

Video Gaming: The Sociology of a Lifeworld

Submitted by Victor Christos Gazis to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of

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Signature:

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to contemporary sociological debates about video games and video gaming by building upon the works of game theorists such as Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003), Juul (2001), Taylor (2006) and Thornham (2011) that explore the interactive and participatory nature of the pursuit. The data within, derived from an empirical study involving focus groups, interviews, observation and analyses of games and gaming practices and participant observation amongst communities of video gamers is analysed using theories and theoretical frameworks from film and audience studies, classical sociology (in particular Durkheim) and the sociology of sport. Emanating from the data video gaming is revealed to be an ‘organised sport played in a domestic environment’ in terms of embodied practice, conduct and sentiment. The prioritising of agency over structure in data analysis reveals multiple multisensory social practices that encourage engagement with the medium and create, maintain and develop a vibrant and constantly evolving video game lifeworld. Using the ‘career’ of the video gamer, as a conceptual framework, this thesis brings to the fore the masculinity and masculine social practices central to the video gaming lifeworld, and the multisensory social practices through which heterogeneous video gamers (from occasional lone gamers to fully immersed MMORPG enthusiasts) actively immerse themselves into, build, maintain and develop the video game lifeworld. A lifeworld wherein gamers develop their motivations to play and keep playing video games consequent to rewarding performances and interactions with other participants.

Key Words: video games - addiction - ‘passive consumer’ – empirical – multisensory – ‘career’ – social practices – active - lone gamer – MMORPG – lifeworld

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It's the winter of 2008, the middle of a night, and I am half way through a night shift. As well as working here (at a well known supermarket) to pay the bills, for the last 4 years I have also been paying my way through university – my undergraduate years are complete and my masters is going well. At this point in my studies I have two key sociological and academic interests – contemporary social theory (particularly Baudrillard) and different sociological and psychological perspectives on understanding addiction - interests which I intend to focus on for my upcoming masters dissertation. That night, like all the others, we (all the smokers) are sat outside smoking chatting and generally passing the time. Amongst this group of workers are a group of lads – aged between nineteen and thirty. For the fourth or fifth night in a row I realise that the lads are talking enthusiastically, loudly and exuberantly about video games – or to be precise football, women and video games. As a non video gamer much of the conversation is beyond my comprehension – on occasions the lads discuss guilds, Orcs, mystical lands and quests on others conversations revolve around more sinister topics such as the delights of driving into pedestrians, visiting strip clubs, beating up prostitutes and swearing at and belittling online opponents.

Despite my lack of knowledge of the world of video games and video gaming as a budding sociologist I became increasingly fascinated by both the social interaction and its point of focus. As a child and young teenager video games, or perhaps more correctly computer games, had entered the domestic environment – my first experience was playing a game called Blue Meanies From Outer Space on a Commodore VIC20 one Christmas. And as a teenager, and a young adult, they had increased in exposure and popularity. However throughout these years they had never been a part of everyday conversation, communication or, most significantly, social interaction and social bonding. Video gaming, it occurred to **me** for the first time, had become sociologically significant. And, furthermore, with a keen interest in addiction studies I could not fail to pick up on the language ‘the lads’ used to describe their levels of interest and immersion into the pursuit – the language of addiction. These lads were, in their own words, totally addicted to WoW (World of Warcraft) or to GTA (Grand Theft Auto) or to the latest racing game. However, it occurred to me that this was an addiction like no other I had come across before. This was an addiction expressed with pride

and confidence – not one talked about in hushed whispers for fear of familial or professional intervention.

Later that year having successfully completed my masters thesis at Birmingham University I was thinking about fields of sociological significance as I considered potential research for a PhD theses – a thesis which at the time I fully intended to focus upon behavioural addictions in contemporary society - and of course my workplace experiences of listening to ‘the lads’ talk about video games and video gaming came to mind. On a mission to gain a theoretical understanding of video game addiction with the goal of developing an original contribution to the field I began to review existing literature on the subject – both in online journals, news articles and, of course, published academic literature. Initial investigations revealed that, in 2008 (there has of course been great developments in sociological analyses of video gaming in recent years – found in literature to be referred to throughout this thesis) popular public opinion, journalistic expositions and dominant academic scrutiny focussed primarily on the negative consequences of video games: video game addiction and associated pathological behaviour. The tragic events of the Heath High School shootings in West Paducah, Kentucky USA and the Columbine high school massacre - where addiction to and pathological behaviours deriving from exposure to video games and video gaming had been cited as causal to the tragic events that took place - by still loomed large in the memories of academics, parents, significant others and journalists alike. This despite the ‘Heath High School Shooting’ court case being dismissed as ‘The court held that the defendants could not have foreseen this "idiosyncratic" reaction to their products, which are, moreover, protected by the First Amendment’, and the dismissal upheld on appeal in 2002 (Liptak, 2002), and the eventual dismissal of the case brought by parents of the victims of Columbine against the companies responsible for producing, publishing and distributing violent video games (Ward, 2001).

My early literature review revealed that the controversy surrounding video games and video gaming had not escaped the attention of journalists who, without substantial empirical scrutiny, often focussed their attention on the propensity for video games and video gaming to have a negative impact on video gamers and their behaviour. Particular attention had been paid to their perceived influence on addictive, anti-social and pathological behaviour - thereby

adding to the intertextual discourse which has caused video games to be demonised and held to account for much of the problematic behaviour exhibited by children and young adults today. For example Wheeler (2009) wrote an article for The Sun newspaper¹ (UK) stating “World of Warcraft ‘like crack’” – a view she claimed was supported by ‘Sweden’s Youth Care Foundation’. An article in the Guardian (UK) newspaper² asserted that ‘Addiction to online games is becoming more widespread among vulnerable young people, according to a treatment centre that has begun running abstinence courses in Britain’ (Bowcott, 2009). An article entitled “Kids are ‘addicts’” states that ‘PARENTS have been warned about the danger of video game addiction by scientists who say it can cause depression’ citing evidence from a study carried out in Singapore by Douglas Gentile (Daily Star³, 2011). And ‘LOGGED ON AND SWITCHED OFF’ (Frangoul, 2010) published in The Times⁴ detailed the problems faced by one teenager and his parents, and how he was eventually treated for his compulsive video game playing in a specialist centre for addiction treatment in the UK citing Griffiths⁵ to support its content (Frangoul, 2010).

Unsatisfied by the empirical scrutiny underlying these media stories I investigated the academic works that journalists have consistently used to support their claims. Although it was not possible to entirely dismiss these articles and approaches there was definitely more to investigate and uncover here. Newspaper articles often referred to the work of Griffiths (above) to support their claims. And whilst Griffiths is a firm believer in the existence of video game addiction, and in the pathological behaviours it can induce, newspaper articles failed to balance out their stories, and their use of Griffiths’ work, with reference to his position that emphasises the significance, but also the rarity of video game addiction (Griffiths, 2005(a): 360). And the work of Douglas Gentile, used in the article ‘Kids are ‘addicts’ (Daily Star, 2011) failed to mention that ‘The Entertainment Software Association criticized the study and Gentile, an Iowa State University researcher, arguing that Gentile used an unproven definition of pathological gaming and made negative interpretations of

¹ The Sun is a tabloid daily newspaper published in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

² The Guardian is a daily British national newspaper.

³ The Daily Star is a tabloid daily newspaper published in the United Kingdom.

⁴ The Times is a daily British national newspaper

⁵ Professor Mark Griffiths is (2012) Professor of Gambling Studies at Nottingham Trent University. He is an expert and prolific writer on the subject of behavioural addictions, including video game addiction and someone to whom this thesis will regularly refer.

"trivial" differences between the behaviors of problem gamers and other children in the survey'. And furthermore, these articles, and the theories used to support them, maintained the image of addiction as being entirely negative – the vibrant, exuberant, outgoing and social 'addict' I had witnessed at work was absolutely invisible within these accounts.

My initial literature further review revealed that video game addiction, and associated pathological behaviour have also featured in academic expositions into the world of video games and video gaming. One significant, although empirically weak, early study in the field of video game addiction 'Mind at Play' by Loftus and Loftus (1983) focussed on the game Pac-man. Having examined the mechanics of the game, including the game-play and the scoring system, Loftus and Loftus concluded that the game is enjoyable because of the mechanics of reinforcement, '...any behaviour that is followed by reinforcement will increase in frequency...' , this includes getting higher scores on a video game (Loftus, Loftus, 1983: 114). "A partial reinforcement schedule leads to behaviour that (1) occurs more rapidly and (2) is more resilient to extinction than a continuous reinforcement schedule.....Taken together, these two effects of partial reinforcement produce what looks very much like 'addictive behaviour'" (Loftus, Loftus, 1983: 17-18). So video game designers create games whilst paying careful attention to reinforcement schedules – because 'It is to the designers' advantage to design a game that reinforces the player on the most addictive schedule possible' (Loftus, Loftus, 1983: 19). More recently Shirley Turkle's (1997) work 'Life on the Screen' directly confronted internet based, multi user video gaming. Her examination of 'Life on the Screen' is used to develop an analysis of the development of identity in the modern age. More specifically Turkle examines how computer users develop identities in MUD' or Multi User Domains. For Turkle, 'MUDs are a new kind of virtual parlour game and a new form of community' (Turkle, 1997: 11). Turkle only briefly refers to addiction in her analysis of 'Life in the Screen'. In her interviews she noted that "... addiction is a frequently discussed subject among MUD players. A Newsweek article described how 'some players attempt to go cold turkey. One method is to randomly change your password by banging your head against the keyboard, making it impossible to log back on'" (Turkle, 1997: 184).

Alongside academic expositions into video games and addiction there is also a body of work that, synonymous with journalistic expositions above, asserts the propensity for video

games to cause other forms of pathological behaviour amongst their 'users'. Viera & Krmar (2011: 113 - 131) surveyed children between the ages of seven and fifteen in order to 'examine the effect of violent game play on their moral reasoning about violence' concluding that '... playing violent video games was significantly negatively related to both cognitive perspective taking and sympathy'. Carnagy, Anderson & Bushman's (2007: 495) study entitled 'The effect of video game violence on psychological desensitization to real-life violence' concludes with the statement 'The present experiment demonstrates that violent videogame exposure can cause desensitization to real-life violence. In this experiment, violent game players were less physiologically aroused by real-life violence than were nonviolent game players. It appears that individuals who play violent videogames habituate or "get used to" all the violence and eventually become physiologically numb to it'. Anderson (2012: 113) presents further evidence - see Carnagy, Anderson & Bushman's (2007) above - that 'exposure to violent video games is significantly linked to increases in aggressive behaviour, aggression cognition, aggressive affect, and cardiovascular arousal, and to decreases in helping behaviour'. And Funk et al's (2004: 32, 33) study 'Violence exposure in real-life, video games, television, movies, and the internet: is there desensitization?' concludes that 'Apart from the expected relationship with gender, only video game violence exposure and movie violence exposure predicted attitudes towards violence score, with more exposure predicting stronger proviolence attitudes'.

