to describe the reader’s ‘chief tool in making sense of narrative’ (Brooks 1992, 23). Brooks considers that a completed narrative allows the player to understand the text as a whole after they finish reading, which can require an ending to allow her to place other events in context.

Similar notions emerge in film theory; David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson consider that ‘most classical narrative films display a strong sense of closure at the end’ (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 95): the conclusion of a film constructs a complete artefact, which can then be considered and interpreted by the viewer in its entirety. In the classic structure, the reader, viewer, or player use the narrative information given in whichever media they are engaging to construct the narrative within a chronological framework. Similarly, videogames require the completion of the ludic *and* narrative elements which are then interpreted and understood by the player.

Whilst narrative closure is seen as the norm in most media, it is not always the case: long-running television programmes, for example, are intended to have ‘indefinitely large, expanding, and wide-open middles with no conclusion in sight’ (Carroll 2007, 2) to maintain their serial structure and viewer interest (Alexander 1995, 14). Postmodern literature and film regularly subvert narrative closure (Hutcheon 2004,

⁹⁵ Hypertexts are defined in chapter 1.

59). Hypertext narratives obfuscate linear narrative structures, presenting only part of the narrative in any single reading, and so offering the reader ‘few clues as to [...] when they can decide they have completed the reading of a single version among many versions of the narrative’s possibilities’ (Yellowlees Douglas 1994, 153), and furthermore making it difficult for a reader to answer all the questions raised in a narrative fully. Hypertext narratives, created by computers, are ‘forking texts’—nonlinear texts in which ‘each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed’ (Aarseth 1997, 3). One of the first hypertext fictions, *Afternoon: A Story* (Joyce 1987), contains ‘539 places or narrative segments, accessed by way of 950 links’ (Yellowlees Douglas 1994, 167); the reader will only come into contact with a small percentage of these in a single reading. Similarly, Chapter 3’s analysis of *Dear Esther* highlights the need for repeated interactions with some videogames to understand their narratives. Such non-linearity and the need to return repeatedly to the narrative means that these narratives do not satisfy reader or player desire for closure on a first encounter; even after much repetition, hypertexts and games like *Dear Esther* may lack any final sense of narrative closure.

Readers, viewers, and gamers have other expectations of narrative endings. Consumers of the detective genre, whatever the medium, expect that the solution to the mystery or crime will be given at some point. Beyond this specific genre, most narratives, Carroll considers, are concerned with raising questions and answering them—‘what we might call an erotetic narrative’ (Carroll 2007, 5); as we saw above, narrative closure occurs when the presiding questions a text raises are answered. Carroll defines these as *macro*-questions, those ‘questions that structure an entire text or, at least most of it’ (Carroll 2007, 5). He also considers a narrative text to contain

micro-questions, ‘a question whose answer will contribute eventually to answer presiding macro-questions but which does not, on its own, answer the relevant presiding question directly and completely’ (Carroll 2007, 6). Macroquestions are readily visible in crime fiction, structuring the narrative around discovering the identity of a murderer, for example, asking ‘Who killed the victim?’ Many videogames have macro-questions, such as ‘Can I save the Princess?’ (*Mario*); ‘How can I find my son?’ (*Heavy Rain*); ‘Who is Aiden?’ (*Beyond: Two Souls*); or, ‘How do I escape from here?’ (*Bioshock*). The player attempts to answer these as she controls the protagonist’s movements and choices through the game. Here, the difference between videogames and traditional media becomes manifest. In most other media, such questions are answered through the thoughts, actions, and representations of a third party, even if the narrative is delivered in the first-person; videogames can (but do not always) allow the player to discover the answers to the macro-question as active participants in the narrative, through a fusing of the thoughts and actions of the player with the protagonist’s diction (which can include thought audibly delivered to the player), actions, and other modes by which the player gains knowledge of the protagonist (such as information about him/her from other characters).

Videogames also contain micro-questions, questions subordinate to the macro-question, whose answers assist the protagonist and the player in resolving the narrative and the game. Micro-questions in a murder mystery include asking and discovering why a murder victim was killed, rather than simply who committed the murder, and overcoming what Carroll describes as ‘local obstacles’—complicating actions that the protagonist must surmount in order to answer the macro-question, such as fake clues that must be discounted, or enemies that must be defeated in order to progress. To the videogame analyst, this is a familiar structure; videogames are by their very nature

teleological and, as such, are structured to guide the player towards the end of the game, using ludic puzzles, and learning skills as well as narrative information to navigate the micro-questions in order to finally answer the macro-question. However, the length of many videogames (which can be upward of 20 hours) means that local obstacles and micro-questions become prominent narrative and ludic factors, as the macro-question is not sufficiently compelling to justify the length of a contemporary videogame.

Narrative closure, the ‘phenomenological feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the narrative are answered’ (Carroll 2007, 1), enters narrative studies as part of plot structure as well as knowledge and emotional satisfaction for consumers. Closure is more than simply the termination of a text, but indicates a ‘concluding, rather than merely stopping’ (Carroll 2007, 1) of the text and its narrative, allowing the reader, viewer, or player to learn the fate of characters, the solution to any outstanding puzzles, and the outcome of conflicts that have been part of the narrative.

Franchise entertainment to some degree subverts narrative closure by creating prequels, sequels, and serials that cross multiple media. These often lack endings or contain temporary endings that are refuted by the next episode. The *Batman: Arkham* games are part of a franchise, with the videogames forming a quadrilogy set in the DC universe, retaining the serial continuity of the DC comics and other media associated with the franchise. As with other media in the franchise, the protagonist is the Batman; its videogames feature the player controlling the titular character as he defends Gotham from many super villains, including the Joker, Poison Ivy, Harley Quinn, Hugo Strange, and Black Mask, all of whom appear in other media forms in the Batman universe, thereby creating narrative continuity across media whilst preventing any final narrative closure among them.

Whilst the diegesis and characters are familiar to readers and viewers of Batman, the videogames not only reinforce their relationship with other media through repetition of known elements, they also expand on the narrative beyond other franchise media. In entering the *Batman* universe, the videogames offer the player the opportunity to interact with elements of the diegesis that are familiar, as well as those that are distinct and unique within the franchise. The quadrilogy opens with *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, which depicts the Batman trapped in Arkham Asylum with many of the criminals he has previously captured in other media, including the main antagonist of the game, The Joker. Like many other narratives in the DC Universe, the Batman must capture the Joker and foil his plans for escape from the asylum and domination over Gotham City, a continuous and repeating narrative that constantly denies narrative closure. Whilst this is familiar narrative territory, unlike in other media, instead of observing the action from outside the narrative, the player has an active role in the capture, controlling the Batman's movements, and adhering to his rubric of not killing⁹⁶ even though his enemies are not at all averse to trying to kill him. *Batman: Arkham Origins*, the third game in the franchise, is a prequel to the earlier games, breaking any sense of linear narrative progression. It features a younger version of the Batman being pursued through Gotham by its criminal contingent; once again, narrative closure cannot be reached as the story will continue, albeit in a previously released game. The game establishes the mixed temporality of the franchise and its ability to create distinct narratives that can take place anywhere in the entire temporality of the diegesis. Here, videogames join other media to invoke immortality for the *Batman* universe; each additional narrative delays the end of the diegesis, refusing to close off the narrative:

⁹⁶ The character has adhered to a no-killing policy since early in the comic books. However, there is also an economic factor in retaining the antagonist: the Joker has a fan base that rivals that of Batman, and so killing him would reduce the number of fans of the franchise, and therefore make it less financially profitable for the franchise owners.

there is always another story to be told, another game to be played, and another film to be watched.

As the ability to create new narratives for the Batman franchise intimates, there is a difference between the narrative ending and the protagonist's ending. Batman and his enemies in Gotham City remain perpetually locked in battle against each other, allowing for multiple narratives; Mario, upon defeating Bowser for the final time in any of the Mario games, rescues the princess and returns to his life as a plumber—at least until the next time she is kidnapped; the protagonist of many FPS games defeats the antagonist and returns the diegesis to its former state of order, until another crisis emerges.

This conventional cyclical structure means that the final death of a protagonist becomes a striking and compelling event. For example, the death of Soap McTavish, the protagonist of the *Modern Warfare* (Sledgehammer Games 2009 - 2011) franchise and the Shepard character in the *Mass Effect* (BioWare 2007 - 2012) trilogy, was decried throughout the gaming community, and brought about a change in the narrative closure of the game after its release, which I discuss later in this chapter. In the original version of the game, Shepard is killed in the final scenes, regardless of the choices the player has made throughout the game, an ineluctable death that no amount of ludic skill can prevent. Upon release, players of *Mass Effect* were dissatisfied with the ending created by BioWare, and a campaign was quickly launched urging them to alter it. In a direct interpenetration between gaming and real-world endings, players put pressure on the game designers to change the authored ending to the narrative – thus becoming part of the authorial process. The ending of the game, it was contended, overturned the hours of play and the moral decisions the player had made throughout the game regarding gender, race, tolerance, posthumanism, and sexuality (to name but a few themes in the

game); instead, the game forced a simple ending on the player that did not engage with any of these issues, all of which had been considered important throughout the game. BioWare responded to this pressure by creating and issuing a new portion of the game that expanded on the ending, although the Shepard character still dies. However, the new ending of the game refutes the End⁹⁷ of the earlier version: an epilogue features a non-specific character, the Stargazer, telling a child the story of ‘The Shepard’, who in turn asks for another story. The Stargazer informs the child that there is always time for another story, with storytelling; his presence as an external and omniscient narrator enables an avoidance of the franchise end, and indeed a new *Mass Effect* game is scheduled to be released in 2016, and there are several DLC’s⁹⁸ available that expand the game and its narrative. Some of this content allows the player to step back temporally and to reengage with the narrative. One way that the designers get around the problem of revising the ending is to have Shepard revisit characters and events from the first game in a series of flashbacks. The DLC *Normandy Crash Site* (BioWare 2010) is a primarily non-ludic addition to the diegesis: Shepard explores the wreck of the original *Normandy* (in which she died at the outset of the second game) to erect a memorial for the crew that fell with the ship. The player’s interaction with Shepard here functions as a post-mortem experience of sorts; if the player has completed the three games, Shepard has died, and is repeatedly reincarnated to memorialise her own death. Here there is a clear difference between ludic and narrative death; during the course of a game, it is rare for a character *not* to die as the player *plays* the game (indeed in my playing of the *Mass Effect* trilogy Shepard died hundreds of times). However, narratively the character dies twice: at the beginning of the second game, and the end of

⁹⁷ Defined as the ‘Termination of existence; destruction, abolition’ (OED Online 2015), the capitalised End refers primarily to the destruction of the world, or society as it is understood in *The Sense of an Ending* (Kermode 2000 ed).

⁹⁸ Downloadable content

the third game. Thus, the end (as well as the End) is once again averted; in various ways, Shepard lives on to save the galaxy and its inhabitants. Death, then, is an ending that can both refute and complement ludic and narrative endings.

Sequels

As with other (especially audiovisual) media, franchises not only refute narrative closure, but also offer less financial risk. Videogames require significant financial backing; the 2013 game *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North 2013) cost upwards of £170 million to make, rivalling the cost of some films released during the same year (Brustein 2013). Therefore, a videogame design company needs to create financially viable games, which will both attract investment and see a return for that investment. Frequently, this takes the form of sequels and franchises based on financially proven models, which Activision, the creators of the *Call of Duty* games, acknowledge; in their corporate description, they write that one of their key aims is to ‘focus on development and publishing activities principally for products and content that are, or have the potential to become, franchises with sustainable mass consumer appeal and recognition’ and ‘that the publishing and distribution of products and content based on proven franchises enhances predictability of revenues and the probability of high unit volume sales and operating profits’ (Activision Inc 2013).

Beyond franchises, financial constraints often lead designers to create videogames that conform to the formula of other financially successful games. This results in many games having the same design formula. Within franchises, individual narratives and ludic theme stretch over several games to create a complete ‘game’.

Both the *Assassin's Creed 2* franchise and the *Mass Effect* trilogy feature players controlling a character over three games.

Marking a significant player investment in both the game and narrative, the *Mass Effect* trilogy also sees the player create her own physical representation of the protagonist at the beginning of the first game, with whom she has the ability to continue to interact throughout the trilogy, importing the character from game to game.⁹⁹ The player has the ability to select the gender, race, species, clothing, and even the mental characteristics of the Shepard character, allowing a heightened sense of identification with the character (see Chapter 4), which in turn intensifies player investment in his narrative progression and outcome. *Mass Effect's* first game progresses as most games do: the protagonist engages in a quest, which in this game is to prevent the antagonist, Saren, from conquering the universe with an army of sentient machines called the Geth. The game ends with Shepard discovering Saren to be part of a larger threat to the universe, the Reapers. Up until this point, the game narrative appears to be ended, closure reached, and the questions that an erotetic text poses answered. However, closure is subverted by a new macro-question that can only be answered in a second game and the continuation of the narrative quest past the end of the first game.

As well as refuting narrative closure, the apocalyptic end is also deferred, recalling Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*. Although Shepard defeats the primary antagonist of the game, the survival of the human race is temporary (as is the end of the narrative); Shepard must continue her quest to save the galaxy in the sequel.

Of course, such narrative structures are not unique to videogames and videogames learn them from earlier media. For example, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* not only uses this structure, but also coined the phrase 'Big Bad', adopted by videogame

⁹⁹ The trilogy has the ability to import files from each previous game, to allow the character the player chooses to continue, and for decisions made in earlier games to impact upon later games.

discourse to denote the overarching enemy of a series, and using the ‘monster of the week’¹⁰⁰ structure to indicate the episodic enemy whose defeat aids in the quest to find and destroy the Big Bad, resulting in what can be called the ‘Big End’, as opposed to the smaller endings that are refuted through sequels. In each episode, whether that is in a serial such as *Buffy* or a videogame like *Mass Effect*, the protagonist defers the apocalyptic ending, whilst serving as prequel to the next sequel. The sequel works as a continuation that does not allow final narrative ending; the confrontation with the ultimate antagonist is repeatedly postponed as the protagonist defeats smaller enemies, a proleptic echo of the final confrontation that is always deferred.

Single or Multiple Endings?

Joining deferral, multiple endings also preclude a definitive, final end. Although the single narrative ending is becoming part of the videogame canon, game endings, like literary and filmic endings, can resist single endings. Most videogames offer a variety of endings, and whilst many of these are traditional, in an Aristotelian sense, in that they complete a story, and offer the player narrative (and ludic) closure, *Bioshock* and *Heavy Rain*, for example, offer the player a number of ways to close the game, including traditional happy and tragic endings. Sometimes, such multiplicity happens across sequels, as in the second game in the *Bioshock* franchise, *Bioshock 2*, which takes place eight years after the ending of the first game. In this game, the ‘bad’ ending of the first is discounted; that is, the game presupposes the good ending¹⁰¹, and uses the basic tropes and context of the original game through which to base the second, despite the

¹⁰⁰ This is also known as ‘the villain of the week’ and ‘freak of the week’, depending on the genre and medium.

¹⁰¹ The good ending has Jack return to the surface with the Little Sisters and live out his life with them, as a family. The bad ending sees Jack return to the surface with the Little Sisters, attacking a nuclear submarine to instigate world domination.

lack of narrative continuity (if the player has achieved the bad ending in the first game). However, all of the endings foreground the ergodic elements of the videogame text, including its potential non-linearity, and the pseudo-authorial role of the player.

The single videogame ending should preclude the player from playing even a pseudo- or quasi-authorial role in videogame narratives; however, the difference between ludic endings and narrative endings allows videogame designers to create games whose narrative ending takes place at a different time than the ludic ending, preventing a single end. Differentiating between narrative and ludic endings allows the game designer to elongate a game past its narrative closure, allowing the player the ability to carry on play, sometimes indefinitely, and thereby become quasi-authors of the game after the narrative is finished. Role-playing games and open world games allow the player free movement through a diegesis, and the ability to interact with quests at her leisure, rather than progressing in a linear, temporally fixed fashion. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda 2011), for example, contains over 250 quests and side quests, of which only a small number convey the main narrative storyline. It is possible for the player to focus primarily on the main quest, answering all of the questions the narrative poses, and bringing about closure in the narrative, without engaging many side quests. This does not bring about ludic closure however, which is only achieved following the completion of all the quests and side-quests.

This structure can be carried further in other games where the player herself, as Janet Murray envisaged in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (Murray 1997), is able to author the ludic and narrative parts of games such as *The Sims* (Electronic Arts 2001). *The Sims* is a simplified life simulation program, in which the player creates a protagonist and creates a narrative for that character, which includes his/her relationships, career, eating, and personal hygiene habits. It is, in the prophetic words of Murray, ‘a costume trunk

of empty avatars [and] all of the interactor's possible performances will have been called into being by the originating author' (Murray 1997, 152).

Unlike many games in which designers author the events prior to the game being released, in a simulation such as *The Sims* the authoring process is primarily ludic. By this, I mean that the game designer authors the rules of the game and the player makes use of these rules to create a narrative within the simulation. This includes engineering the conditions to end the game and bring about closure. Of course, the player can simply choose to stop playing, a choice I establish in chapter 6, and a frequent occurrence in videogames, since studies indicate that only 20% of games are completed (Snow 2011). More relevant to my study, however, are the choices that the player makes in her pursuit of ludic and narrative closure. *The Sims* does not have a didactically specified narrative or ludic objective, although there are several that the player can invoke to advance the protagonist's narrative: these include furthering the career of the controlled character and guiding her personal relationships and friendships, as individuals do in life—after all, it is a life simulation. As such, there is a minimal amount of pre-authored narrative content in *The Sims*, although later games do give more prominence to this content; *The Sims: Life Stories* (Aspyr Media, Inc 2007) series allows the player to engage with simulation aspects embedded in the game by the franchise designers, whilst at the same time creating a player authored narrative: for example, being cast on a desert island and trying to escape in *The Sims: Castaway Stories* (Electronic Arts 2009). *The Sims* can offer an infinite variety of endings then, as the player is responsible for choosing the primary objectives and conditions that constitute the end of the game, and also authors the life narrative of the protagonist.

Single endings, in the pure sense of that term, are arguably not possible in videogames, since even when ludic play and narrative cease at the same moment, each

represents a different kind of ending. Videogame endings are becoming less about the termination of a predetermined ludic or narrative event and more about the ability of the player to navigate through a series of different elements of the end, to reach her own conditions of closure. Building upon these player choices, designers are increasingly creating games that contain more than one ending.

Although the single narrative ending is predominant in videogames, multiple endings are common and clearly draw on earlier media such as the *Choose your Own Adventure* series, discussed in Chapter 1. Multiple endings are, by contrast, rather rare in film and seem to derive from games rather than inspire them. The 1985 film *Clue* (Curry 1985), an adaptation of the board game *Cluedo*, filmed four different endings, with cinemas showing one of three versions¹⁰² and the home release including three endings. Upon its theatre release, the intention was for the audience to visit the cinema multiple times—to watch all of the endings. However, the experiment backfired. Director Jonathan Lynn recounts that instead of reengaging with the film through multiple viewings, filmgoers ‘opted for not going to see any of them because they didn’t know which one to go to’ (Akers 2004). DVD and Blu-ray versions select one ending randomly, emulating the original design of the film, and allowing multiple revisitings of the narrative.

Both gaming conventions and technologies render the implementation of a multiple ending easier than in film; as we have seen, different methods of play and various player decisions determine the end rather than a predetermined conclusion determined by an author, film director, or a random DVD algorithm. The multiple ending can be subdivided into several sub-tropes, which include endings based on the game’s morality and ideology (such as good or evil, or order and chaos), known as

¹⁰² The fourth ending was cut from cinematic versions prior to the film’s release.

alignment-based endings, as we saw in Chapter 6's discussion of *Bioshock*. Other games determine the end based on a single instance of choice that the player makes immediately prior to the end, regardless of earlier gameplay; this is known as the last-second ending, illustrated in Chapter 7's examination of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. A third sub-trope is the modular ending, which features a sequence of cut-scenes that bring together the choices the player has made during the game; this is the structure that *Heavy Rain* uses to bring about narrative closure. *Heavy Rain* offers more than 20 cut-scenes as part of its modular ending, as the game brings together all the narrative and ludic elements of the game to create a sense of closure for the characters. Each constituent part is reliant on the choices the player makes on behalf of the characters throughout the game, including whether she has engineered the characters' survival to the end and whether the victim, Shaun Mars, is saved. Each part of the ending is dependent on specific criteria; for example, there are seven possible endings for Ethan Mars's epilogue. Here the quasi-authorial approach is once again made explicit: although the player has been required to make decisions throughout the game, some of these decisions have little or no bearing on the main narrative arc; these are revealed in the ending that the player achieves. Of the seven endings available for Ethan, three see him arrested as the killer and three see him not arrested or cleared of kidnapping his own son, whilst one ending has him killed during the game. Within these endings, three see Shaun die, and four see Ethan die, either within the game itself, or as part of the narrative epilogue. Rather than simply focusing on plot and character intersections leading to narrative conclusions, the endings require the player to consider the consequences of her moral and ethical actions and decisions, as well as her ability to see and understand the plot and characters: as the appendix indicates, if Ethan fails his trials, or if Shaun dies, the consequence is Ethan's suicide; similarly, if no one uncovers

the identity of the killer (or all other characters die before it is revealed), he goes free. A major way in which the game adjudicates consequences is through the deaths of characters; Huaxin Wei writes that ‘if death occurs, subsequent chapters and sequences with the dead character will be automatically removed [...] causing the change of the story trajectory as well as the final ending’ (Wei 2011). In consequence, the death of playable characters becomes a narrative aspect of the game, a deviation from most videogames, in which death has a primarily ludic function and outcome, as we have seen. As with other narratological evolutions in videogames, ludology directs this development; endings depend on the skill and ludic choices of players, not just on interactions between plots and characters. Here, the combination of ludology and narrative—the ludonarrative—brings together diegetic and extradiegetic factors to reach closure.