Although interesting and insightful, these articles and expositions consistently failed to account for the exuberant, outgoing 'addict' evidenced through my work place experiences. It seemed to me confusing that the video gamers who I spent time with in the work place, and who I had begun to seek out in an informal entry into a research project, regularly referred to themselves as being addicted to particular video games, or to video gaming in general, but portrayed both the pursuit and the products in a favourable light - and whilst being 'addicts' they also managed to hold down full time jobs, raise children, earn the respect of their colleagues and peers and maintain positive relationships with girlfriends, wives and partners and at no time exhibited any of the pathological behaviours associated with video gaming in legal expositions and in the press, expositions which presented a far more sinister and dangerous picture of pathological behaviour, self and child neglect and the necessity for treatment in specialist clinics. It was revealing the juxtaposition of these two 'manifestations' and understandings of addiction that inspired the theoretical framework for my initial

empirical enquiries into the world of video games and video gaming. Why was it, I thought and attempted to discover, that video gamers were willingly taking on board a self determination of themselves as an addict – a label that has traditionally been so heavily laden with negativity. Was it something to do with the construction of an identity – possibly a dangerous and exciting identity? Was it a way to affiliate yourself with a particular social group of enthusiasts? Perhaps a Baudrillardian perspective, I thought, applied to video game addiction may help to reveal and pursue a study of video game addiction's positive attributes. Jean Baudrillard (1993) conducted a theoretical analysis of 'extreme phenomenon'. He asked: Drugs... 'All melodramatics aside, what exactly do they protect us from, from what even worse scourge do they offer us an avenue of escape?' (Baudrillard, 1993, 66). He proposed that 'It is [even] quite probable that drugs, and all the compulsive activities that drugs bring in their train, also contribute to the level of vitality and crudely metabolic vigour of the city' (Baudrillard, 1993, 103). Inspired by this approach the initial focus of my work became a consideration of how video gaming, and all the compulsive activities that video gaming brings in its train can contribute to the 'vigour' of the city.

Consequently I set about developing and carrying out an empirical research project to investigate video gamers' motivations for entering the world of video games and video gaming and, importantly, their motivations for spending a considerable amount of time invested in the pursuit - periods of time that concerned others would and could see as dangerous and pathological but those immersed in the world, it seemed, could use as a positive representation of their character, identity and degree of dedication to their pursuit. In order to understand and immerse myself into the life-world of video gaming it was my ambition to meet (in the virtual or the 'real' world) as many enthusiastic gamers as possible, of all ages, and also some industry professionals who could provide insight into how the industry goes about creating an immersive and engaging product. I decided that it would be ideal if I could talk to some teenagers about their video gaming activities, likes and dislikes because it is immediately evident to anyone who has any contact with school aged children just how popular video games are amongst this demographic, and how familiar they are with the medium, 'Studies have shown that children value their computers and computer games far more highly than TV programmes or books' (Alderman, N. 2010) so I thought they would be a keen and plentiful source of information. I decided that if the research with young gamers could take the form of a group discussion in a comfortable, relaxed and safe environment for

the young gamers it would be both conducive to my research, and good research practice. Therefore I decided to organise focus groups, involving small numbers of teenagers (comprised of boys and girls of varying ages). With schools being the obvious places to find a sample of teenagers in a safe and familiar environment I decided that I would focus my attention on finding some schools who would be willing to participate in my research and where I would be able to conduct my focus groups on school grounds - 'Where pre-existing social groups are being recruited (such as a school peer group), then the ideal venue will be in the natural social setting of the group (such as the school)' (Bloor et al, 2001, 56). So, with my research methods decided upon, I sought ethics approval and put together the required information sheets and consent forms to send to schools in my sampling frame. I also needed to have a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check done as is standard procedure for anyone working in a school. Once I had the go ahead from the University of Exeter ethics committee I began this element of my research process.

In order to maximise my chances of attracting the interest of a school (or even better two or three) I took three related decisions. The first decision was to narrow down the field to a manageable size by carefully selecting schools to approach depending upon their particular curriculum interests and specialities. Therefore I looked at the websites of the schools in the local area (financial restrictions limiting the geographical scope of my research) and if any school showed a particular interest in visual media, the arts or other related subject then they went on my list of schools to contact. The second decision was to offer something to the school in return for their help. So I offered the schools a written report of my research findings to hopefully enable them to improve relationships with their pupils, in terms of motivation and engagement. The third decision was to make my initial introduction letter clear, succinct and directed towards the most appropriate member of staff. The overall response to the letters I sent out was not very positive. I sent out ten letters. Within a few hours I was declined by a school who said they had so many similar request each year that they could not say yes to all of them, so as a matter of policy they said no to all of them. Eight of the schools did not respond to my request at all, including the one I was most hopeful of a positive response from due to the close relationship between its speciality and my research area. One school did reply positively. A teacher, not the head teacher who I had initially contacted, rang me to express his interest in my research project and to suggest meeting in order to take things further. It turned out that a few days before this teacher had been given a new brief as 'Head of New Technologies' which was to look at new ways to use

technology to motivate and engage pupils and therefore he had a vested interest in my research. This could, it seemed, be a mutually beneficent relationship where I could gain useful insights for the school whilst he could facilitate my research by acting as a gatekeeper, organising some of the logistics and encouraging students to participate.

This led to an excellent symbiotic relationship. The teacher, in his gatekeeper role, was invaluable in terms of his knowledge of students' interests, activities and personalities. He approached other tutors from the school and encouraged them to ask their students to talk to me. He organised students' attendance at focus groups, allocated room space and time and also distributed and collected consent forms. This left me free to carry out my research with a promise to relay my findings in a written report fulfilling my side of the bargain. I chose to carry out focus groups with small numbers of pupils as we were limited on time (squeezing sessions between lessons, or during lesson time). The focus groups did not always hold the same amount of students as is often the case, some students who were expected to attend were off school, or a student not expected to attend would at the last minute with his or her consent form. I arrived with a list of potential questions to ask the group, however, taking advice from texts ‘... the facilitator of the group does not need, and should not seek to control the group...’ (Bloor et al, 2001, 48), I made it clear throughout that I was primarily interested in listening, not talking, and encouraged an open, but ordered, discussion amongst the participants from where significant gamer/consumer focussed qualitative data which informed this thesis came from.

The process of forming a relationship with the second school with whom I worked was much less straight forward. I did not approach the school by letter myself, as I did the others. Initial contact was made through a colleague. He mentioned my work to the headmistress who took an interest and decided that her school would participate in my research. The gatekeeper role was delegated to a member of staff with whom I had very positive first contact and agreements were made regarding how and when to proceed. This resulted in an email from the gatekeeper informing me that he would make contact when a group of children had been organised for me to talk to - however at this point communication stopped. After persisting with this contact, although recognising the time constraints put upon a professional in his position, it was agreed that I could carry out a focus group with three year 8 male pupils (aged between twelve and fourteen). It was clear that this was to be my only

chance to use a sample of gamers from this school. Fortunately I had already carried out several focus groups through my initial school contact (see above) so with this experience in hand it proved to be a successful (if isolated) venture. The data derived from this focus groups was also significant in informing this thesis. Having exhausted the potential for focus groups the data was then transcribed and entered into Nvivo. It was coded and examined for patterns, commonalities (and differences) and points of interest in order to develop an initial understanding of the video gaming activities of this research sample – the data derived was later triangulated with data from interviews and participation observation (see Chapter 6 & 7) and from analyses of blogs and forums (see Chapter 8) in order to ensure validity and generalisability.

The process of identifying and contacting interviewees with industry professionals took several stages, the first of which was identifying my sampling frame. In order to do this I carried out some basic internet based research in order to identify as many British based video game companies as possible. I then began the process of narrowing down this sample to the companies within a viable distance (both financially and logistically) for travelling and meeting interviewees. Once this was done I needed to determine the names and contact details of a manageable number of industry professionals from the fields of programming, design, PR and management. Having identified my target sample I then contacted them by letter or email depending on the contact details available. In the letter/email I introduced myself and presented a summary of my research project and asked whether anyone (either the recipient of the letter, or a colleague) would be willing to meet with me for an interview. I also offered to send more information to any of the contacts who might want to know more about the project before committing themselves to an interview. Initially (for about month) I did not receive any response at all, then when I did it was all negative. It seemed that I would have to give up on that avenue completely and decided that (given the time restraints inherent in a PhD) I would have to concentrate my efforts on data from video game users and consumers.

However, almost six months after making initial contact I received an email from Jon Hare. This was an excellent development as Jon is a renowned British computer game designer who was a founder and director of the highly successful company ‘Sensible

Software' responsible for some iconic games of the 1980s and 1990s including Sensible Soccer. Jon, who (2011 at time of interview) is a leading video game consultant, was also a driving force behind the creation of 'Tower Studios' a leading UK based computer game company and at the time of interview maintained a position with The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) as a voting member on all mediums including the prestigious British Academy Video Game Awards. I agreed to meet Jon at the BAFTA offices in London whilst he was between appointments where I conducted a two hour interview covering Jon's personal and professional experiences of, involvement in, and opinions regarding the video game industry, video games and video gaming in general and the games he himself had produced. Jon's long running involvement with the video game industry resulted in some invaluable data which will be called upon throughout this thesis.

My good fortune continued when a discussion about my research with a colleague revealed that he had a potential contact in the video game industry. I made contact by email, once again with a summary of my research goals and an additional information sheet. Through an ensuing email conversation it emerged that my contact had been a full time computer game programmer, and now continued to do so as a part time free lance worker. Although willing to help personally, he felt that my research aims could be better fulfilled through communication with people more involved in the game development process. To this end I was provided with the email address of a designer Greg Bryant, who at the time of writing was a project manager at Crytek (Nottingham), who agreed to an interview and also arranged for me to talk to a colleague of his Tom Goodchild, who at the time of writing was lead designer at Monumental Games in Nottingham England. Consequently a joint interview was arranged which took place at a venue in Nottingham UK. The interview lasted over two hours during which we discussed many aspects of gaming – personal and professional.

Ethical considerations for research involving adults were not far reaching (as they proved to be with children). However I had to consider the professional reputations of those involved and how affiliation with a piece of research might, potentially, impact upon their careers. Therefore before I met either interviewee, or took up any considerable amount of their time, I informed them of my research goals, how I planned to achieve them and who, when the work was done, would have access to it. I informed them that there was a possibility that once my work was completed some of it (if accepted) may be included in widely available journal articles with the possibility of further dissemination through secondary referencing.

Having done this I informed the interviewees that in terms of ethics there were three options: 1) Decline to take part in the interview 2) Take part in the interview with the assurance of anonymity 3) Take part in the interview and have the opportunity to read any section of the completed work where they were mentioned (or their words were used) with the option to anonymise at that point. Both interviewees said they were interested in reading the final piece of work but in terms of the interview they were prepared to waive anonymity and self censor (if necessary) as we progressed. If at any point they felt as if they had said something they would be uncomfortable being included in my work then they would ask and I would strike it from the record immediately. The data derived from these interviews with professionals is referred to throughout this thesis – particularly Chapter 4 entitled Video games and video gaming - a ‘System of Provision’

When I began this research project I thought that reaching enthusiastic adult gamers and talking to them would be the most straightforward element of my empirical project. People enjoy talking about their interests - I thought. So many people play video games that if I contacted a quantity of them then at least a few would be willing to talk to me – I thought. In comparison to contacting young gamers the process of contacting adult gamers should be far easier. No gatekeepers, no institutions with their own agendas and timetables to worry about, no ethical issues regarding Criminal Records Bureau checks. Just a matter of sourcing and talking to a number of willing interviewees for a few minutes at a time, in a place and using any medium convenient for them – be that MSN, Google chat, Skype or any other. In reality however, contacting adult gamers with an enthusiastic but healthy interest in video gaming who were prepared to be interviewed proved to be very frustrating. I tried several potential sources: contact addresses from game review web-sites and journal articles, (university) gaming societies, placing advertisements on notice boards, contacts through friends and contacts through colleagues to name a few. However I did not get any positive responses from these avenues. It became apparent that people were not generally willing to talk to a stranger (particularly a researcher) about their gaming. I came to the conclusion that most gamers did not think of their activities in the world of video gaming as being remarkable in any way, and therefore of little or no interest to anyone else. When Michael Messner (1995, 25) asked men who had a history of involvement in sport how and why they got involved in sport ‘many of these men seemed a bit puzzled: after all, sport was “just the thing to do”..... it was just like brushing your teeth: its just what you did. Its part of your existence”’. It

seemed that this idea that ‘it’s just something you do’ once applied to organised sport by Messner was also applicable to video gaming – and I believe the reason why putting together a sample of adult gamers was so problematic.

In order to proceed with my research I took a different route. At the time I attended a weekly poker game that lasts up to 3-4 hours which is attended by a predominately young (18-25) male crowd, most of whom are enthusiastic gamers to a greater or lesser degree. I informed them of my research project and its aims and then took every opportunity to listen to their conversations, and engage them in conversation, about video gaming and ask questions about their practices and interests. At the time I was also employed at a business where there were several enthusiastic gamers so I followed the same procedure there and in combination managed to gather useful insights regarding the video gaming lives, interests and practices of adult gamers – insights that consequent to the writing of field notes at opportune moments were entered into the Nvivo programme for triangulation (see above). Also I have several personal contacts who are enthusiastic gamers and were willing to allow me to talk to me about the games they enjoyed, observe them gaming and speak to them at length about their activities, likes, dislikes and motivations for gaming. As a consequence I was also was also invited to sit in on, and join in with, social gaming activities when fiends and their acquaintances got together (in the same physical as opposed to virtual location) for gaming sessions where I learned about several games, their content, and the interactions – verbal and non-verbal – between gamers at play. Once again consequent to the writing of field notes at opportune moments data was entered into the Nvivo programme for triangulation. Through these contacts I also met a gamer who invited me to attend after work gaming sessions where he, and some colleagues – ‘the lads’ - got together to unwind, socialise, enjoy a few drinks – a breakthrough which allowed me to carry out the phenomenological study at the heart of Chapter 6 where further details of the methods I used will be found.

Consequent to, and as an outcome of, my initial empirical research (focus and interviews where the methodology used can be found above which took place prior to the more in-depth work found throughout this thesis especially chapters 4-8), the focus of my research changed considerably and eventually left behind a focus on addiction. It became apparent from the literature review that the ‘effect theory’, or the ‘hypodermic theory’ of mass communication

(McQuail, 1994) was implicit within powerful and influential theories and expositions on video game addiction, and theories concerning the relationship between video games and pathological behaviour, theories and expositions that hold video game companies, structures and content as determinate over consumer behaviour and posit the viewing/consuming population as isolated, mystified and ‘passive consumers’ of popular culture⁶. And that whilst Baudrillard offered an alternative perspective on the addiction debate his work suggested that the population could be seen as homogenous, non-interpretative and subjugated by electronic media – a population that can be generalised and conceptualised as a ‘a mass’. However throughout initial research (focus groups and interviews) I repeatedly came across gamers and derived data that pointed towards heterogeneous (in terms of interests, degrees of immersion, enthusiasm and practices), educated, active, interpretative, vibrant gamers willingly and actively immersing themselves into a pursuit – either alone, amongst groups of friends, or within electronically networked communities.

The ‘hypodermic theory’ of mass communication is a legacy of The Frankfurt School’s neo-Marxist position, asserts that through standardised cultural output – films, television and magazines for example (Horkheimer & Adorno⁷ (1997/1944) - ‘the culture industry’ manipulates its consumers’ behaviour (a population of consumers separated from close knit communities by the forces of capitalism) which ultimately contributes toward the capitalist system producing a passive, mystified, and exploited population. Horkheimer and Adorno (1997/1944) argue that despite limited freedom from the workplace, through better working practices and disposable income to spend on non-essential goods (i.e. leisure) there is no such freedom from the forces of capitalism. Whilst having control over people’s working lives the capitalist system also controls and exploits consumers during their leisure time. The culture industry profits from producing and selling access to their output. And the cultural output they produce supports an ideology that maintains, extends and reinforces the workers’ passivity by compounding the ‘false consciousness’ central to social control in the age of industrialised capitalism. Horkheimer and Adorno’s neo-Marxist perspective espouses a dualism, one that is familiar within video game theory, a dualism that portrays powerful

⁶ Collins (2004) theory of addiction to interaction rituals is not included in this summary as this sociological perspective does not feature in dominant analyses of video gaming and video game addiction.

⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno were key members of the Frankfurt School along with Herbert Marcuse – see Chapter .

elements from a culture industry imposing itself on a passive consuming population and, through exposure to its products determining their thoughts, actions and behaviour.

In these powerful and influential analyses of video games and video gaming discussed above video gamers are portrayed not only as passive consumers, but as passive victims - the active, interpretative and social actor, the one that I experienced throughout my initial research and became dominant in later research and analyses, who is deriving, has derived, or has the potential to derive pleasure from their leisure pursuit has totally disappeared. Theoretical determinism posits the individual gamer as subjugated by a drive, compulsion or even addiction, to fulfil 'false needs' – in this case the compulsive or addictive need to play video games - needs that may feel like a rewarding choice to the individual but which are ultimately repressive and 'superimposed on the individual by particular social interests' (Marcuse, 1964: 5).

'Such needs have a societal content and function which are determined by external powers over which the individual has no control; the development and satisfaction of these needs is heteronomous. No matter how much such needs may have become the individual's own, reproduced and fortified by the conditions of his existence; no matter how much he identifies with them and finds himself in their satisfaction, they continue to be what they were from the beginning – products of a society whose dominant interest demands repression'.

(Marcuse, 1964: 5)

We have seen that there have been high profile legal proceedings (with enduring consequences for popular perceptions of video games and video gaming) wherein the video game industry, as a power external to the individual pursuing the capitalist profit motive, has been accused of producing and distributing games to eager, compliant and passive consumers, consumers who become driven by, even compelled by or addicted to a (false) 'need' to play, consumers who are posited as unable to interpret onscreen content and consequently control their behaviour and respond to it in a healthy and socially appropriate

manner. Academics have theorised – having taken an implicit position that the consumer is passive – that video gaming technology and its content determine video gamers' behaviour, concluding that the content and structures within video games incorporate reward structures that direct gamers' immersion into and engagement with video games with for some (often those with psychological damage or inadequacies) the consequence of initiating and maintaining anti-social, addictive and pathological behaviours. Journalists have circulated 'news' about the dangers of video games and video gaming to the public, supporting their stories of extreme behaviour that maintain the passive consumer paradigm by citing legal cases, studies, articles and academics with a deterministic bias or through selective reporting of empirical academic research. In legal cases, academia and the press through an enduring conception of, and focus on, the 'passive consumer' the video game industry has consistently been portrayed as one that produces output that has the power to direct the actions and behaviour of its consumers. And consumers have been presented as passive and acquiescent when exposed to the industry and the video games that dictate their 'needs' and direct their behaviour.

So, for me, despite the prominence and enduring influence of the 'passive consumer' paradigm in video game theory this had proved to be conceptually inadequate for a comprehensive sociological understanding of either video game addiction or the wider world of video games and video gaming having found such convincing (and triangulated) evidence of the educated and active gamer with a genuine 'passion' for their pursuit – a realisation of which inspired a 'search, which came to be at the heart of this thesis, **for the gamer and not the game, for the agency not the structure.** The 'passive consumer' paradigm was inadequate for understanding and theorising the nuanced workings of the video game lifeworld. For example understanding addiction, and therefore the wider world of video gaming requires a qualitative grasp of the social and cultural *practices and particularities* central to the world of video games and video gaming, and the contextual use of language and concepts *actively developed and interpreted* by gamers and used therein. Similarly the 'effect theory' or 'hypodermic theory' of mass communication (McQuail, 1994) cannot reveal, and incorporate into its analyses the social and cultural environment in which video gaming and video game research takes place and how attitudes towards, and studies of, video games and video gaming can be influenced by power relationships and 'the violence we do to things' (Foucault, 1982).

Presenting the video game consumer as passive and ‘powerless’ over video games proved to be empirically (quantitatively) unsupportable. Without dismissing the existence and significance of video game addiction for *a small number* of video gamers, in a world where video gaming has become a hugely popular global phenomenon and gamers are spending long hours at the screen (see Chapter 4 for details) ‘genuine’ cases of ‘ideal-type’ video game addiction, those based upon core components of individual, anti-social and pathological addiction remain few and far between – and those do exist are not imposed upon the ‘passive’ individual by the video game industry and its technology but they are, according to Griffiths (2005(a), 2005(b), 2006) and Turkle (1997) developed consequent to the psychological rewards gained from identity construction and identity play in a *social gaming environment*. Quantitatively, an increase in numbers of video gamers and their time spent ‘at the screen’ has not been matched by an exponential rise in cases of video game addiction, one that would be expected if immersion and addiction were determined by gamers’ passive consumption of video games, their contents and systems - especially considering that if contents and systems determine behaviour then experienced developers would be able use their design skills to produce addictive products. Despite widespread fears and demonisation of the video game industry empirical evidence, quantitative and qualitative, suggests that the vast majority of video gamers have a non-problematic and rewarding relationship with their pursuit – and for those that do exhibit problematic behaviour the causes and explanations are too complex to be adequately explained through the reductionism inherent the ‘effect theory’ or the ‘hypodermic theory’ of mass communication (McQuail, 1994)

In these analyses of the world of video games and video gaming the agency of the gamer had been overlooked. The agent and the agency that appeared to be abundant in this empirical study, and the agent and the agency which, as my literature review expanded beyond its initial focus revealed, has been recognised by authors such as Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003) - who examined the gamer (not the game) to establish how video gaming had consequences on social lives, and how the social lives of gamers impacted on gaming practices - Juul (2001) who highlighted the interactive nature of video gaming by looking for the agents’ role and agency in understanding, interpreting and following the narratives found in video games, an endeavour that will be returned to later in this thesis (Chapter 5) - and Taylor (2006) who explored the video game ‘lifeworld’ by examining the social networks

that gamers move in and out of and how they can cross over from the virtual to the real world – and also several others authors noted at the beginning of Chapter 2 whose work and input into video game theory and whose theoretical and empirical analyses this thesis will build upon by emphasising the agency of the active, creative gamer immersed in a social and vibrant lifeworld.