Alternative Endings

Different endings in videogames are gaining popularity, with some games having two endings, generally a choice between Good and Evil, such as *inFAMOUS* (Sucker Punch Production 2009) and *inFAMOUS 2* (Sucker Punch Productions 2011) in which player actions are collated and become the deciding factor in the games’ ending, rather than the ludic winning or losing structure. Whilst the player is frequently asked to make an ethical choice that is ambiguous: the ending offers an unambiguous binary dichotomy in which only two alternative endings are possible: good or bad. *Bioshock* presents another example, offering two endings, a good, and a bad one,¹⁰³ based on ethical player choices and actions throughout the game, particularly in relation to saving the Little

¹⁰³ The game technically contains three endings, one of which features the same animation and speech as the ‘bad’ ending, but is spoken in a different tone: that of sorrow.

Sisters, as we have seen. Whilst alternative endings are by no means unique to videogames (Ayn Rand's *Night of January 16th* (1963), a theatre production that uses audience participation to determine its ending, allowing audience members to act as a jury deciding whether the person on trial is innocent or guilty comes to mind here).¹⁰⁴ However, the interactive nature of the videogame and the use of software programming to hide the alternatives in electronic media makes the alternative and multiple ending appear less obvious and in some ways more determined, as after a certain point in the game, the choices that players have made leave them with only one possible ending, unless they reload and replay the game making different choices.

Alternate endings not only encourage player (re)involvement and replay, they create continuities between ludic choices and narrative outcomes and between both of these and ideological positions, as we have seen. While the ability to replay games with different outcomes increases game sales and popularity, designing games that require player re-involvement, especially narrative heavy games, is leading to such games being watched rather than played, making narrative predominant over ludic play. The video distribution platform website, *YouTube*, contains thousands of videos of gameplay, uploaded by playing individuals for others to watch. Individuals can not only watch game play by others, but also listen to criticism and commentary on them. As of September 7 2015, Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg, known by the alias PewDiePie, had over thirty-nine million subscribers to his *YouTube* videogame commentary channel. In March 2014, the recording of his playing of *The Last of Us* (Part 1) had had almost 9 million views, whilst sales (excluding second-hand sales) were estimated to be at around six million (Karmali 2014). As of September 7, 2015, the video had had nearly 14 million views. While it is impossible to ascertain whether viewers are also gamers,

¹⁰⁴ The play is a courtroom drama, which focuses on the trial of a young woman with the audience placed in the role of the jury.

the figures make clear that watching game play by others is increasingly popular. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly popular to watch gamers as they play, with professional gamers being treated as ‘legends’ and participating in events across the world that fans watch; the recent Legends of Gaming Live event in London hosted 8 legends as they played each other, with fans paying £22 entry.

Fragmented Narratives and Non-linear Endings

Simon Gottschalk considers that ‘new technological devices such as television sets, Virtual Reality, computers, [...] video-games, and so forth [are] associated by many theorists with the shift from a modern to a postmodern society, culture, and consciousness’ (Gottschalk 1995, 1). As a new interactive technology, the videogame is ideal for the further exploration, expansion, and even transcendence of the modernist tropes of nonlinear, disjointed, and fragmented fiction (Ardis 2002, 101) and the purging ‘of narrative – the presentation of biblical, classical, historical, and other such scenes – which belonged to the literary sphere’ (Bertens 1995, 3). Beyond modernism, postmodern literature rejects ‘a close and clear ending in favour of the open ending in which a reader has a space to participate in the creation of the meaning of a text’ (Kušnir 2011, 33). Videogames carry these tendencies into the context of postmodern technology.

Summarising the structure of the majority of narratives across multiple media, Robert Turner assess that ‘the traditional narrative text starts at page one and continues without break or pause, beyond chapter divisions, until reaching a seemingly inevitable conclusion’ (2005, 495), the fragmented narrative, especially one whose temporality is part of the fragmentation, resists this structure. The reader of such a narrative is placed

in a position of having to interpret it by collating it to bring about emplotment—the ‘transform[ing of a] list or sequence of disconnected events into a unified story with a point or theme’ (Polkinghorne 1991, 141).

Beyond: Two Souls (Quantic Dream 2013) is a videogame whose narrative is fragmented and nonlinear, told from the perspective of a female, Jodie, and divided into twenty-five chapters, which span the majority of Jodie’s childhood and early adulthood. Rather than the narrative following a linear chronological path from childhood to adulthood, however, the narrative is non-chronological, with events from Jodie’s childhood juxtaposed with those in her adult life, often seemingly with no connection to each other and no method of interpreting their interrelations until the end of the game. Upon reaching the close of the game, individual chapters create a chronology that the player can use to piece together Jodie’s narrative retrospectively. To illustrate, the game opens with a chapter entitled *Prologue*, which Figure 44 (a chronological view of the game narrative) shows to be positioned at the end of the game, where it serves as a framing narrative for the game as a whole.



Figure 44: Chronological View of the *Beyond: Two Souls* Narrative

The nonchronological sequencing is represented as the product of the character's brain. During this opening cut-scene, Jodie (Ellen Page) begins the narration by explaining that the events 'are all mixed up in my head. The images, the sounds, the smell. I need to remember, put things in order right up to this moment. Remember who I am' (Quantic Dream 2013). The introductory cut-scene fulfils a twofold objective: it introduces both protagonist and game as a retrospective evaluation of events that she has endured, whilst foregrounding the game as the means of piecing together the chronology of the narrative. From here, the player is taken to an earlier point in the narrative, the chapter 'Broken', approximately two-thirds of the way through the chronology, and to a further cut-scene that introduces the player to Jodie's guardian, Nathan (Willem Dafoe). Another shift to Jodie's childhood, situated near the beginning of the chronology, begins the player's involvement in gaming the narrative.

As the player progresses through the game, chronological gaps are filled in, with protagonist and the player visiting many locations before the game is brought to a close with the chapter titled 'Black Sun', representing events that directly precede the game prologue in the chronology, and bringing the player back to the frame narrative, thus providing a context for it. It is only after this chronology has been pieced together through playing the game that the ending is achievable, and narrative closure can be reached. Here again, the videogame as a medium demonstrates its ability to carry narrative form and consumption beyond their manifestations in other media through ludic interaction and through the interaction between ludology and narratology—through ludonarrative.

Conclusion

Videogame narratives, despite their ability to offer multiple, alternate, and even fragmented endings more easily than other media, are frequently structured to offer a traditional Aristotelian ending: to bring closure to the narrative in a way that will be satisfactory to the player. Yet the ending of a videogame will also need to take into account the need for ludic satisfaction and closure—for example, the defeat of the final enemy and the completion of all the ludic challenges. This is a different kind of satisfaction that requires further study.

We have also seen that, despite frequent conformity to traditional narrative structures, the ends of videogames can subvert such structures, both in terms of characters and narrative forms. Whilst most videogames end with the restoration of order and the protagonist restored through ludic triumph to a happy state, the (final) death of videogame protagonists is relatively rare, by contrast to the frequency of protagonist death in media such as literature, film, theatre, and television. This means that when such a death does occur, it is more shocking. *Fallout 3*, set in a post-apocalyptic America, is an RPG, or roleplaying game, which allows the player to construct a character to her own specifications, which she then controls throughout the game and roam the landscape at will, moulding the protagonist's characteristics as she makes ludic progress. The intense identification between players and protagonists of RPG games and conventions in which RPGs continue without closure, *ad infinitum*, mean that the protagonist's death at the end of the game comes as a shock to the player. Moreover, the death of the protagonist precludes narrative completion and forces narrative closure. Most RPGs allow the main quest to be completed, and then allow the player to complete other quests; the end is deferred until the player has completed as many of sub-quests as she desires, and she can return to them as often as she wishes. In

Fallout 3, such deferral, and revisiting, is prohibited: as the main quest requires the death of the protagonist for its completion,¹⁰⁵ the player is unable to continue play after this, leaving any undiscovered locations, unfinished quests, and uncollected items unknown.

The death of the protagonist further signals the end of the post-apocalyptic society, the end of the End, and restores the world to a post post-apocalyptic state. Again, the end of a videogame raises consider social and ethical issues that extend beyond the game. In this and other similar games, endings encompass more than plot and character closure, offering perspective on the social End—the apocalypse. The interactivity of videogaming, as we have seen, intensifies not only the level of identification that the player has with the diegesis and characters, but continuities between gaming and actual worlds further encourage her to consider her role—the implications of her decisions and actions—in both. Apocalyptic games in particular encourage contemplation on the potential end of civilisation as we know it, and to connect that kind of ending with personal endings through death. Not only are the two facets of videogames, narrative and play, inextricably linked, they create further links to the societies that produce them.

¹⁰⁵ The main quest of *Fallout 3* ends with the player instigating the creation of clean water, which will assist in the renewal of the post-apocalyptic society.

Conclusion

This thesis was undertaken to investigate why the narratives that I could clearly see in videogames as a player were denied, opposed, and ignored by scholars and journalists and set in opposition to their ludic elements. Despite scholars in both narrative and game studies positing a mutual exclusivity between videogames and narrative since the turn of the millennium, there has not been a substantive investigation exploring the relationship in recent years, despite a change in the videogames being created, through the technological changes that have allowed videogames to evolve as a medium. As far back as 2002, Geoffrey Rockwell posited a need for a poetics of videogames, offering

at least four reasons for developing a poetics of computer games: [1] computer games are a significant form of popular entertainment; [2] they are the form in which most people are exposed to hypertext fiction; [3] computer games are important for hypertext theory; and [4] theory can provide the players with the theoretical tools with which to think about critically about the game. (Rockwell 2002, 349).

These points also apply to the videogames that I have studied in this thesis. Yet whilst Game Studies has flourished in my field, there is far less critical literature treating videogames as narratives. Those that have been conducted either focus on specific aspects of narrative, such as the relationship between videogames and film (King and Krzywinska 2000), or on the spatial aspects of videogame play (Nitsche 2008), rather than carrying out a broader application of narrative theory to videogames, as my study has done. Although with new technologies and more complex narratives many are acknowledging the centrality of narrative to videogames, I have met with resistance to

my research from the academic population, although this has diminished as my thesis has progressed.

I began with the hypothesis that videogames can carry narratives as significant and substantial as those in other media and set out to prove it; my research, however, found more than this: that far from being opposed to narrative, ludic elements, in interaction with narrative elements and new technologies, have brought about an evolution in narrative form that goes beyond its forms in other media.. Not only are player reflexes, feelings, senses, and thoughts required for the unfolding of a videogame narrative, their ludic choices, actions, and skills are also essential to the discovery of the narrative. Both narrative and gameplay are dependent on each other for narrative completion and ludic success. Videogames thus require both ludology and narratology (as well as other narrative theories) to understand them; they cannot live by game studies alone. The juxtaposition of narrative and play bring about a new method of narrative delivery, one that places the player at the heart of the game and narrative, and asks her to interpret and understand it from within the narrative itself, making the narrative through play, rather than just observing it.

The first part of the thesis focuses on narratological theories of narrative. It draws on narrative theory from Aristotle to Gerard Genette and more recent scholars to argue that popular mainstream videogames can be subjected to and withstand a classical narratological reading, while showing the limitations of the classic game model developed by Jesper Juul to explicate narrative in videogames or its interaction with ludic play. Far from showing that narrative and ludology are mutually exclusive, my analysis finds the two to be inextricable and interdependent on each other in many games. This finding extends from playing to scholarship: studying narrative in videogames is essential to understanding them as games.

My interrogation of Assassin's Creed 2's (Ubisoft Games 2007 - 2011) narrative structure demonstrates that even a mainstream popular videogame such as adheres, to and withstands, a narratological reading using Genette's theory of temporality in *Narrative Discourse* (1980), and that such a study reveals flaws in Juul's arguments about time in *Half Real* (Juul 2005). Videogames no longer rely on a supposition that they take place in real time, as Juul argues; moreover, my analysis shows that the temporal structures of some videogames offer a more multifaceted use of time than is found in other media.

The formal narrative analysis continues with a change in focus from time to space, and the use of the environment as a narrative carrier. Videogames require spatial ludic exploration of the gameworld environment to discover narrative elements; such exploration of environments enable a narrative depth and complexity and establish a time-space continuum that Genette's narratological model cannot explicate, based as it is in older media.

My study of identity and identification begins with a narratological focus, interrogating the way that narrative points of view construct, mediate, and even refigure identification between players and characters in a videogame. Here again, I show that not only do videogames adhere to narrative structures in other media, but that their combination of ludic and narrative elements enable new points of view and new kinds of narrative identification that carry them beyond the narrative structures found in other media. Building on the concept of narrative agency and interactivity addressed in the previous chapters, this chapter finds that gaming intensifies player identification as and with the protagonist that she plays. For all the complex and multi-faceted narratological categories of points of view and modes of identification, studies of videogame identification require new ones. My thesis proposes a decentred perspective that allows

for more intense identification between player and protagonist, while still providing some separation of them. Comparing the game *Tomb Raider* to the franchises manifestation in literary and film forms provides a case study arguing and clarifying both the videogame's continuities with and departures from older media forms.

My thesis examines not only formal and phenomenological narrative theories but also cultural and ideological ones, which are equally changing under the interactive features of videogames. Here too, my research finds that videogame narratives can be as complex as those in other media, and also bring about evolution through technology and interactivity. However, my research also finds that philosophically and ideologically, videogame narratives are often regressive and reactionary.

It is well documented that exposure to narratives in forms such as film and literature affect consumers psychologically and ideologically. Tragedies and comedies have long been known to elicit an emotional response, but it is also accepted that other emotional responses can be triggered through interaction with fiction: fear, anticipation, sexual arousal, and grief are all found in fiction. 'Works of fiction arouse emotions' writes Christopher New in *Philosophy of Literature: An Introduction* and 'it is fictional characters and events that are the objects or the source of those reactions' (New 1999, 53). This is an arena that videogames not only enter, but also modify, as I demonstrate in the second part of the thesis, which examines ethical, psychological, philosophical, and political narratives. The section begins by highlighting links between narratology and theories of narrative ideology in twenty-first century game design. Interactivity not only intensifies player identification with the identity and narrative goals of the protagonists they play, but also with their ideologies and psychologies.

My thesis finds that not only formal but also cultural aspects of narrative are being changed by the ludic features of videogames. Here too videogame narratives can

be as complex as those in other media, and also bring about evolution in their consumption through gameplay. However, if narrative forms have gone beyond narrative forms in other media, narrative content is often regressive and behindhand in narrative content, promoting binary oppositions long deconstructed in other media, and various –isms widely opposed in humanities academia (sexism, heterosexism, nationalism, racism, etc.). Since these aspects of videogame narrative have been widely critiqued, my chapters focus more on places where ideological narrative in videogames does not regress, but where it pushes against regression.

For example, playing characters unlike oneself fosters different kinds of understanding of through interactivity, allowing players to become more aware of other points of view when imaginative identification with a character becomes imaginative playing and acting as that character. Conversely, some videogame designers are creating critical distance between players and protagonists through characters who comment self-reflexively on their own construction and highlight the methods that games use to engage players, as my case study of the videogame *Spec Ops: The Line* attests. Here intertextual relationships between videogames, film, and literature in the game design question the legitimacy of violent ludic structures in mainstream games. In these and other ways, videogames can be used to instigate questions and discussion about game form and content.

As we have seen, choice is central to ludic play. It is also central to social action. In some games, choice is used not only to vary narrative and ludic lines but also to raise moral, ethical, and aesthetic choices for the player, choices that often correspond to issues in the player's own society. The second part of the thesis enters into a growing body of work that addresses ethical and ideological concerns in videogames. My findings agree with scholars such as Ian Bogost (2008) and Miguel

Sicart (2009) that videogames are capable of carrying a message that can teach a player, and that can cause a player to question her actions in the real world, based on the actions she makes in a game world.

Choices also allow players to be quasi-authors of the videogame narrative in which they are also actors, as they are in the social world, as my analysis of the videogame *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007), which adapts the 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand 2007), illustrates. The game not only adapts, it also critiques the novel and requires the player to critique both game and novel and set them in dialogue. Case studies of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Montreal 2011) and *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010) further examine how choices, both ludic and narrative, are implicated in ethical and social ideologies, and call players to consider the weight of their actions as characters in the worlds of the games, as well as their own worlds.

The final chapter brings together formal, psychological, and ideological narrative theories in a study of videogame narrative endings, whether those character endings we call death or the plot and ludic arcs that signal the completion of the game. The multiple lives of played characters undermine theories that make protagonist death a tragedy but at the same time make a final death of such a character a more tragic shock. The ludonarrative nature of videogames brings with it a need for ludic and narrative endings which may bring a heightened sense of closure, in which narrative and play are inseparable in some games, while in others, it can create a rupture between them, as in games where the player rejoices over ludic success while mourning a tragic narrative ending. The need to make games replayable has fostered the design of multiple narratives and endings; the desire to build on a successful franchise has resulted in sequels and prequels. Considering several endings that can be found in videogames, I juxtapose the technological abilities that enables and can even require a

diversity of endings, with the conservative endings that are found across many videogames.

Limitations of the Thesis

In order to make larger points and trace larger arcs, I have had to forgo the detailed systematic analyses of narratology. In order to keep my focus on interactions between narrative and play, I have had to forgo detailed analysis of ideological narratives.

For example, in seeking to prove that videogames withstand the scrutiny of the most complex of narratological models, with their numerous categories, sub-categories and sub-sub-categories (etc.), I did not consider it necessary to apply every aspect of Genette's narrative theory to videogames to make that point. A full application of Genette's theory to videogames would require many books, as would a full application of narrative theories concerning identity, identification, sexuality, gender, politics, ethics, and the other topics that this thesis touches upon. This thesis is meant to be a starting point for future study by myself, and other narrative scholars, not a final end point.

My sampling of games has also been relatively small, as such analysis requires a primary playing experience, a process that can require 100 or more hours per game. Where narratives and endings vary, this has required multiple replays. I opted for a detailed knowledge of the games used as case studies rather than a slight knowledge of more games. Using the same games across chapters in some cases, I believe, helped to strengthen the continuity of chapters and deepen the analysis to offset the wider range of narrative issues addressed.

Future Study

Not only does this thesis leave aspects unexplored, requiring future studies, but videogames are also a constantly changing medium, subject to fast-moving and radical changes in technology. Even in the time I have been researching and writing this project, there have been technological and narrative innovations that have changed my perceptions of videogames and their narrative abilities. Therefore, the narrative scholar who chooses to focus on videogames must keep abreast of the latest innovations and advances and be prepared to have them change her thinking and arguments in future.

Further studies of narrative in videogames are potentially endless, not just because there will be future change, but even amid the games we already have available. Narrative Studies is a wide domain, involving many theories, topics, and methodologies; by contrast, videogames are understudied in the humanities by comparison to narrative media such as literature, film, theatre, and television. Since videogames are played by millions of people and changing the way in which we and they consume narrative in the twenty-first century, shouldn't we be looking at what they are telling us, and how, as much as, and perhaps even more than we do with books and films?

Bibliography

- Aarseth, E. "Computer Game Studies, Year One." In *Game Studies*. 2001.
www.gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html (accessed March 20th, 2012).
- . *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Aarseth, Espen. "Allegories of Space: The Question of Spatiality in Computer Games." In *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism: The Next Level*, by Friedrich von Borries, Steffen, P Walz and Matthias Bottger, 152-171. Berlin: Birkhauser Verlag AG, 2007.
- Abbott, Michael. "Drake's Serial Adventure." *Brainy Gmaer*. 06 June 2009.
http://www.brainygamer.com/the_brainy_gamer/2009/06/drakes-serial-adventure.html (accessed November 18, 2013).
- Absolutist. *How to play tetris game*. 2013. http://absolutist.com/tetris/play_game.html (accessed May 17, 2013).
- Activision Inc. "Company Background." *Activision.com*. 2013.
<http://investor.activision.com/background.cfm> (accessed February 15, 2014).
- Adams, R. *The Colossal Cave Adventure Page*. no date.
<http://www.rickadams.org/adventure/index.html> (accessed April 27, 2012).
- Akers, Michael. *Transcript of Question/Answer Session with Jonathan Lynn*. 16 October 2004.
<http://www.theartofmurder.com/table/stage/lynnqa/lynnqa.html> (accessed March 31, 2014).
- Alexander, John. *Televersions: Narrative Structure in Television*. InterMedia Publications, 1995.
- Alighieri, A. *The Divine Comedy*. London: Arcturus Publishing, 1472.
- Allison, F. *The Game Narrative Triangle*. 12 July 2010. <http://redkingsdream.com/2010/07/the-game-narrative-triangle/> (accessed June 11, 2012).
- AMC Networks. "The Walking Dead." AMC Networks, 2010 - Present .
- Andersen, Kirsten. *The Number of US Children Living in Single-Parent Homes has Nearly Doubled in 50 Years: Census Data*. 04 January 2013.
<http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/the-number-of-children-living-in-single-parent-homes-has-nearly-doubled-in/> (accessed October 08, 2013).
- Andreas, Kapardis. *Psychology and Law: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

- Ardévol, Elisanda, Antoni Roig, Gemma San Cornelio, Ruth Pagès, and Pau Alsina. *Game pleasures and media practices*. 2006. http://www.media-anthropology.net/ardevol_etal_gamepleasures.pdf (accessed December 17, 2013).
- Ardis, Ann L. *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922*. Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Project Gutenberg Ebook, 03 November 2008.
- Arthur, Charles. "PlayStation Network users fear identity theft after major data leak." *The Guardian*. 27 April 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/apr/27/playstation-users-identity-theft-data-leak> (accessed November 02, 2013).
- Asimov, Isaac. *Robot Series*. Various: Various, 1939-2011.
- Associated Press. "Ashley Madison Adultery Website Faces \$578m Class Action Over Data reach." *theguardian.com*. 22 August 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/aug/22/adultery-website-ashley-madison-faces-578m-class-action-over-data-breach> (accessed August 22, 2015).
- Atkins, Barry. *More Than a Game: The Computer Game as Fictional Form*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- Ayn Rand Institute. *A Brief Biography of Ayn Rand*. 2013. http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_ayn_rand_aynrand_biography (accessed September 12, 2013).
- . "Frequently Asked Questions." *Ayn Rand Institute*. 2013. http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=faq_index#obj_q6 (accessed August 19, 2013).
- . "Introducing Objectivism." *Ayn Rand Institute*. 1962. http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism_intro (accessed August 21, 2013).
- Baker, Lynne Rudder. "Philosophy in Mediis Rebus." *Metaphilosophy* 32, 2001: 378-394.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- . *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- Baranowski, Tom, Richard Buday, and Janice Baranowski. "Playing for Real: Video Games and Stories for Health-Related Behaviour Change." *US National Library of Medicine*. January 2008. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2189579/> (accessed October 12, 2013).