This particular thesis is very much focussed upon the interactive masculine gamer and the masculine practices through which they build, maintain and develop the world of video gaming and the social relations that are found therein. This focus on masculinity is one which ‘came out of the data’ – a process that will be reflected upon in detail in Chapter 2.4.1. However here an introduction to this focus on masculinity is pertinent. Although boys and girls were equally encouraged to participate, volunteer participants in focus groups were predominantly male whose expressed choices of video games were those with ‘masculine content’ – driving, fighting, shooting for example. As will also be returned to in Chapter 2.4.1 volunteer interviewees from the video game industry were all male – and the focus of their employment was designing, developing and promoting games with masculine content. And, furthermore ‘the lads’ to be returned to in Chapter 6 proved to be not only a male group of gamers but an overtly masculine group of gamers as will be evidenced and reflected upon throughout Chapter 6. Reflecting upon this masculine sample, their masculine practices and content of the games they prefer which became the focus of this thesis a limitation to this study becomes evident – the female gamer, or more correctly the feminine gamer, is absent here. Whilst it is correct to reflect upon this limitation to the following study it is important to note that the sample used herein, as will become clear in Chapter 4, is one which reflects an enduring history of male dominance in the video game lifeworld from production to consumption – and therefore a sample of great significance for developing an understanding on the world of video games and video gaming. But it also a limitation to the study which highlights the difficulties in understanding the experiences of women gamers – an under-researched demographic. This is a difficulty that raises the potential for future research, a potential field of enquiry that has been initiated by Mayra (2011: 109-115) who has written about the emerging field of ‘contextual play’ or ‘contextual gaming’. And one that Taylor (2006) takes up in the chapter entitled “Where the Women Are” which examines the social construction of online identity within a consideration of men’s and women’s play in the world of MMORPGs.

To conclude this introduction; analyses of addiction and pathological behaviour in the world of video games and video gaming exemplify how deterministic theories have, and continue to, influence video game theory by prioritising structures, content and systems, and show them to be inadequate for achieving a comprehensive sociological understanding of video games and video gaming as they ignore the active social and cultural practices central to the lifeworld, the social and cultural environment in which video gaming takes place, and the social and cultural environments that video gaming can create and influence. The ‘passive consumer’ in video game theory exemplified through expositions on video game addiction is not, as we will see in Chapter 2.1, limited to expositions on addiction. In video game theory technological determinism has thus far dominated the field wherein work on encouraging and understanding gamers’ immersion and engagement has historically ‘situate[d] power exclusively within the game itself’ (Thornham, 2001: 1). And, as Chapter 2.2 will show ‘demonisation’ of the electronic entertainment industry, consequent to the omission, or exclusion, of the active and interpretative consumer from analyses is not exclusive to studies of the video game industry and its content and systems. It continues a long and established social critique that posits the entertainment industry, and electronic entertainment, as divisive and tyrannical and the consuming public as its isolated, powerless and passive subjects.

In Chapter 2.3 and 2.4 an alternative to the structure/agency paradigm and deterministic theories that dominate video game theory will be proposed. It will be argued that in an age of electronic technology and electronic entertainment, advances in computer and game console technology, and widespread access to the internet people locally and globally are connecting with each other and forming valued and enduring networked communities. And furthermore, the people engaging with the electronic technology, social networks and the communities within are not passive subjects, but they are active engaged and interpretative actors – performative participants living in, building and developing vibrant and social lifeworlds. Consequently in order to advance video game studies it is theoretically and empirically imperative to avoid the structural dualism that posits the gamer as passive and prioritise a social as opposed to a dual ontology. Thereby a picture of the video game lifeworld can be developed that focuses on human agency, social action, relations, networks and communities.

From this social ontology this thesis will examine and analyse the ‘mundane’ and the ordinary social practices through which video gamers actively engage with their pursuit in order to achieve immersion, engagement, enjoyment and a rewarding gaming experience. Social actions, interactions, rituals and performances characteristic of participation in the video game lifeworld will be examined and shown to be crucial for developing and maintaining immersion into, and engagement with, the inherently social pursuit of video gaming.

The chapters that are to follow will illustrate and analyse how, in the video game lifeworld, video gamers indulge in social practices (exemplified in this thesis by masculine practices) in the forms of, amongst others, chat, play, labour, fandom, contest, cooperation, identity formation construction and performance, which can have the consequence of gamers spending extraordinary amounts of time in the game, or in the screen, time which leads to concerned ‘outsiders’, journalists, parents and even academics ‘seeing’ individual anti-social pathologies or ‘addictions’. And it is here, in the chapters that are to follow, that the theoretical contributions to sociology, and the sociology of video games and video gaming that this thesis offers will become apparent. In Chapter 5 there will be content analyses of a range of popular contemporary video games. Herein theories from film studies will be utilised in order to highlight narratives of masculinity and audience identification. Following on from this a contribution to content analysis and audience studies will be made by emphasising the inherent agency of the video gamer immersed in their pursuit. Whilst Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003) acknowledge the existence and importance of gameplay performance, in terms of taking on a variety of roles, herein it will be argued that through a combination of ‘narcissistic identification’ and agency the video gamer not only identifies with the onscreen character (and acts out the appropriate role) but they ‘become’ the onscreen character and perform as their ‘ideal self’ encouraging and facilitating the ‘suspension of disbelief’ and, importantly, the motivation to keep returning to the game.

In addition to this contributions to the field will be made through a theoretical and empirical analysis that posits video games and video gaming as an ‘organised sport played in a domestic environment’. Emanating from the data - observation and participant observation - it will be shown that gamers’ comments and analyses (of contents and practices) central to video gaming, and the actions and reactions of gamers in terms of physical practices – skill

development and embodiment, language, individual and group training regimes and bonding practices, competitive practices and the formation of social relations and social groups through the practices of video gaming - reflect the conduct and sentiment of organised sport. Theorising video gaming as an 'organised sport' then facilitates further theoretical analyses of the world of video games and video gaming by utilising insights from the sociology of sport. In particular it allows for a phenomenological analysis of gaming practices (Chapter 6) - an analysis that builds upon Thornam's (2012) contribution to the field by focussing on masculine embodied practices and performances - and a Durkheimian analysis of the career of the video gamer including practices of immersion and integration into a video gaming community - with the eventuality of a successful and enjoyable gaming experience (Chapter 7) - and a Durkheimian analysis of fan communities through an examination of participation, rituals, effervescence and community within video game forums.

Fundamentally the interactivity and creativity of the video gamer will be emphasised throughout this thesis - an argument will be presented that video gaming must not be seen as where sociality ends and anti-sociality begins, key concepts for dominant theories of addiction, or as a world characterised by 'corrosive' social separation and isolation - as Taylor (2006) argues video games, particularly MMORPGs (to be discussed in Chapter 7) are an inherently, and necessarily, a social pursuit enjoyed by millions - not just the solitary teenage boy on the fringes of society. Video gaming will be shown to be a locus for new, contemporary forms of agency and sociality. Through video games and video gaming, facilitated by global telecommunication networks, video gamers enact contemporary forms of agency as, with their multisensory social practices they interact with, and develop, warm and inviting environments, social networks and communities. Video gaming practices, which may become obsessive, or even addictive, are enmeshed in social action, social performance and social collectives and a sociological understanding the video game lifeworld requires this inherent sociality to be recognised, understood and prioritised.

Chapter 2: Towards a Lifeworld Analysis of the World of Video Games and Video Gaming

2.1) Structure/Agency: A Prevailing Dualism in Video Game Theory

Crawford (2012: 2) praised the importance of recent contributions to the study of video games ‘There are, of course, some very good books that pay attention to the culture of video games in the course of their wider consideration of the genre, such as Dovey and Kennedy (2006) and Mayra (2008), to name but two, as well as a small number that look at video game culture more specifically, such as Newman (2008)’. Frans Mayra (in 2012) is Professor in Information Studies and Interactive Media in the School of Information Sciences, University of Tampere in Finland. His 2008 book is an introductory text book for students of game studies that presents and examines the social, cultural and economic history and significance of video games and game theory. Dovey and Kennedy (2006) avoided technological determinism ‘one of the critiques that has been levelled at video game theory’ (Thornham, 2011: 1) through a Media and Cultural Studies analysis of game cultures. Newman (2008: 14) achieved the same by highlighting the ‘... inherent creativity, productivity and sociality of [these] wider gamer cultures’ through an examination of gaming communities and their development of walkthroughs, FAQs, game art, narratives, modifications and game development. To Crawford’s list we can add Turkle (1997) and Rheingold’s (1994) expositions on MUDs which examined a range of gaming practices: identity construction and play, world-building, the changing nature of the individual psyche and depersonalized modes of communication for example. Walkerdine (2006, 2007) challenged the dichotomies of ‘activity and passivity’ and ‘economy and ideology’, which she argued had dominated game theory, by putting gender at the centre of debate and developing a relational approach to examining and theorising game-play. Thornham’s (2011) study of video gaming within eleven households incorporated the lived experiences of video gaming into video game theory examining, for example, how the practices of gaming produce and generate power relations. Thereby she highlighted gaming as a social activity with meaning beyond the immediate moment of game-play. Crawford (2005) examined the correlation between video game play and interest, knowledge and participation in sport. Crawford, Gosling & Light’s (2011) edited volume, through multiple contributions, revealed the social and cultural significance of

online games. And Crawford (2012) provided an analysis of video gamers, their practices and their culture, as well as the theoretical tools available to understand their social patterns and gaming practices.

However, despite these recent contributions to the study of video games and video gaming (above) there remains an enduring and dominant focus on content and systems and how they engage the gamer. For example, Salen & Zimmerman (2003), Crawford (2003), Koster (2005), Freeman (2004) all focus on video game design and how content can be created in order to engage the consumer. Dovey and Kennedy (2006, 85) point to the works of 'Juul (2003), Jarvinen (2003) and Arseth, Smedstat & Sunnana (2003) all working on projects which concentrate on the structural rule base of games'. Newman (2004) analyses the structure and content of video games and the analytical tools that can be used to understand them. Atkins (2003) is concerned with analysing, as fiction, the narrative content of video games - Tomb Raider, Half-Life, Close Combat and Sim City. Malone (1982 in Squire: 2003), Bowman (1982 in Squire: 2003) and Garret & Ezzo (1996 in Rosas et al: 2002) have focussed on the structural elements of popular video games and how they might be adapted into engaging educational tools. Consequently '...it is fair to say that most research, to date, has focussed specifically either on the video games themselves, such as their content or systems, or the direct engagement of a player or players, with a specific piece of game technology' Crawford (2012: 2). The research into video games and video gaming, discussed in Chapter 1, which focussed on the impact and potential impact of exposure to video games, their contents and systems, particularly the variable rate reward structure, provides further support for Crawford's (2012) assertion regarding the field's enduring focus on content and systems. An assertion that is supported by Thornham's (2011) position which exposes, and challenges, the primacy of technological determinism within video game theory which has had a tendency to 'situate power exclusively within the game itself' (Thornham, 2011: 1).

The primacy of technological determinism in video game theory, an enduring academic focus on the extremes of the video game lifeworld, discussed in Chapter 1.4 (compounded by the scapegoating of video games and video gaming considered in Chapter 1.5), together with journalism that focuses on extreme behaviour, discussed in Chapter 1.2, prominent legal action (compounded by consequent news reporting) taken against the video game

industry, industry professionals who proudly publicise their intentions, and abilities, to ‘...produce the most addictive games possible’ (Hare, 2011) and widespread use of the language and terminology of addiction amongst consumers exemplify a prevailing structure/agency dualism in analyses and understandings of video games and video gaming. Within academia, journalism, and consequently the wider population, there is an enduring belief that the video game industry is responsible for wilfully producing output that can and does dominate and determine its consumers’ behaviour.