- Barrett, Martyn, and Bruna Zani. *Political and Civic Engagement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Hove: Routledge, 2015.
- Barthes, Roland. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." In *A Roland Barthes Reader*, by Susan (ed) Sontag, 251 - 295. London: Vintage, 1993.
- Un Chien Andaluo*. Directed by Luis Bunuel. Performed by Pierre Batcheff and Simone Mareuil. 1929.
- Bates, Catherine. "Love and Courtship." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, by Alexander (ed) Leggatt, 102-122. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Bayer-Berenbaum, L. *The Gothic Imagination*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982.
- BBC. *Horizon: Are Video Games Really That Bad?* London: BBC, 16 September 2015.
- Beck, Victoria Simpson, Stephanie Boys, Rose Christopher, and Eric Beck. "Violence Against Women in Video Games: A Prequel or Sequel to Rape Myth Acceptance?" *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2012: <http://jiv.sagepub.com/content/27/15/3016>.
- Beirne, Stephen. "Goodbye, Cruel Will: Determinism in Videogames." *Destructoid.com*. 11 January 2012. <http://www.destructoid.com/goodbye-cruel-will-determinism-in-videogames-237529.phtml> (accessed September 12, 2013).
- Belifiore, Elizabeth. "Pleasure, Tragedy and Aristotelian Psychology." *The Classical Quarterly*, 1985: 349-361.
- Bennet, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literary Criticism and Theory (4th Edition)*. Harlow: Longman, 2009.
- Berger, Arthur Asa. *Video Games: A Popular Culture Phenomenon*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2002.
- Bertens, Hans. *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Biessener, Adam. *Dear Esther: In Depth Interview*. 17 April 2011. http://www.gameinformer.com/games/dear_esther/b/pc/archive/2011/04/17/in-depth-q-amp-a-with-creator-dr-dan-pinchbeck.aspx (accessed May 30, 2013).
- Binswanger, Harry. "Femininity." *Aynrandlexicon.com*. 2015. <http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/femininity.html> (accessed September 23, 2015).
- Bluestone, G. *Novels into Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
- Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2007.

- . "Persuasive Games: The Picnic Spoils the Rain." *Gamasutra*. 06 May 2010. http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/132800/persuasive_games_the_picnic_.php?print=1 (accessed November 26, 2013).
- Bogost, Ian. "The Rhetoric of Videogames." In *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, by Katie Salen, 117-140. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008.
- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction (Eighth Edition)*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.
- Bossche, Andrew Vanden. "Analysis: Would You Kindly? BioShock And Free Will." *Gamasutra.com*. 18 August 2009. http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=24822 (accessed September 12, 2013).
- Bostrom, Nick. "Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up." *Nickbostrom.com*. 2006. <http://www.nickbostrom.com/posthuman.pdf> (accessed July 22, 2015).
- Bouton, Mark E. *Learning and Behaviour: A Contemporary Synthesis*. Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 2007.
- Breger, Claudia. "Digital Digs, or Lara Croft Replying Indiana Jones." *Aether the Journal of Media Geography*, 2008: 41-60.
- Bremond, Claude. *Logic of the Story*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973.
- Bridgeman, Teresa. "Time and Space." In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, by David Herman, 52-66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Brown, Alistair. "Guest Blog: Are Video Games Literature?" *Interestingliterature.com*. 20 August 2013. <http://interestingliterature.com/2013/08/20/guest-blog-are-video-games-literature/> (accessed August 12, 2014).
- Brown, Harry J. *Videogames and Education*. New York: M E Sharpe, 2008.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C Levinson. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Brustein, Joshua. *Grand Theft Auto V Is the Most Expensive Game Ever—and It's Almost Obsolete*. 18 September 2013. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-09-18/grand-theft-auto-v-is-the-most-expensive-game-ever-and-it-s-almost-obsolete> (accessed February 15, 2014).
- Buckles, MA. *Interactive Fiction: The Computer Storygame 'Adventure'*. PhD Thesis, Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1985.

- Bucktin, Christopher. "Washington Navy Yard gunman Aaron Alexis heard 'voices in head' after playing violent video games up to 18 hours a day." *The Mirror*. 18 September 2013. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/washington-navy-yard-gunman-aaron-2280976> (accessed October 12, 2013).
- Burns, Robert P. "On the Foundations and Nature of Morality." *Law.Harvard.edu*. January 2008. http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/jlpp/Vol31_No1_Burnsonline.pdf (accessed October 12, 2013).
- Butler, Erik. *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010.
- Butts, Steve. "Ethics Without a Net." *The Escapist*. 31 May 2011. http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue_308/8908-Ethics-Without-a-Net.2 (accessed October 12, 2013).
- Byron, G G. *Don Juan*. 2007 edition.
- Calleja, Gordon. *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.
- Campbell, Lisa. "Lara Croft signs up for Lucozade." *marketingmagazine.co.uk*. 22 April 1999. <http://www.marketingmagazine.co.uk/article/61474/lara-croft-signs-lucozade-rsquo-pounds-25m-push> (accessed July 10, 2015).
- Cloverfield*. Directed by Matt Reeves. Performed by Lizzy Caplan. 2008.
- Carroll, Noel. "Narrative Closure." *Philosophical Studies*, 2007: 1-15.
- Chang, Stewart. "Zombie Stripper Geishas in the New Global Economy: Racism and Sexism in Video Game Content." In *Game On, Hollywood! Essays on the Intersection of Video Games and Cinema*, by Gretchen Papazian and Joseph Michael Sommers, 129-. Jefferson: McFarland, 2013.
- Cirlot, Juan-Eduardo. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. New York: Dover Publications, 2002.
- Clarke, Arthur C. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. London: Orbit, 1968.
- Cohen, Jonathan. "Defining Identification: A Theoretical Look at the Identification of Audiences with Media Characters." in *Mass Communication and Society*, 2001: 245-264.
- Colman, Felicity. *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014.
- Connor, Steve. "A sensational breakthrough: the first bionic hand that can feel." *The Independent*. 17 February 2013. <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/a-sensational-breakthrough-the-first-bionic-hand-that-can-feel-8498622.html> (accessed October 01, 2013).
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1990.

- Apocalypse Now*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Performed by Marlon Brando 1979.
- Crawford, C. *Chris Crawford on Interactive Storytelling*. Berkeley: New Riders Games, 2005.
- Cupchik, G C. "The Evolution of Psychical Distance as an Aesthetic Concept." *Culture and Psychology*, 2002: 155-187.
- Clue*. Directed by Jonathan Lynn. Performed by Tim Curry. 1985.
- Deen, Menno, Ben Schouten, and Tilde Bekker. "Playful Identity in Game Design and Open Ended Play." In *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*, 111-130. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema II*. London: Continuum, 2005.
- DeSouzza, Clyde. *h+*. 06 June 2013. <http://hplusmagazine.com/2013/06/06/4-ways-google-glass-makes-us-transhuman/> (accessed October 03, 2013).
- Deus Ex Wiki. "Deus Ex beta release." *Deus Ex Wiki*. 2013. http://deusex.wikia.com/wiki/Deus_Ex_beta_release (accessed October 05, 2013).
- Diener, Paul W. *Religion and Morality: An Introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 1997.
- Dill, Karen E. "The Influence of Video Games on Youth:." *OECD.org*. 2007. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/39414891.pdf> (accessed August 12, 2014).
- . "Violent Videogames can Increase Aggression." *American Psychology Association*. 23 April 2000. <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2000/04/video-games.aspx> (accessed October 12, 2013).
- The Blair Witch Project*. Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez. Performed by Heather Donahue. 1999.
- Donovan, T. *Replay: The History of Video Games*. Lewes: Yellow Ant, 2010.
- Dunning, Jason. "Activision: *Call of Duty* Franchise Passes \$11 Billion in Revenue, Destiny has Over 16 Million Users." *PlayStationLifeStyle.net*. 06 February 2015. <http://www.playstationlifestyle.net/2015/02/06/activision-call-duty-franchise-passes-11-billion-revenue-destiny-16-million-users/> (accessed March 24, 2015).
- Dyer, Mitch. "The Story Secrets of *Spec Ops: The Line*." *IGN*. 20 July 2012. <http://uk.ign.com/articles/2012/07/20/the-story-secrets-of-spec-ops-the-line> (accessed January 28, 2014).
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, and Joans Heide Smith. "Playing with Fire: How do Computer Games Affect the Player." September 2003.

http://resources.eun.org/insafe/datorspel_Playing_with.pdf (accessed October 13, 2013).

Engelhardt, Christopher R., Bruce D. Bartholow, Geoffrey T. Kerr, and Brad J. Bushman. "This Is Your Brain On Violent Video Games: Neural Desensitization To Violence Predicts Increased Aggression Following Violent Video Game Exposure." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2011: 1033-1036.

Eskelinen, M. "The Gaming Situation." *Game Studies*. 2001.
<https://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/> (accessed March 19, 2012).

Facepunch.com. *Did Anybody Actually Notice the Would You Kindly's in Bioshock*. 05 August 2009. <http://facepunch.com/showthread.php?t=786692> (accessed September 12, 2013).

Fagerholt, Erik, and Loerntzon, Magnus. *Beyond the HUD User Interfaces for Increased Player Immersion in FPS Games*. Masters Thesis, Göteborg, 2009

Farrow, Robert, and Ioanna Iacovides. 'In the Game'? *Embodied Subjectivity in Gaming Environments*. January 2012. http://oro.open.ac.uk/33357/1/82-Farrow-Iacovides_FINAL.pdf (accessed January 1, 2015).

Ferguson, Christopher J. "Violent Video Games and the Supreme Court." *American Psychologist*, 2013: 57-74.

Firmin, Michael, W, Janine, M Helmick, Brian A Iezzi, and Aaron Vaughn. "Say Please: The Effect of the Word "Please" in Compliance Seeking Requests." *Social Behaviour and Personality*, 2004, 32 (1): 67-72.

Flikschuh, Katrin. *Freedom*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

Forensic Architecture. "Investigations: White Phosphorus." *Forensic Architecture*. 17 January 2009. <http://www.forensic-architecture.org/investigations/white-phosphorus/> (accessed January 27, 2014).

Frasca, G. "Ludology Meets Narratology." *Ludology.org*. 1999.
<http://www.ludology.org/articles/ludology.htm> (accessed April 2011).

—. *Play The Message*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished, 2007.
http://www.powerfulrobot.com/Frasca_Play_the_Message_PhD.pdf (Accessed September 23, 2015)

—. "Simulation versus Narrative." In *The Video Game Theory Reader*, by MJ Wolf and B Perron, 221-235. London: Routledge, 2003.

Frattei, Timothy, Douglas Griesbach, Jonathan Leith, and Timothy Shaffer. *Replayability of Video Games*. 2011.

- Friedmann, Anthony. *Writing for Visual Media*. Abingdon: Focal Press, 2006.
- Fuller, Brian. *Bioshock Script*. 2007.
- Gallelli, R, and R D Fanelli. "Game and Narration. Identity Formation and Identity De-Construction." *International Journal for Cross Disciplinary Subjects in Education*, 2010: 105-109.
- Gazzard, Alison. *Paths, Players, Places: Towards an Understanding of Mazes and Spaces in Videogames*. PhD Thesis, Hatfield: Herts.ac.uk, 2009.
- Genette, G. "Introduction to the Paratext." *New Literary History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, *Probings: Art, Criticism, Genre*, 1991: 261 - 272.
- . *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- . "Boundaries of Narrative." *New Literary History*, 1976: 1-13.
- . *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Geraci, Robert M. "Videogames and the Transhuman Inclination." *Academia.edu*. December 2012.
http://www.academia.edu/2283059/Video_Games_and_the_Transhuman_Inclination
 (accessed October 07, 2013).
- Giannetti, L. *Understanding Movies (Eighth Edition)*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1999.
- Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005.
- Gordon, Philip. *Data Mining: Predicting Tipping Points*. Woodside, CA: MDG-Consultants.com, 2013.
- Gottschalk, Simon. "Videology: Video-Games as Postmodern Sights/Sites of Ideological Reproduction." *Academia.edu*. 1995.
https://www.academia.edu/3499503/VIDEOLOGY_-_VIDEO_GAMES_AS_POSTMODERN_SIGHTS_SITES_OF_IDEOLOGICAL_REPRODUCTION
 (accessed January 27, 2014).
- Grey, Sarah. "Dissonance and Dystopia: Fallout 3 and Philosophy Amidst the Ashes." *The Philosophy of Computer Games Conference*. Oslo, 2009.
- Harold, James. "Mixed Feelings: Conflicts in Emotional Responses to Film." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 2010: 280-294.
- Harper, Willie. *Gamer PewDiePie Earns Millions Playing Video Games on YouTube!* 19 March 2014. <http://www.gizmocrave.com/30605-gamer-pewdiepie-earns-millions-playing-video-games-on-youtube/> (accessed March 19, 2014).

- Hartley, John. *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.
- Hartman, Michael. "Gaming and Its Affectation for Empowerment Fantasies." *Altered Gamer*. 17 April 2012. <http://www.alteredgamer.com/gaming/66335-and-its-affectation-for-empowerment-fantasies/> (accessed January 26, 2014).
- Hayle, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Henniger, Nicole E, and Christine, R Harris. "Can Negative Social Emotions have Positive Consequences?" In *The Positive Side of Negative Emotions*, by W Gerrod Parrott, 76-100. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2014.
- Herman, Luc, and Bart Vervaeck. "Ideology and Narrative Fiction." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. 30 September 2013. <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/ideology-and-narrative-fiction> (accessed December 29, 2014).
- Hinkson, Jake. "Through the Camera's Eye." *Film Noir Foundation*. 2011. <http://filmnoirfoundation.org/sentinel-article/NoirCity-emag-Camera.pdf> (accessed May 17, 2013).
- Hocking, Clint. *Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock*. 07 October 2007. http://clicknothing.typepad.com/click_nothing/2007/10/ludonarrative-d.html (accessed September 12, 2013).
- Hodgson, David S J. *Alan Wake Survival Guide*. Roseville: Prima Games, 2010.
- Howells, Sacha A. "Watching a Game, Playing a Movie: When Media Collide." In *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, by Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, 110-121. London: Wallflower Press, 2002.
- Howson, Greg. "Lara's Creator Speaks." *The Guardian*. 18 April 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/gamesblog/2006/apr/18/larascreators1> (accessed May 21, 2013).
- Houghton, David. "Heavy Rain's BIG plot-holes" Gamesradar.com. 25 February 2010. <http://www.gamesradar.com/heavy-rains-big-plot-holes/> (Accessed September 23, 2015)
- Huber, Werner, Martin Middeke, and Hubert Zapf. *Self-reflexivity in Literature*. Wiesbaden: Konigshausen & Neumann, 2005.
- Huffinton Post. "The Sun' Mixes Up 'Sarif Industries' (From 'Deus Ex') With Real Company, Credits It For Cybernetic Eyeball." *Huffington Post*. 16 October 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/10/16/sarif-industries-the-sun_n_4108549.html (accessed November 29, 2013).
- Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens*. London: Routledge, 1938.

- Humanityplus. "What is Transhumanism." *humanityplus.org*. n.d.
http://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-faq/#answer_19 (accessed July 22, 2015).
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. London: Vintage Books, 1932.
- IGN. "Tomb Raider." *IGN*. 13 December 1996. <http://uk.ign.com/articles/1996/12/14/tomb-raider-5> (accessed May 17, 2013).
- IMDB. "FAQ for Heavy Rain." *IMDB*. 2012. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1606610/faq> (accessed October 08, 2013).
- International Arcade Museum. *Museum of the Game* 2015. <http://www.arcade-museum.com/> (Accessed September 23, 2015)
- Iverson, Sara Mosberg. "In the Double Grip of the Game: Challenge and Fallout 3." *Game Studies*. December 2012.
http://gamestudies.org/1202/articles/in_the_double_grip_of_the_game (accessed April 18, 2014).
- Jansz, J, and R G Martis. "The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters." *Sex Roles*: 56, 2007: 141-148.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Game Design as Narrative Architecture." In *First-person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, 120-130. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.
- . "Video Games Myths Revisited: New Pew Study Tells Us About Games and Youth." *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*. 03 October 2008.
http://henryjenkins.org/2008/10/video_games_myths_revisited_ne.html (accessed August 12, 2014).
- Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. Directed by Simon West. Performed by Angelina Jolie. 2001.
- Jones, Amelia. *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.
- Joyce, Michael. *Afternoon, A Story*. 1987.
<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/pmaf/hypertext/aft/> (accessed May 06, 2013).
- Juul, J. *A Clash Between Game and Narrative*. Masters Thesis, Copenhagen, 1999.
- . *Games Telling Stories?* July 2001. <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/> (accessed March 19, 2012).

- . *Half Real: Videogames Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005.
- Karmali, Luke. *Sony Reveals The Last of Us Sales Figures*. 15 March 2014. <http://ap.ign.com/en/news/11763/sony-reveals-the-last-of-us-sales-figures> (accessed March 19, 2014).
- Kelly, Tadhg. "What Games Are." *EDGE*, 2 September 2011: 143.
- Kendal, N. "David Cage: The Full Interview." *Times Online*. 2010. http://technology.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/tech_and_web/article7032477.ece (accessed August 28, 2011).
- Kennedy, Helen W. "Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?" *Game Studies*. December 2002. <http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/> (accessed May 17, 2013).
- Keogh, Brendan. *Killing is Harmless: A critical Reading of Spec Ops: The Line*. Marden Australia: Stolen Projects, 2012.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 ed.
- Khaled, Fazia. *Tomb Raider Study*. Masters Thesis, 2010.
- Kindt, Tom, and Hans-Harald Muller. "Preface." In *What is Narratology?*, by Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Muller, v-vii. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003.
- King, Geoff, and Tanya Krzywinska. *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace*. London: Wallflower Press, 2000.
- King, Geoff, and Tanya Krzywinska. *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: Video Games in the 21st Century*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2005.
- Kirkland, Ewan. "Maternal Engulfment in Horror Videogames." *Video Games Cultures and Future Interactive Entertainment*. 2010. www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Kirkland-paper.pdf.
- . "Racial Whiteness in Silent Hill." *Inter-Disciplinary.net*. June 2010. <https://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/kirklandpaper.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2015).
- Kirkman, Robert, and Moore, Tony. *The Walking Dead*. Berkeley, CA: Image Comics (2003 – Present)
- Kirschner, Friedrich. "From Games to Movies: Machinima and Modifications." *ETC Press*. 20 December 2012. <http://www.etc.cmu.edu/etcpres/content/games-movies-machinima-and-modifications> (accessed May 17, 2013).

- Kiss, Miklós. "Narrative Metalepsis as Diegetic Concept in Christopher Nolan's *Inception*." *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 2012: 35-54.
- kiwiatlarge. "Looking back on the clues earlier in the game indicating the Origami Killer." *community.eu.playstation.com*. 03 December 2010.
<http://community.eu.playstation.com/t5/Heavy-Rain/Looking-back-on-the-clues-earlier-in-the-game-indicating-the/td-p/10392342> (accessed May 21, 2013).
- Krzywinska, Tanya, MacCallum-Stewart, Esther and Parsler, Justin. *Ring Bearers: The Lord of the Rings Online as Intertextual Narrative*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011
- Kubinski, Poitr. "Unreliable Narrator in *Call of Juarez: Gunslinger*." *6th Global Conference: Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment*. Oxford: Forthcoming, 2014.
- Kušnír, Jaroslav. *Postmodernism in American and Australian fiction*. Prešov: Electronic Source, 2011.
- Laurel, B. *Computers as Theatre*. Wokingham: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1991.
- Lejacq, Yannick. "Tomb Raider Writer Rhianna Pratchett on Creating 'men with boobs' and writing a vulnerable Lara Croft." *Kill Screen*. 19 March 2013.
<http://www.killscreendaily.com/articles/interviews/tomb-raider-writer-rhianna-pratchett-creating-men-boobs-and-writing-vulnerable-lara-croft/> (accessed May 21, 2013).
- Lim, Lin Lean (ed). *The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia*. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1998.
- Lothe, Jakob. *Narrative and Fiction in Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Lowensohn, Josh. "Apple Q4 2014 Earnings." *The Verge*. 20 October 2014.
<http://www.theverge.com/2014/10/20/7022335/apple-q4-2014-earnings> (accessed August 10, 2015).
- MacAndrew, Elizabeth. *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
- The Six Million Dollar Man*. Directed by Dick et al Moder. Performed by Lee Majors. 1974-1978.
- Makuch, Eddie. "Assassin's Creed: Revelations Ships 7 Million." *Gamespot*. 15 February 2012.
<http://www.gamespot.com/articles/assassins-creed-revelations-ships-7-million/1100-6350453/> (accessed September 23, 2015).
- Mar, Raymond A, Keith Oatley, Maja Djikic, and Justin Mullin. "Emotion and Narrative Fiction: Interactive Influences, Before, During, and After Reading." *Cognition and Emotion*, 2010: 818-833.