This technologically determinist structure/agency dualism has not ‘only’ limited comprehensive analyses of video games and video gaming by ignoring or omitting the socio-cultural and economic significance of video games and video gaming. ‘There now exists a sizable academic literature that would seem to support [his] fears that video games can, and do, have a negative effect on their players’ (Crawford, 2012: 70) that is reflected in the fears and concerns of video gamers, parents, educators, and journalists. As a consequence of this prevailing dualism, in many quarters, video games and video gaming have been demonized.

2.2) Demonization of the Electronic Entertainment Industry: Nihilism, Individualism and the Controlling Power of ‘The Screen’

Prioritising technological determinism when examining the electronic entertainment industry, and thereby focusing on the ability of an organization, its content, systems and structures to determine the actions of its consumers has not been restricted to prominent research into the video game industry, video games and video gaming. It is consistent with a long standing social critique that concerns itself with the controlling power of ‘the screen’ on an increasingly isolated (physically and culturally) population as Dant (2005) argues in the quote below:

What is of significance for sociology is that the increasing tempo of technological change has changed the pace of material civilization and this has led critics to argue that technology has changed humankind's relationship with nature and the relationship between individual and society. Put simply, the critics suggest that technology has altered the human relationship with their material environment in ways that inhibit their full potential as human beings. In the sphere of social theory, these critiques have emphasised how the individual has become subordinated to a society driven by technology.'

(Dant, 2005: 34)

Baudrillard (1990) wrote that contemporary society is characterised by 'hyperreality' – and that 'hyperreality' emerged and came to dominate when cultural representations no longer referred to any social or human reality. Baudrillard asserted that cultural representations have become autonomous. All cultural representations, according to Baudrillard, no longer have their roots in a grounded reality – nature, the physical human body, objective science for example – but they are now conceived from 'models' constructed by and disseminated by electronic media. Consequent to the development, and proliferation, of the television the boundaries between media and 'reality' have become increasingly blurred. Instead of referring to an external grounded reality, mediated cultural references now refer only to other equivalent mediated cultural references and media representations of reality refer only to other media representations of reality which have gained primacy over all other representations of reality, and precede all other representations of reality in the interpretative process of people living in the mediated contemporary world: "All signs and signified joined (in cross reference) to form a complete 'simulacrum' and the 'precession of simulacra'" (Baudrillard, 1994: 1).

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: A hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map,

nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - that engenders the territory.

(Baudrillard, 1994: 1)

In the television age the public has only the mediated spectacle to engage with, wherein ‘only affiliation to the model has any meaning’ - as the images people are exposed bear no relation to an external reality that the viewer can refer to, the screen through which we now engage with the hyperreality of simulation requires no, and receives no, interpretation by the viewer (Baudrillard, 1993: 56). So Baudrillard asserts that the screen ends all interpretation... ‘effectively the subject, as an active, thinking, interpreting being, disappears, the subject and the object implode into a hyperreal simulation, which attains a position of complete dominance’ (King, 1998: 51). Baudrillard’s perspective on the electronic entertainment industry, which focuses on the determining power of the organization, its content, systems and structures on the agency of isolated individuals, is not incomparable. It is a particularly nihilistic theory, but one that extends an enduring history of sociological thought that has condemned the electronic entertainment industry for creating and controlling an unthinking, non-interpretive, passive and mystified population of isolated individuals.

Lasch (1978) asserted that contemporary society is characterised by a ‘culture of narcissism’ – a culture of individual self awareness, and self obsession. In Western society, he argued, consequent to the ubiquity, imposition and pressures of capitalism, relations between people are now defined by competition. Consequently social activity and relations between people have taken a defensive turn, resulting in communities, and thereby in Putnam’s (2000) terms ‘social capital’ – see below - being undermined and broken down and the self preservation and self-determination of the individual to be prioritised. By identifying a ‘culture of narcissism’ under industrialised capitalism Lasch (1978) encapsulates a powerful social critique within which post enlightenment capitalist society is characterised by increased individualisation and social separation (Maffesoli, 1996: 11) exemplified by Bauman’s assertion that ‘Casting members as individuals is the trademark of modern society’ (Bauman, 2001b: 45). Whilst Lasch (1978) focussed on the impact of social structures, particularly the forces of capitalism, on communities, social relations, social lives and human

behaviour with the consequence of competitive individualism and self preservation Horkheimer and Adorno (1997/1944), whose work relates directly to the entertainment industry, discussed how the values of that capitalist system (such as individualism and the culture of narcissism) are disseminated, with the consequences of subsuming the agency and determining the behaviour of individuals separated from close knit communities by the forces of capitalism and ultimately producing a mystified, duped and exploited population

In 'Bowling Alone' Putnam (2000: 19) argued, and used empirical evidence to support the contention, that since the 1970s American society had experienced a significant decline in 'social capital' – with social capital referring to 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them'. According to Putnam (2000: 22) the key forms of social capital are 'bonding social capital' and 'bridging social capital'. 'Bonding social capital' maintains close connections between members of social groups, whereas 'bridging social capital' allows for interaction between those social groups - so bonding social capital creates powerful 'in-group loyalty' and bridging social capital 'can have powerfully positive social effects' (Putnam, 2000: 23). Putnam (2000) presented seven measures of social capital: political participation, civic participation, religious participation, workplace networks, informal networks, mutual trust, and altruism. And he empirically demonstrated that aside from a few exceptions including youth volunteering (Putnam, 2000: 165), self-help (Putnam, 2000: 150) and 'telecommunications' (Putnam, 2000: 166) by any measurement there has been a steady and dramatic diminishment in 'social capital' over the previous two generations (Putnam, 2000: 287).

Putnam set out to identify where and why 'social capital' had diminished in order to determine practices for encouraging future growth. After considering different causes for the reduction of social capital, including education (Putnam, 2000: 186) and changing family structure (Putnam, 2000: 277) Putnam concluded, consequent to applying self determined measures to ensure the validity of his work, that four key characteristics of contemporary society had emerged as having a negative impact on social capital. Firstly, the 'pressures of time and money' in terms of 'endemic economic pressures, job insecurity, and declining real wages, especially [but not exclusively] among the lower two thirds of the income

distribution' and 'the movement of women out of the home and into the paid labour force' (Putnam, 2000: 191, 194). Secondly Putnam (2000: 204, 205, 215) asserted that 'mobility and sprawl' inhibited social capital as a constantly mobile or 'nomadic' population diminishes the potential for, and motivation to achieve civic engagement community cohesion through the development of community-based social capital and that due to the distance between residents of large metropolitan residential areas the residents incur a "sprawl civic penalty" due to the inherent problems of social engagement in getting to places. Thirdly Putnam (2000: 247-248) argued that age/generational differences are significant in the loss of social capital in American society as 'middle-aged and older people are more active in organizations than younger people, attend church more often, vote more regularly, both read and watch the news more frequently... and volunteer more'.

Thirdly, and with particular significance to an analysis of how the electronic entertainment industry, its content and structures have been seen to determine agency, behaviour and social relations, Putnam (2000: 216-217) pointed to 'technology and mass media' for having a significant bearing on social capital in two related ways: 'First, news and entertainment have become increasingly individualised. No longer must we coordinate our tastes and timings with others in order to enjoy the rarest culture or the most esoteric information' and 'second, electronic technology allows us to consume this hand-tailored entertainment in private, even utterly alone'. Putnam's research also showed that watching television had become a universal activity in American society and that its growth in popularity was synergistic with age/generational differences and their impact on social capital:

'This massive change in the way Americans spend our days and nights occurred precisely during the years of generational civic disengagement. How is television viewing related to civic engagement? In a correlational sense, the answer is simple. More television watching means less of virtually every form of civic participation and social involvement'

(Putnam, 2000: 228)

Putnam's (2000) assertions about the impact of social structures, particularly electronic media, on social relations are supported by Sennett (1986). Sennett argues, sympathetically with Lasch (1978), that over the last two centuries people, particularly in Western societies, have become obsessed with the phenomenon of personality. In addition the dominance of secularism, beginning in the 19th Century, meant that logic, not immediate feelings or sensations, was applied to activities, meetings and to other people in public life in a bid to understand them not experience them. Thereby all public experiences could be, and were, taken seriously and analysed which had a significant impact on, and increase in, an obsession with personality and presentation of the self. The consequent constant self analysis and fears regarding the presentation of self has created a situation where people have become more distant from others and less able and willing to socialise freely and without anxiety. Sennett tells us that we, as a society, have lost our will and ability to 'play'. We are no longer able to express ourselves in the company of others and the gratification available to us in the eighteenth century, when such an obsession with the self and personality was not an prominent, is now lost to us.

Alongside the obsession with personality and the presentation of self consequent to the dominance of secularism, the rise of industrial capitalism led those who had been economically successful to withdraw from projects aimed at shaping public life and focus on protecting themselves from public life. Consequently there was an emergent ideology of the family as a refuge from the seriousness of social relations in public, the constant self analysis and presentation and the threats, or perceived threats from public life. Once ensconced in the privacy and refuge of our private homes it may appear as if the television is a bridge between the home and the street however the impact of television is one of 'tyranny' (Sennett, 1986). Television, in particular the news and politics takes the form of titillation, it is a one way flow of messages and information that inhibits the establishment of social communication and relations and by focussing on personality and private lives it reinforces the ideology and causal structures inherent to the 'fall of public man'. So for Sennett, as for Baudrillard, and synonymous with dominant theories and expositions on video game addiction, and technological determinism in video game theory the consumer of electronic entertainment is posited as isolated, passive, powerless and controlled by a one way flow of information from 'the screen'.

Through an analysis of Horkheimer and Adorno (1997/1944), Sennett (1986) and Putnam (2000) we can see that a perspective on the electronic entertainment industry that focuses on institutional and technological determinism, within a wider Baudrillardian social critique, has a long and established history. This perspective has become somewhat axiomatic in analyses of electronic entertainment and ‘the screen’, and it is now a powerful feature of analyses of video games and video gaming. When academics, journalists, parents and others have examined the world around them not only have they seen a pervasive and profitable capitalist video game industry with a vested interest in selling more games and making more profit, they have also seen a world where physically isolated research subjects - friends, children and others - cast as passive individuals in the grips of technological determinism by dominant social critiques, spend what can often seem to be extraordinary amounts of time ‘in the game’. Consequent to an enduring focus on institutions, content and structure, coupled with a tendency towards axiomatic understandings of the isolated individual and the determining power of electronic entertainment on agency, analyses of video games and video gaming, by remaining within a prevailing structure/agency paradigm, have become deterministic and/or nihilistic.