- Marusic, Jera. "Poetry as Mimesis in Aristotles Poetics." *Academia.edu*. 2009.
http://www.academia.edu/364685/Poetry_as_mimesis_in_Aristotles_Poetics
 (accessed May 19, 2013).
- Mateas, Michael, and Andrew Stern. "Build it to Understand it: Ludology Meets Narratology in Game Design Space". *UCSC.edu*. 2005.
<http://users.soe.ucsc.edu/~michaelm/publications/mateas-digra2005.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2014).
- Matthews, Devin. "An Analysis of Transhumanism in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*." *www.scribd.com*. 17 April 2012. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/90301385/An-Analysis-of-Transhumanism-in-Deus-Ex-Human-Revolution-Evolving-Technologies-Test-Traditional-Ethics> (accessed October 1, 2013).
- Mayak, Malathi. "*Grand Theft Auto V* sales zoom past \$1 billion mark in 3 days." *Reuters.com*. 20 September 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/20/entertainment-us-taketwo-gta-idUSBRE98J00820130920> (accessed October 12, 2013).
- McCarthy, Angela, Travis Yates, and Yusup Martyastiadi. "Analysis and Critique of Visual Representation: *Fallout 3*." *Ultimart*, 2011: 97-106.
- McGonigal, J. *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. London: Jonathon Cape, 2011.
- McWhertor, Michael. "How *Deus Ex 3*'s Cyber Renaissance Averted A Puffy Pants Disaster." *Kotaku.com*. 12 March 2010. <http://kotaku.com/5491544/how-deus-ex-3s-cyber-renaissance-averted-a-puffy-pants-disaster> (accessed October 14, 2013).
- Mellamphy, Deborah. "Dead Eye: The Spectacle of Torture Porn in *Dead Rising*." In *Game On, Hollywood!: Essays on the Intersection of Videogames and Cinema*, by Gretchen Papazian and Joseph Michael Sommers, 35-46. Jefferson: McFarland & Co Inc, 2013.
- Meltzer, Tom. "Lara Croft: the reinvention of a sex symbol." *The Guardian*. 04 March 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2013/mar/04/lara-croft-reinvention-of-sex-symbol#> (accessed May 17, 2013).
- metalheadjake12. "Why ___ Being the Origami Killer Doesn't Work." *Gamefaqs.com*. 2010. <http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/933123-heavy-rain/54234556> (accessed July 22, 2015).
- Mick, Jason. "IDC: 2014 Sales Show PC Isn't Dead." *Daily Tech*. 19 January 2015. <http://www.dailytech.com/IDC+2014+Sales+Show+PC+Isnt+Dead+But+Desktop+May+be+Dying/article37087.htm> (accessed August 10, 2015).
- Mikula, Maja. "Gender and Videogames: The Political Valency of Lara Croft." *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 2003.

- Monaco, James. *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- The Lady in the Lake*. Directed by Robert Montgomery. Performed by Robert Montgomery. 1947.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, by Patricia Erens, 28-40. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Munkittrick, Kyle. "'I Would Hope That Saner Minds Would Prevail' *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* Lead Writer Mary DeMarle on the Ethics of Transhumanism." *DiscoverMagazine.com*. 12 August 2011.
<http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/sciencenotfiction/2011/08/12/i-would-hope-that-saner-minds-would-prevail-deus-ex-human-revolution-lead-writer-mary-demarle-on-the-ethics-of-transhumanism/#.UIAyDCSsim4> (accessed October 04, 2013).
- Murray, Janet. *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
- Nauert, Rick. "In New Study, Video Games Not Tied to Violence in High-Risk Youth." *Psych Central*. 27 August 2013. <http://psychcentral.com/news/2013/08/27/in-new-study-video-games-not-tied-to-violence-in-high-risk-youth/58934.html> (accessed October 12, 2013).
- Nestvold, Ruth. "Do You Want to Hear About It? ." *It's a writer's Life*. 2007.
<http://www.ruthnestvold.com/2ndper.htm> (accessed May 19, 2013).
- New, Christopher. *Philosophy of Literature: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Newman, J. *Videogames*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Niederhoff, Burkhard. "Focalization." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. 04 August 2011.
<http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Focalization> (accessed July 14, 2015).
- . "Perspective - Point of View." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. 11 June 2011.
http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Perspective_-_Point_of_View (accessed August 10, 2015).
- Nitsche, Michael. *Focalisation in 3D Video Games*. Atlanta, 2005.
- . *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play and Structure in 3D Worlds*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008.
- Nunning, Ansgar. "On the Perspective Structure of Narrative Texts." In *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, by W Van Peer and S Chatman, 207-224. New York: State University of New York Press, 2001.

- OED Online. "End." *OED Online*. June 2015.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/61863?redirectedFrom=The+End#eid5591170> (accessed July 21, 2015).
- . "identification, n." *OED Online*. November 2010.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/90995?redirectedFrom=identification#eid> (accessed March 24, 2015).
- . "ideology (n)." *OED Online*. September 2014.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/91016?redirectedFrom=ideology> (accessed November 05, 2014).
- . "Ostinato, adj. and n." *OED Online*. June 2015.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/133156?redirectedFrom=ostinato> (accessed August 11, 2015).
- . "Ouroboros, n." *OED Online*. June 2015.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/220549?redirectedFrom=ouroboros> (accessed August 11, 2015).
- . "Tone, n." *OED Online*. June 2015.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/203150?redirectedFrom=tone+painting> (accessed August 11, 2015).
- . "Video-, comb. form." *OED Online*. December 2011.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/223262> (accessed March 04, 2012).
- . "Story." *OED Online*. June 2013.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/190981?rkey=y3ZIGq&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 6, 2013).
- Office for National Statistics. *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households, 2012*. 2012.
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2012/stb-families-households.html> (accessed October 08, 2013).
- Onega, Susana, and Landa, Jose Angel Garcia. *Narratology: An Introduction*. London: Routledge (1996)
- Oxford, Adam. "Dear Esther: An open letter for story telling in games." *Arts & Humanities Research Council*. 15 August 2012. <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Features/Pages/Dear-Esther.aspx> (accessed August 17, 2013).
- Packer, Joseph. "The Battle for Galt's Gulch: Bioshock as Critique of Objectivism." *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*, 2010: 209-224.

- Pellegrino, Bethany. "Immunosuppression." *Medscape*. 17 ovember 2011.
<http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/432316-overview#aw2aab6b4> (accessed October 05, 2013).
- . "School of Creative Technologies-Staff." *University of Portsmouth*. 2012.
<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/academic/ct/staff/title,12639,en.html> (accessed August 16, 2013).
- Pinchefskey, Carol. *A Feminist Reviews Tomb Raider's Lara Croft*. 12 March 2013.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolpinchefskey/2013/03/12/a-feminist-reviews-tomb-raiders-lara-croft/2/> (accessed May 22, 2013).
- Pitts, B. "The Galaxy Game." *Infolab at Stanford University*. 1997.
<http://infolab.stanford.edu/pub/voy/museum/galaxy.html> (accessed March 6, 2012).
- Polkinghorne, Donald E. "Narrative and Self-Concept." *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1991: 135-153.
- Poole, Steven. "Lara's Story." *StevenPoole.net*. 15 June 2001.
<http://stevenpoole.net/articles/laras-story/> (accessed May 17, 2013).
- Porter Abbott, H. "Story, Plot, and Narration." In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, by David Herman, 39-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Poulaki, Maria. "Puzzled Hollywood and the Return of Complex Films." In *Hollywood Puzzle Films*, by Warren Buckland, 35-54. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Powers, Richard. *Galatea 2.2*. London: Atlantic Books, 1995.
- Pretzsch, Birgit. "A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft: Body, Identity, Reality." Masters Thesis, Dublin, 1999.
- Prince, Gerald. "A Point of View on Point of View or Refocusing Focalization." In *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, by W Van Peer and S Chatman, 43-50. New York: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Propp, V. *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009 20th edition.
- Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2007.
- . *The Night of January 16th*. New York: Penguin, 1963.
- Rehak, Bob. "Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar." In *The Video Game Theory Reader*, by Mark J P Wolf and Bernard Perron, 103-127. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Reilly, Jim. *2013 Video Game Release Schedule*. 06 August 2013.
<http://www.gameinformer.com/b/news/archive/2012/11/01/2013-video-game-release-schedule.aspx> (accessed July 15, 2014).

- Reynolds, Paul. "White phosphorus: weapon on the edge." *BBC News*. 16 November 2005.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4442988.stm> (accessed January 27, 2014).
- Richardson, K. "Video Games and Aggression." <http://www.wnmu.edu>. 2004.
<http://www.wnmu.edu/academic/hum/contest2004/essaycontestvideogamesandaggression.pdf> (accessed July 3, 2012).
- Rockstarwatch. *Red Dead Redemption US and UK sale figures released*. 23 July 2010.
<http://www.rockstarwatch.net/news/996/Red-Dead-Redemption-US-and-UK-sale-figures-released/> (accessed August 12, 2012).
- Rockwell, Geoffrey. "Gore Galore: Literary Thoery and Computer Games." In *Computers and the Humanities*, 2002: 345-358.
- Romero, John. *Rome.Ro*. 08 July 2002.
<http://rome.ro/smf/index.php/topic,1521.msg31827.html#msg31827> (accessed May 17, 2013).
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Avatars of Story (Electronic Mediations)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- . "Beyond Myth and Metaphor-The Case of Narrative in Digital Media." *Gamestudies.org*. July 2001. <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/ryan/> (accessed May 2, 2012).
- . "Multivariant Narratives." *A Companion to Digital Humanities*. 2004.
<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion> (accessed April 29, 2012).
- . *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Saunders, Vivien Leanne, interview by Dawn Stobbart. *Conversations about Music* (2014 July 2014).
- SCE Santa Monica Studio. *God of War 3*. Playa Vista, LA: Sony Computer Entertainment, 16 March 2010.
- Schofield, Dennis. "The Second Person: A Point of View?" *Second Person Ficiton*. 18 January 2003. <http://members.westnet.com.au/emmas/2p/thesis/0c.htm> (accessed May 19, 2013).
- Schramm, Mike. "Exploring a 'Cyber Renaissance' in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*." *Joystiq.com*. 18 May 2010. <http://www.joystiq.com/2010/05/18/exploring-a-cyber-renaissance-in-deus-ex-human-revolution/> (accessed November 14, 2013).
- Schulzke, Marcus. "Defending the morality of violent video games." *Ethics and Information Technology*, 2010: 127-138.

- SDSU. "About us>What is Rhetoric." *San Diego State University*. 19 September 2013.
http://rhetoric.sdsu.edu/about_us/what_is_rhetoric.htm (accessed October 12, 2013).
- Sheppard, Sandy. "What Would Jesus Do?" *Christianity.com*. 2013.
<http://www.christianity.com/11622298/> (accessed October 12, 2013).
- Short, Sue. "Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Beauty and the "Big Bad"." In *Cult Telefantasy Series*, by Sue Short, 84-107. Jefferson: Macfarland & Co., 2011.
- Sicart, Miguel. "Against Procedurality." *Game Studies*. December 2011.
http://gamestudies.org/1103/articles/sicart_ap (accessed July 11, 2014).
- . "Game, Player, Ethics: A Virtue Ethics Approach to Computer Games." *International Review of Information Ethics*, 2005: 13-18.
- . *The Ethics of Computer Games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Sim, Stuart. "The Modern, The Postmodern, and the Post-Postmodern." In *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, by Stuart Sim, vii-xiv. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.
- Simons, Jan. "Narrative, Games, and Theory." *Gamestudies*, 2007:
<http://gamestudies.org/0701/articles/simons>.
- Snow, Blake. *Why most people don't finish video games*. 17 August 2011.
<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/gaming.gadgets/08/17/finishing.videogames.snow/>
 / (accessed March 19, 2014).
- Spector, W. *Postmortem: Ion Storm's Deus Ex*. 06 December 2000.
http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/131523/postmortem_ion_storms_deus_ex.php
 (accessed June 17, 2012).
- Staines, Dan, and Malcolm Ryan. "Ethical Choices in Videogames: Lessons from Moral Psychology." *Wordsonplay.com*. 06 May 2011.
<http://wordsonplay.com/2011/05/06/ethical-choices-in-videogames-lessons-from-moral-psychology/> (accessed October 13, 2013).
- Stam, R, J R Burgoyne, and S Flitterman-Lewis. *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Beyond*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Stam, Robert. *Reflexivity in Film and Culture: From Don Quixote to Jean Luc Godard*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Stamper, Tim, and Chris Stamper. *Battletoads*. Twycross: Rare, 1991.
- Statista. "Global Sales of Current Generation Video Game Consoles from 2008 to 2014." *Statista.com*. 2015. <http://www.statista.com/statistics/276768/global-unit-sales-of-video-game-consoles/> (accessed August 10, 2015).