2.3) Challenging Nihilism: Individualism and the Controlling Power of The Screen

2.3.1) Challenging Nihilism: Individualism

‘Individualism, either properly speaking or in its derivative form of narcissism, is central to many books, articles and theses which, naturally enough, take a psychological, as well as a sociological or political perspective. This is a kind of obligatory rite of passage for those wishing to build a knowledge of modernity. While certainly not without its uses, this approach becomes increasingly questionable when used in countless newspaper articles, political speeches or moral posturings as a kind of magical key to understanding. So-called experts, untroubled by caution or scholarly nuance, disseminate a body of conventional, and somewhat disastrous, wisdom about the withdrawal into the self, the end of collective ideals or, taken at its

widest sense, the public sphere. What we find ourselves face to face with is a kind of doxa, which may perhaps not endure but which is nevertheless widely received, and at the very least, has the potential to mask or deny the developing social forms of today.’

(Maffesoli, 1996: 9)

Maffesoli’s quote above exemplifies that enduring sociological critiques that posit individuals as irreversibly isolated and individualised and as powerless pawns of technology and a technological superstructure can be contested as an axiomatic perspective – accepted due to its common sense acceptance as opposed to its empirical grounding. Supporting this critique of an axiomatic perspective Stonier (1983) asserted that a revolution in micro-electronics would not inhibit collective ideals, collective action and further the withdrawal into the self but that a proliferation of technology would propel society into a ‘Communicative Era’ (after having been through the Agrarian and then in the Mechanical eras) wherein the ‘next great boom in Western Consumerism will be in the electronic information/communication field’. This communicative era, he predicted – which is especially powerful in the light of the 2012 ‘Arab Spring’ – would not bring about the 1984 dystopia predicted by many, and apparent in the work of Jean Baudrillard, but it would provide the opportunity for people to ‘acquire, store, process, and communicate information’ (Stonier, 1983: 144). This he argued would have far reaching consequences for the formation of social networks and for the power of disenfranchised populations (in 1983) to share and interpret information, work and act together and thereby have an impact on their social world. Stonier (1983) focussed primarily on how through communication facilitated by micro-electronics populations could bring down authoritarian regimes. However his is a theory with wider social implications as it defies nihilistic social theories of the powerless individual by (correctly) predicting that people will have the power to change the world around them through electronically mediated networked communities.

Contrary to Stoll (1995) who foresaw increased separation as traditional, social, interactive and participatory means of meeting needs are usurped by solitary internet activity, Shenk (1997) who coined the term ‘hyper-fragmentation’ to describe an emerging political environment in the virtual world, Mandel & Van der Leun (1996) who described the

internet/virtual world as characterised by small tribes which they anticipated would become impenetrable to outsiders and Thimbleby (1998) who foresaw 'tribalism', a 'glocal' environment and homogenous groups adverse to interaction with each other, Marshall McLuhan (1969) saw the begins of, and foresaw a future when electronic technology, and electronic media (McLuhan focussed primarily on the television) would complete a 'retribalizing process'. A process that would, in time, unite a fragmented world into a 'global village'. Characterised by advances in forms of communication there have been three ages of man (McLuhan, 1969). In the preliterate tribal era '... all the senses were balanced and simultaneous, a closed world of tribal depth and resonance, an oral culture structured by a dominant auditory sense of life' (McLuhan, 1969). In a tribal culture the intimacy of the spoken world drew people into 'tribal mesh', a 'tribal mesh' characterised by interpersonal speech, participation in group experiences and integration. The primacy of the phonetic alphabet – exacerbated by its proliferation through the invention and popularity of the Guttenberg press – brought with it a new era dominated by the printed word and 'the eye'. The sensory balance and intimacy of the tribal mesh could not survive this 'bombshell' (McLuhan, 1969) and '... literate or visual man [created] an environment that is strongly fragmented, individualistic, explicit, logical, specialised and detached' (McLuhan, 1969). The third, and current, era – one characterised by electronic media – McLuhan argued would (through the telegraph, radio, films, telephone, computer and television) bring an end to 'visual supremacy' and, by facilitating multisensory participation with the media and with others, bring to an end the separation and individualism characteristic of 'visual man' and, through a process of retribalization, culminate in the establishment of a 'global village'.

McLuhan's (1969) theory leaves him open to criticism as he seems to promote technological determinism. He argued that 'the medium is the message' thereby suggesting that technology and technology alone – not human agency – would change and reconstruct the social order. However an alternative reading of McLuhan is that certain media facilitate human agency, and that that agency can take one, or many, of a wide range of forms and processes depending upon people's needs, wants and chosen approach to the media. People determine how technology is used, technology does not determine how people behave and thereby determine human agency and practices. So, from this perspective, McLuhan (1969) argued that electronic media have the capacity to facilitate human agency and multisensory

participatory social practices of a sort that have not been dominant since the days of the ‘tribal mesh’. ‘The essence of TV viewing is, in short, intense participation and low definition — what I call a “cool” experience, as opposed to an essentially “hot,” or high definition-low participation, medium like radio’... ‘The use of electronic media constitutes a break boundary between Gutenberg man and integral man, just as phonetic literacy was a break boundary between oral-tribal man and visual man’ (McLuhan, 1969). McLuhan saw electronic media as extending the central nervous system of its users and inducing a multi-sensory engagement with the medium, the self and ultimately between a community of users. Fundamentally, he argued, ‘The aloof and dissociated role of the literate man of the Western world is succumbing to the new, intense depth participation engendered by the electronic media and bringing us back in touch with ourselves as well as with one another’ (McLuhan, 1969).

Wellman et al’s work (1996: 213) supports McLuhan theory as they asserted that ‘When computer networks link people as well as machines they become social networks’ – and on these networks which they called CCSNs (computer-supported social networks) members of virtual communities find a space to work and find companionship. Wesch (2009) analysed self-awareness and interaction as expressed and understood through posting and viewing YouTube videos and vlogs (video blogs where individuals express themselves, their thoughts and interests), a process wherein participants find their own use for electronic media, and a process that incorporates multi-sensory activities involving sight, speech, interpretation, participation and feedback. Wesch (2009) discovered that YouTube enthusiasts were able to develop loose and deep ties with one another, thereby creating a community amongst a geographically dispersed and isolated population. Wright (2007) wrote an article for the New York Times⁸ asserting that ‘The growth of social networks – and the Internet as a whole – stems largely from an outpouring of expression that often feels more like ‘talking’ than writing: blog posts, comments, homemade videos...’. Wright’s (2007) perspective is echoed by Mangold (2009) who writes that people’s eagerness to utilise telecommunications in order to ‘broadcast themselves to a global audience’ is evidence of humankind’s desire to move towards the retribalization written about by McLuhan (1969)’. And it is one that is supported by Van Mensvoort (2011), assistant Professor at the Industrial Design Department of the Eindhoven University of Technology, who argues that ‘social software networks like

⁸ The New York Times is an American newspaper published daily.

Facebook, MySpace, Qzone and Twitter... have one thing in common: they restructure the social linkage between people.

Havick (2000), inspired by Marshall McLuhan's (1969) concept of hot and cold media, argued that the internet is a 'hot' medium, one that allows and encourages little user participation and therefore specialises, fragments and tends to detribalize. 'The Internet Screen is not ambiguous and does not leave much to the imagination', the internet is, in McLuhan's terms, hot [and therefore] '.... the impact of the internet on a television-based culture will be massive. Increased specialisation, fragmentation, individualization, and decentralization of societal activity will cause stress to social, economic, and political institutions' (Havick, 2000: 173, 282). However, in opposition to Havick's (2000) position, further to a reading of McLuhan (1969) I suggest that the internet is, in fact, a 'cold' medium, one that requires a great deal of participatory and multi-sensory engagement in order to make it meaningful (warm). And this makes it both actively, and potentially, a great facilitator, not negator, of retribalization. The internet does not leave much to the imagination, as Havick argues, but this is not because it is like a photograph or a film, determined by McLuhan (1969) to be hot media, ones that contain all the detailed information about specific objects a viewer requires and therefore inhibits participation. The internet does not leave much to the imagination because it is a facilitator not a provider of information.

Through the agency and multisensory practices of individuals and groups content (web-pages) is created and disseminated through the internet and then people interact with this content which provides it with meaning and a social context – their actions 'warm it up' in other words. On the internet there are many pages that are predominately script and provide little space for user interaction or participation. However there are countless more (including hugely popular sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia and Online video gaming sites) where not only is the content provided by its users, but visitors to the sites are invited to contribute to the content through reviews, comments, adding user generate content and engaging with online games. The internet user, like the TV viewer, is not provided with comprehensive content, but 'is constantly 'filling in vague and blurry images, bringing himself into in-depth involvement with the screen and acting out a constant creative dialog with the iconoscope' (McLuhan, 1969). The internet is a cold medium – a network that

facilitates work and play, and one on which multi-sensory activities take place in order to make it functional, and, in combination with other electronic technologies: computers, games consoles, computer/video games, and mobile telephones (McLuhan Galaxy, 2011) to name a few, facilitates social action and the creation and maintenance of social networks and enduring networked communities.

2.3.2) Challenging Nihilism: The Controlling Power of The Screen

Dovey & Kennedy (2006) recognised a historical tendency for new technology to be demonised through academic, journalistic and anecdotal expositions stating that: ‘Each new technological epoch brings about a period of instability which is greeted by both enthusiasm and suspicion; this was true of the advent of the printing press, the telegraph, the telephone and electricity’ (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006: 65). And there are now social theorists who, despite axiomatic views that demonise electronic technology generally, and video games specifically, convincingly challenge technological determinism and associated ideas relating to the subjugation of human beings. Stonier (1983) and McLuhan (1969), and others above, whose work focuses on retribalization challenge Baudrillard’s theories (and by association those of Horkheimer & Adorno (1997/1944), Putnam (2000) and Sennett (1986)) which see progressive subjugation of human beings, the complete dominance of the screen, and the determination of behaviour through unlimited engagement with the hyperreal. McLuhan’s (1969) ideas also challenge dominant theories and expositions on video game addiction (Chapter 1) and the technological determinism that dominates video game theory which situates power exclusively in the game (Thornham, 2011). McLuhan points to the significance of multisensory participation for active engagement with the screen and networked communities – something that as we will see throughout this thesis is integral to the practices of video gaming and to rewarding, immersive and engaging gaming experiences. In support of Baudrillard, dominant theories of addiction, and many personal accounts of ‘addiction’ (Chapter 1) are founded on the idea that video game addiction is related to, and quantifiable by time spent ‘at the screen’, and that the underlying cause of immersion and engagement (and therefore addiction) is exposure to the content with which gamers are confronted. However, Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality, and the associated disappearance of the interpreting subject, relies upon the (Cartesian) premise that the

human's ability to interpret, understand and make sense of the world is entirely dependent upon their visual interaction with the world around them (King, 1998).

Human beings interact and interpret the world with senses other than vision and, furthermore, as Heidegger argues our ocular experiences of the world are made meaningful to us (and those around us) socially, through interpreted meanings shared and disseminated through language. 'Language is not supplementary to the ocular experience but constitutive of it... [Rather] our language makes certain parts of the world meaningful for us and it is these which our senses become attuned to recognizing' (King, 1998: 58). 'The screen' therefore does not comprise and present a false (hyper) reality – it presents an interpretation of reality determined by the social and cultural norms of the society, or culture, in which content is created and to which 'the screen' is presented. A series of images that were not grounded in any social or cultural reality, and were not presented in a way that viewers could interpret and therefore connect with could not, and would not, engage the viewer. Similarly consumers, or viewers, of television programmes do not merely absorb empty, referenceless images – but they interpret them in order to make sense of them in relation to the world in which they live – images are interpreted using skills developed consequent to skills, meanings and cultural references socialised consequent to living in the world, the world beyond the screen (King, 1998: 52). The production and consumption of television, therefore, is synonymous with that of other forms of written and spoken culture as 'consumers' discuss and interpret it in relation to their shared lives and understandings.