- Statistic Brain. "Skyrim : The Elder Scrolls V Statistics." *Statistic Brain*. 09 October 2013. <http://www.statisticbrain.com/skyrim-the-elder-scrolls-v-statistics/> (accessed November 25, 2013).
- Stern, David. *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*. London: Pocket Books, 2003.
- Sternfeld, Joshua. "Pedagogical Principles of Digital Historiography." In *Digital Humanities Pedagogy: Practices, Principles and Politics*, by Brett D Hirsch, 255-290. Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2012.
- Stobbart, D. *Playing With Literature: Videogames as Narrative Fiction*. Masters Thesis, Unpublished, 2011.
- Sutter Health CPMC. "Financial Matters: Liver Transplant Costs." *CPMC*. 2013. <http://www.cpmc.org/advanced/liver/patients/topics/finance.html> (accessed October 07, 2013).
- Svensson, Ulf. "Magnavox Odyssey Museum." <http://www.magnavox-odyssey.com/>. 16 October 2012. <http://www.magnavox-odyssey.com/> (accessed August 10, 2015).
- TAMIU. *Violent Video Games Help Relieve Stress, Depression, Says TAMIU Professor*. 17 June 2010. <http://www.tamtu.edu/newsinfo/7-08-10/article5.shtml> (accessed August 3, 2012).
- Tangney, June, Jeff Stuewig, and Debra J Mashek. "Moral Emotions and Moral Behaviour." *US National Library of Medicine*. 2007. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3083636/> (accessed October 12, 2013).
- Tavinor, Grant. "Bioshock and the Art of Rapture." *Philosophy and Literature*, 2009: 91-106.
— . *The Art of Videogames*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Terdiman, Daniel. "Sims 3 Sets Franchise Sales Record." *cnet.com*. 09 June 2009. <http://www.cnet.com/uk/news/sims-3-sets-franchise-sales-record/> (accessed August 10, 2015).
- Thompson, Tim. *Forensic Human Identification : An Introduction* . Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2007.
- Tolkien, J R R. *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*. London: Harper Collins, 2007 edition.
- Turner, Robert. "Fragmented Narration and Multiple Path Readings: Towards the Creation of Reader Driven Texts." *Neophilologus*, 2005: 495-508.
- United States Navy. *Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy*. 2013. http://www.navy.mil/navydata/leadership/mcpon_respons.asp (accessed May 17, 2013).

- Valdes, Valerie. "Moral Relativism in *Heavy Rain*: Pre and Post-Partum." *Medium Difficulty*. 13 March 2012. <http://www.mediumdifficulty.com/2012/03/13/moral-relativism-in-heavy-rain-pre-and-post-partum/> (accessed Decemver 5, 2013).
- van Beneden, Peter. "Viewer 'Identification' with Characters ." *aber.ac.uk*. November 1998. <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/pjv9801.html> (accessed may 17, 2013).
- Van der Heide, M. *The Hobbit*. 2012. <http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseekid.cgi?id=0006440> (accessed August 12, 2012).
- van Elferen, Isabella. *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012.
- . "The Gothic Bach." *Understanding Bach*, 2012: 9-20.
- Waddington, David I. "Locating the wrongness in ultra-violent video games." *Ethics and Information Technology*, 2007: 121-128.
- Waever, Jonas Herlov. "Game Theory: Embedded Narrative in Games." <http://rooc.offtopicproductions.com/>. 16 December 2009. <http://rooc.offtopicproductions.com/stuff/EmbeddedNarrative.pdf> (accessed December 17, 2013).
- Walton, Kendall L. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Ward, Mark. "Columbine Families Sue Computer Game Makers." *BBC News*. 01 May 2001. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/1295920.stm> (accessed August 19, 2015).
- Wei, Huaxin. "Embedded narrative in game design." *the Future of Game Design and Technology: Proceedings of the International Academic Conference*. Vancouver, 2010. 247-250.
- . "Structuring Narrative Interaction: What We Can Learn from *Heavy Rain*." In *Interactive Storytelling: 4th International Conference on Interactive Storytelling*, by Mei Si, David Thue, Elizabeth, Lester, James Andre, Joshua Tanenbaum and Veronica Zammitto, 338-341. Berlin: Springer, 2011.
- Wei, Huaxin, Jim Bizzocchi, and Tom Calvert. "Time and Space in Digital Game Storytelling." *International Journal of Computer Games Technology*, 2010.
- Robocop*. Directed by Paul Verhoeven. Performed by Paul Weller. 1987.
- Wikileaks. *About: What is Wikileaks*. 2013. <http://www.wikileaks.org/About.html> (accessed 02 November, 2013).
- . *Wikileaks*. 2013. <http://wikileaks.org/> (accessed November 02, 2013).

- Wolf, Mark J P. "Inventing Space: Toward a Taxonomy of On- and Off-Screen Space in Video." *Film Quarterly*, 1997: 11-23.
- . *The Medium of the Videogame*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001.
- . "Theorizing Navigable Space in Video Games." *Academia.edu*. 2011.
https://www.academia.edu/1468700/Theorizing_Navigable_Space_in_Video_Games
 (accessed July 08, 2014).
- Wood, Michael. "Modernism and Film." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, by Michael Levenson, 268-283. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Yellowlees Douglas, Jane. "'How Do I Stop This Thing?': Closure and Indeterminacy in Interactive Narratives." In *Hyper/Text/Theory*, by George P Landow, 159-188. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- Younkins, Edward W. *Exploring Capitalist Fiction: Business through Literature and Film*. Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2013.
- Zagal, Z P. "Heavy Rain: Morality in Inaction, the Quotidian, and the Ambiguous." In *Vice City Virtue: Moral Issues in Digital Play*, by K Poels and S (eds) Malliet, 267-286. Belgium: Acco Academic, 2011.
- Zoss, J M. "Ethics 101: Designing Morality in Videogames." *Gamasutra*. 26 may 2010.
http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/133712/ethics_101_designing_morality_in_.php
 (accessed October 08, 2013).
- Zunshine, Lisa. *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Gameography

2K Games. *Bioshock*. New York: Take Two Interactive, 2007.

4A Games. *Metro 2033*. Calabasas, CA: THQ, 16 March 2010.

Activision. *Call of Duty* Franchise. California: Activision, (2003 – Present)

Anderson, Tom, Blank, Marc, Bruce Daniels, and Dave Lebling. *Zork*. Massachusetts, 1979.

Arkane Studios. *Dishonored*. Rockville: Bethesda Softworks, 12 October 2012.

Aspyr Media, Inc. *The Sims: Life Stories*. Redwood City, CA: Electronic Arts Games, 6 February 2007.

Bethesda. *Fallout 3*. Bethesda: London, 31 October 2008.

—.*The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Bethesda: London, 2011.

Bethesda Softworks. *Fallout Shelter*. Haymarket: Bethesda Softworks, 2015.

BioWare. *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. Redwood City, CA: Electronic Arts , 18 November 2014.

—.*Mass Effect*. Redwood City, CA: Electronic Arts, 2007 - 2012.

—.*Normandy Crash Site DLC*. Redwood City, CA: Electronic Arts, 26 January 2010.

Bowden, Oliver. *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance*. London: Penguin Books, 2009.

Bradygames. *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*. Indianapolis: DK Publishing, 2009.

Bungie Games. *Halo: Combat Evolved*. Reading:Microsoft, 2002.

CD Projekt RED. *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings*. Tokyo: Bandai Namco Entertainment, 17 May 2011.

Crowther, W, and D Woods. *Adventure*. 1976.

Crystal Dynamics. *Tomb Raider*. London: Square Enix, 05 March 2013.

Eidos Montreal. *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. London: Square Enix, 2011.

Electronic Arts. *Dante's Inferno*. Guilford, 2010.

—.*The Sims*. Guilford, 2001.

—.*The Sims: Castaway Stories*. Guilford: Electronic Arts, January 2009.

id Software. *Doom*. California: Activision, 1993 - 2005.

—. "Doom 3." Mesquite, Tx: id Software, 03 August 2004.

Lionhead Studios. *Black & White*. Redwood City, CA: EA Games, 252 March 2001.

Namco. *Pacman*. Tokyo: Namco, 22 May 1980.

Naughty Dog. *The Last of Us*. London: Sony Entertainment, 14 June 2013.

—. *Uncharted*. London: Sony, 2008 - 2011.

Nintendo . *Super Mario Bros U*. Grossostheim: Nintendo Europe, 30 November 2012.

—. *The Legend of Zelda*. Tokyo: Nintendo, 21 February 1986.

Nishikado, Tomohiro. *Space Invaders*. Tokyo: Taito, June 1978.

Pinchbeck, Dan. *Dear Esther*. The Chinese Room, 2012.

Quantic Dream. *Beyond: Two Souls*. London: Sony Entertainment Europe Software, 10 October 2013.

—. *Heavy Rain*. London: Sony, 2010.

Remedy Entertainment. *Alan Wake*. Paivantaite 8, Finland: Remedy Entertainment, 2010.

Remedy Entertainment; Rockstar Studios. *Max Payne*. New York NY: Rockstar Games, 2001-2012.

Rockstar Games. *LA Noire*. New York: Take Two Entertainment, 2011.

—. *Red Dead Redemption*. New York: Take Two Entertainment, 2010.

Rockstar North. *Grand Theft Auto V*. Edinburgh: Rockstar Games, 17 September 2013.

Rockstar Studios. *Max Payne 3*. Vancouver: Rockstar Games, 15 May 2012.

Sledgehammer Games. *Modern Warfare*. California: Activision, 2009 - 2011.

Square Enix. *Murdered: Soul Suspect*. London: Square Enix, 06 June 2014.

Sucker Punch Production. *InFamous*. Tokyo: Sony Computer Entertainment, 26 May 2009.

—. *InFamous 2*. Tokyo: Sony Computer Entertainment, 07 June 2011.

Techland. *Call of Juarez: Gunslinger*. Montreuil: Ubisoft Entertainment, 21 May 2013.

—. *Dead Island*. Wroclaw: Techland, 06 September 2011.

Telltale Games. *The Walking Dead*. San Rafael: Telltale Games, 2012.

—. *The Wolf Among Us*. San Rafael: Telltale Games, 2013.

thatgamecompany. *Flower*. Los Angeles, 2009.

Ubisoft. *Assassin's Creed*. Montreuil: Ubisoft, 2007.

—. *Assassin's Creed 2 (Franchise)*. Montreuil: Ubisoft, 2007 - 2011.

—. *Assassin's Creed 2*. Montreuil: Ubisoft, 17 November 2009.

—. *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreuil: Ubisoft, 16 November 2010.

—. *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*. Montreuil: Ubisoft, 15 November 2011.

—. *Assassin's Creed 3*. Montreuil: Ubisoft, 29 April 2013.

Undead Labs. *State of Decay*. London : Microsoft Studios, 05 June 2013.

Valve. *Portal*. Bellvue, WA, October 2007.

—. *Portal 2*. Bellvue, WA, April 2011.

Yager. *Spec Ops: The Line*. Berkshire: 2K Games, 2012.