Television viewers are not passive victims of electronic technology and its output – they are active, thinking, interpreting engaged people who, consequent to living within a social group are able to immerse themselves in cultural output and, through language, engage with it and make sense of it in relation to their lives amongst the social group to which they belong. And, significantly, the same can be said of video gamers⁹, with the additional factor that video gamers do not 'only' immerse themselves in the cultural output, engage with it and make sense of it linguistically. The merits, and otherwise, of in-game content, structures and

⁹ As Mayra (2008: 65-66) notes 'In contrast to literature of cinema, the world, theme, characters or other elements of game design are open for both player interpretation and for player manipulation, and thus the analysis of games should involve elements from both of these two main dimensions'.

narratives are actively discussed, analysed and criticised amongst gamers face to face and on online forums. And video gamers, as we will see in Chapter 5, actively engage with the content and structures within video games consequent to understandings derived from, and brought from, the social that world they live in. Through, for example, socialised norms of masculinity brought to the game video gamers interpret on screen events and thereby determine the culturally and socially appropriate way to engage with, and react to them. Video gamers, as we will see in Chapter 6, engage with the screen and its content physically through micro-practices on controllers thereby crafting themselves as protagonists and controlling events on the screen. Video gamers also enact embodied (physical and verbal) practices and performances that lead to immersion into games and integration into communities of games offering a social gaming experience. Furthermore, as we will see in Chapter 7, video gamers (specifically in this study PC gamers playing the MMORPG *Eve Online*) interpret – individually and as part of a team – on screen events, game content and game systems in order to build enduring and rewarding social worlds and develop group and situationally specific, and meaningful, gaming experiences. And, in Chapter 8 we will see that video game fans actively engage with game developers in order influence game design (an influence that is courted by the video game industry) and they even unite in protest, or withdraw themselves from the game, in order exert their agency and power over game developers and therefore onscreen content.

Video gamers recognise that it is their multisensory engagement with video games and video gaming, and not (only) the visually received on screen content, that initiates and maintains their immersion into, and consequent ‘addiction’ to video games (in the specific context that the terminology of addiction is used in the world of video gaming). For example, in a focus group one young gamer was motivated to immersion by sibling rivalry – he gained great satisfaction from completing a new game, or completing a game on a higher difficulty level, before his older brother had managed to do so. Another with ambitions to be a pilot played flight simulator games in order to learn as much as possible about different planes and airports and test his knowledge of airplanes and airports brought to the game from books and films. One young gamer described a game as addictive because of the interesting and challenging skills needed to play ‘There’s a game [doodlejump] that’s addictive, like you use your ipod ... because you move it like that (gestures) and so you can’t move it like that (gestures)...’ (C1, 2011). Another young gamer expressed that his engagement with the

game was geared towards seeking out hidden rewards that his peers hadn't found yet 'yeah that's the addictive part of it because you want to get higher and higher...' (B1, 2011). Games were appealing to another gamer because he got to engage with other gamers and play competitively, and cooperatively, with them 'I'm addicted to things when you are in groups and you do a death match...' (A1, 2011). A female gamer talked about her enthusiasm for the variety of opportunities for actions, entertainment and self expression through her gaming medium of choice (the iPhone) on which she plays games, listens to music, texts and updates her social network profiles 'I'm not joking I'm addicted to my iPhone you can just do so much with it' (C4, 2011).

2.4) Towards a Lifeworld Analysis of Video Games and Video Gaming

Even accepting that under certain circumstances social structures, such as industrialised capitalism and the mass media, can influence social action - for example by separating people from traditional communities and undermining social capital, and that the culture industry, or electronic entertainment, can produce and 'expose' its audience to content with an ideological bias, there are significant differences between traditional electronic entertainment – films and television - particularly in terms of the networked communities facilitated by gaming technology (and global telecommunication networks) and the multisensory practices of the consumer that must be taken into account when analysing the world of video games and video gaming.

The structure/agency paradigm wherein structures (capitalism, and the electronic entertainment industry) are posited as prior to and dominant over agency of the 'passive consumer' is inadequate for a comprehensive sociological analysis of video games and video gaming as it overlooks the active and interpretative social actor, and it does not take into account the potential for, and the reality of, the agency and social action that builds, maintains, develops and operates within this vibrant and social lifeworld. Focussing on the structure/agency dualism, and raising it to an axiomatic level, as has been done in analyses of video gaming following investigations into other entertainment media by the social theorists cited above, reflects a Habermasian conception of the social world. Habermas asserted that social structures pre-exist individual action, they are autonomous and are causal in terms of

individual and social action. Individuals are born into an established social world with pre-existing and autonomous social systems and then people necessarily fit into functional slots in those social systems. For Habermas the existence of social structures that are prior to, and dominant over, the lifeworld was an indisputable reality. For Habermas (1988) - and Bhaskar (1979) - these structures were not reducible to any individual or to their constituent members. Denouncing the idealism that he perceived as being inherent to hermeneutics, Habermas argued that there exists an objective reality consisting of objective structures, and therefore society is ontologically independent of individuals. Habermas (1988: 174) believed that there are autonomous structural aspects of our society that cannot be reduced to interpretation – ‘... the objective context of social action is not reducible to the dimension of intersubjectively intended and symbolically transmitted meaning’. Following a functionalist perspective Habermas argued that in Western societies the social structure exists simultaneously with the lifeworld. The rationality of coherent and autonomous social structures – primarily the state and the capitalist economy of which the video game industry is a part - inevitably colonise and sideline the lifeworld, consequently these objective realities necessarily constrain and direct human action.

This dualistic political ontology has some manifest empirical grounding. Yet, this ontology in no way represents an accurate picture of modern social reality. It focuses on one experience of this reality, raising it to an axiomatic level’.

(King, 2004: 16)

However the ideology that promotes the absolute primacy of structure over agency, as propounded by Habermas and others can and should be challenged – both generally and with specific reference to the world of video gaming. It is true, as Habermas argues that the social world and its structures cannot be reduced to the individual or individual interpretation of it. However they cannot be more than the individuals involved, and cannot be autonomous and therefore independent of the people involved. To maintain such a dualism is to reify society and reify the social structures within it. Social structures have developed and become

enduring, the capitalist system and the state for example, and people certainly fill slots in the machinery, as Habermas points out. But the structures are collective, not autonomous, phenomena. Even the seemingly functional and rational structures such as the state and the capitalist system have developed consequent to collective action, and all objective structures are ultimately reducible to social relations. And, furthermore, the roles and positions within the state, or other rational bureaucracy (such as the video game industry), exist consequent to historical collective action and agreement not due to the inherent needs of an autonomous system.

So the Habermasian position can be resolutely challenged within classical and contemporary social theory. And these challenges have significance for developing an alternative analysis of the world of video gaming - an analysis that prioritises collective social action and thereby eliminates the enduring problematic of reifying content and social structures, and technological determinism. Dilthey (1976) argued that the 'intentionality' of human action is different to the causality of the natural environment. Whereas animals and plants are necessarily constrained and directed by their significant environmental structures, humans, he argued, although constrained by natural laws were not entirely limited by them. According to Dilthey (1976), the collective human mind invests the natural world and the environment with meaning, and the particular meaning that a social group invests into that environment is fundamental to human 'life'. Human 'life' therefore cannot be understood through logical analyses that ignore the particular meaning that a lifeworld has invested in their environment. And, furthermore, the social world cannot be understood by logical analyses of objective, autonomous and reified causal structures but only by interpreting the meanings that particular lifeworlds had developed through shared understandings and shared social action.

What Dilthey called 'life', Schultz called the 'World of daily life', a world comprised of typifications and relevances determined by, modified by and disseminated by social relations and mediated by language. So for Schultz, like Dilthey, social structures are not prior or autonomous but they are socially and historically constructed, developed and handed down from one generation to the next through socialisation - in particular the work of parents and teachers. Schütz (1962: 3) argued that social structures when conceived of as autonomous and directive by social scientists - such as Marxist interpretations of historical materialism

and capitalism, neo-Marxist interpretations of the culture industry, or Baudrillard's construction of the electronic media and hyperreality - are in fact 'thought objects' constructed by social scientists in order to grasp the social reality... 'constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene...'. Whilst the social world is certainly not unstructured, social structures are not prior to social action or autonomous of social actors – those 'living, thinking, and acting' human beings have 'preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life and it is these thought objects which determine their behavior, define the goal of their action, the means available for attaining them-in brief, which help them to find their bearing within their natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it' (Schütz (1962: 3).

Schütz's (1970, 2002) social theory prioritises collective action, interpretation and a shared language. Schütz (1970) asserted that the 'World of daily life' is comprised of typifications and relevances determined by, modified by and disseminated by social relations and mediated by language. So for Schütz¹⁰ social structures are not prior or autonomous but they are socially and historically constructed, developed and handed down from one generation to the next through socialisation¹¹ – in particular the work of parents and teachers. Therefore the social world, and the lifeworlds within, cannot be understood from a dual ontology that reifies social structures and ignores collective agency because the social world is socially derived and consequently comprised of shared meanings and shared actions that can only be interpreted and understood from a social ontology and disseminated with a shared language.

“World of daily life” shall mean the intersubjective world which existed long before our birth, experienced and interpreted by others, our predecessors, as an organised world. Now it is given to our interpretation. All interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teachers, which in the form of “knowledge at hand” functions as a scheme of reference’.

¹⁰ Schütz's phenomenological approach to understanding the social world will be returned to in Chapter 6 in an analysis of skills training and development.

¹¹ In Chapter 3 we will see how socialisation (often by parents and peers) into historically developed praxes of play facilitates immersion into the video game life world.

(Schütz, 1970: 73)

‘The knowledge of these typifications and of their appropriate use is an inseparable element of the sociocultural heritage handed down to the child born into the group by his parents and his teachers and the parents of his parents and the teachers of his teachers; it is thus socially derived’.

(Schütz, 1970: 119)

2.4.1) Constructing a Lifeworld Analysis of Video Games and Video Gaming

Schütz’ (1970) work, along with Collins’s (2004) micro-sociology that prioritises social interaction and social and group rituals and performances, is significant for this thesis as it introduces the social ontology, as opposed to the prevailing dual ontology, that will be used here to analyse, interpret and understand the world of video games and video gaming by focussing on social actions, networks and communities. This thesis will challenge conceptions of the ‘passive consumer’ by prioritising social action amongst vibrant gaming communities, contest theories of individualism and separation by pointing to ‘retribalization’ amongst networked gaming communities - and in doing so it will also oppose Baudrillard’s nihilism, and structural determinism that gives ‘power to the screen’.

Video gaming will be shown to be a shared, social and interactive pursuit and that it is social practices, social relations and social networks that make the video game lifeworld engaging and meaningful – and therefore inviting, warm, immersive and rewarding.

For the video gamers at the heart of this study significant past memories of video gaming were social – whether that was a designer and developer’s motivation to create a new game (Chapter 4), the memories of a young gamer being introduced to video gaming or being

taught to play by a parent, the memory of beating an older sibling for the first time, or the ‘adrenaline rush of collaborative or competitive play – a finding that corresponds with Thornham (2011: 150) who wrote of her research subjects ‘The past memories of gaming were social ones; they were nostalgic recollections not of past gaming experiences, but of childhood social relations... and of pleasurable and familiar social scenarios’. Therefore at the theoretical and empirical levels video game theories that focus on the individual, content and systems whilst ignoring the social and cultural context in which video gaming takes place must be resolutely challenged.

The empirical data that informs this thesis has been gathered through immersion into the video game lifeworld. A variety of research methods, the details of which will become apparent as this project progresses, were utilised. These included traditional research methods: focus groups, observations and interviews with professionals and consumers. There were periods of participant adventures into the video gaming lifeworld through playing (in company and alone) some of the most popular games of the day and analysing their content and the social practices of those who play them. The research process also involved periods of engagement with two gaming communities who invited me to join them, chat to and interview them and experience first hand the lifeworld they inhabit and the social practices, networks and communities that comprise it, maintain it, develop it and make it meaningful, enjoyable, frustrating, warm, inclusive and much more besides for its members. In contrast to Sennett’s (1986) assertion that there has been a ‘fall of public man’ consequent to the imposition of the rational structures that colonise the lifeworld and diminish opportunities for play, the popularity and ubiquity of video game technology and video games has facilitated non-instrumental social interaction and interactive play on a global scale. And quantitative research, presented in greater detail in Chapter 4, demonstrates that increasingly girls and women are taking up opportunities for non-instrumental play by entering the video gaming lifeworld. However when it comes to gaming in the UK, which this thesis will prioritise (the research that informs this study has a UK focus, however it will also include and refer to relevant information derived from investigations and research into the wider global video game industry and lifeworld) it has been well documented that ‘there continues to be distinct gender differences in gaming patterns’ (Crawford, 2004: 259; Crawford & Gosling, 2005). The findings of this thesis support that assertion, and will focus on a predominately male element of this lifeworld. Consequently a recurring and uniting theme of this thesis will be

masculinity, and the performance of masculinity – particularly how masculinity, a culture of masculinity, and performances of masculinity facilitate engagement with, and immersion into, the video game lifeworld.

The research process was not designed in order to study and analyse a culture of masculinity. A snowballing recruitment technique was used to build a research sample, through which the volunteer participants who agreed to talk about their gaming practices, be observed at play and offer advice on games and gaming were predominately male video gamers - with female participants reinforcing rather than challenging gender differences and existing perceptions of video gaming as a male dominated and masculine pursuit. Six focus groups took place in schools which were populated by self-determined enthusiastic video gamers – despite the opportunity to participate being offered equally to boys and to girls of the thirty six volunteers only seven were female. Whilst boys’ gaming choices were unmistakably and consistently masculine – first person shooter (FPS) games, action games, action adventure games and driving games for example - girls were, as a rule, more interested in the nurturing genre or in low skill and immersion games played on phones, handheld consoles, tablet computers or on Facebook applications, a finding that corresponds with Crawford and Gosling (2005) who found a propensity for many women to play “simple and quick 'mini games'” on mobile devices, the reason offered for this was that ‘mobile telephones tend to be less gendered than many other information and communication technologies; hence, these are often more readily accessible to women and less controlled by men’¹². And when there were exceptions where girls became enthusiastic and animated whilst talking about the action adventure and first person shooter (FPS) games more consistently favoured by boys girls often felt the need to justify themselves, for example, by stating that they had been introduced to violent games and console gaming by an older male sibling. So, even though these girls may seem to have subverted the existence of a gender divide in video gaming, by self determining their choices as unusual or significant in terms of their gender ‘I know it’s weird for a girl but I like games where I get to kill things’ (C4: 2011) they, like the male shoppers studied by Miller (1998) - who appear to contest observations of female dominated shopping patterns but actually reinforce it through their constant referral to female advice and methods – reinforce the gender rule.

¹² In Chapter 5 we will see the significance of gendered choices and practices for the development of games containing representational strategies co-opted from Hollywood films.

Volunteer interviewees from the video game industry, contacted by letters or emails to heads of programming, design, public relations and management at British video game development and publishing companies were all male, and within these interviews it was emphasised that female employees in the industry are few and far between. And, furthermore, the two principle field sites central to this thesis were dominated by men and a culture of masculinity. One was an all male group of console gamers who played together and independently, and invited me to gaming sessions in order to observe, play and later carry out interviews, two of whom also offered advice and gaming recommendations for the duration of this study. The console games that will come under analysis are primarily action games which were discussed and favoured by this gaming community, focus group participants and industry experts - as one teenage participant put it 'boys' games'. The other field site was a group of predominately male Personal Computer (PC) gamers united through the Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) *Eve Online*, a game characterised by the language and performance of masculinity, although more subtle and nuanced than the overt masculinity performed by the cohort of console gamers. Some of the players in the *Eve Online* community were female; however the social interaction within game play was distinctly masculine.

The breadth of this research, and the lifeworld depicted, is limited by the scale of the study and by the dominance of male participants. So it must be noted that there are other arenas in the world of video games and gaming where femininity and gender neutral social action and social relations hold sway – for example Mayra (2011: 109-115) draws our attention to the emerging field of 'contextual play' or 'contextual gaming' that is now taking place on mobile internet devices and includes games such as *Flickr Sudoku*, *Fastr* and *PhotoMunchrs*. However; the male video gamer which became central to this study is significant and worthy of investigation. As Dovey and Kennedy (2006: 63) point out, 'the cultures of production in the world of video gaming have produced the white, heterosexual male as the 'ideal;' subject and one with 'considerable force within computer game cultures'. Having access to these gamers, and their video gaming practices, allowed for an exploration of the social practices, relations and networks at the heart of video games and video gaming with a particular emphasis on masculinity and how it unites the process of production, content, consumption

and performative practices (in terms of language and embodiment) that are central to the video game lifeworld.

2.5) Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter 3 an examination of the history of organised and competitive play will illustrate that although video gamers' enthusiasm for their pursuit may be encouraged through 'in-game' content and systems, the success and popularity of video gaming is consequent to a social and cultural history that has given organised play and contest an exalted status. In Chapter 4 an analysis of the video game 'system of provision' – an analysis of the 'commodity chain' which 'traces the entire trajectory of a product from its conception and design, through production, retailing and final consumption' (Fine, 1999: 404) - will illustrate how the video game industry has developed and evolved from early interactions and social relations between groups of (male) enthusiasts and hobbyists into a rationalised industry, and how it is now going through a new period of change consequent to how social networks of enthusiasts and professionals are using new mobile technologies. Thereby affirming that the video game industry may be enduring, restrictive and problematic and directive for the self expression of employees and consumers alike, but this is not because the system and its structures are autonomous, prior to and dominant over individuals and individual behaviour – they have evolved, and continue to evolve consequent to social actions and interactions. It will not be denied that the gaming industry imposes limitations on its developers, and that game developers place certain limits on what a gamer can do with and in a game - what we can call a game's ludic structure (Huizinga, 1949) - but it will be emphasised that networks of developers adapt to new technology and thereby encourage the continued evolution of the lifeworld, and, as with users of Facebook (Miller, 2011), video gamers through their interpretive and social practices adapt, and adapt to, the video game lifeworld and its content.

Through the construction of the 'system of provision' Chapter 4 will also reveal key social and cultural factors that impact upon the video game industry, and those who occupy it as gamers and professionals. These factors, such as an enduring culture of masculinity, representations of masculinity, embodiment and skill development, team work, competition

and social cohesion in the online world, and relationships between networks of gamers and industry professionals, will help to inform the remainder of this thesis. A thesis which, from Chapter 5 onwards, will analyse the 'career', or potential 'career' of a video gamer. The concept of a career is longstanding in the discipline of sociology - exemplified by Goffman (1961) who illustrated the 'The Moral Career of the Mental Patient' and Becker (1963) who depicted the 'career' of the cannabis using social deviant. The concept of a video gaming 'career' within this thesis is not intended to depict the path that a video gamer necessarily takes as they become more committed to video games and video gaming – a deterministic approach to the concept outlined by Crawford (2011). And neither is it used to portray a 'moral career' of the video gamer – wherein the individual progressively takes on a succession of social roles. Herein the concept of a career is used as a conceptual framework which allows the presentation and analysis of video gamers and video gaming that take many different forms: lone gaming, gaming in the 'physical' company of friends and peers and online video gaming. Video gamers can, and often do, simultaneously occupy two or more positions within the 'career' structure' such as lone and online gamer. And within each category there are gamers with different levels of 'career progression' characterised by experience, commitment and dedication to the video gaming lifeworld.

So, the concept of a video gaming 'career' within this thesis is not intended to depict the path that a video gamer necessarily takes as they become more committed to video games and video gaming. It is a conceptual framework which allows the presentation and analysis of video gamers and video gaming that take many different forms: lone gaming, gaming in the 'physical' company of friends and peers and online video gaming. Video gamers can, and often do, simultaneously occupy two or more positions within the 'career' structure' such as lone and online gamer. And within each category there are gamers with different levels of 'career progression' characterised by experience, commitment and dedication to the video gaming lifeworld. As will become clear as the thesis progresses there is no homogenous video gamer and no set of homogenous gaming practices. With different tastes, interests, degrees of interest and immersion into the video game lifeworld and the communities within, despite their unifying interest, there can be no single definition of a video gamer. For some video gaming is a lone pursuit for whom engagement with the wider lifeworld may simply involve reviewing an odd magazine to guide purchasing decisions or looking at tips for game-play on the internet. For others video gaming involves the lone activities above, with the

addition of social gaming sessions in the physical company of a community of friends and peers. Whilst for some video gaming is a fully immersive and engaging pursuit wherein long-term involvement with close knit communities playing Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG) is central to their video gaming practices. For gamers who have advanced through the video gaming career, successfully and enjoyably playing MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft, or as will be discussed primarily within this thesis, Eve Online necessitates many hours of, often daily, immersion and engagement with the video game lifeworld.

So, Chapter 5 will discuss the process through which a video gamer moves from audience to agent through ‘narcissistic identification’ (Ellis, 1982) with familiar representations of aspirational masculinity. A process through which, along with the agency inherent to video games (an inherency that differentiates video games from other forms of electronic entertainment) the lone gamer interprets onscreen events, crafts themselves as the protagonist, and thereby gains immersion, the ‘suspension of disbelief’ and the motivation to keep returning to the game. In Chapter 6 there will be an analysis of embodiment in video gaming which will examine how a performance of masculinity accompanies and facilitates immersion, the suspension of disbelief and an enjoyable lone gaming experience. And it will also be seen that such performances of masculinity are crucial for the video gamer who wishes to advance their gaming career and engage with a social gaming experience amongst a community of video gamers. Furthermore, Chapter 6 will also document and analyse the embodied skill development process necessary to achieve immersive game-play both for the lone gamer and for those who wish to advance their careers into cooperative or competitive video gaming.

Chapter 7 will examine the career of a video gamer that moves into the online world of MMORPGs. Here it will be seen that a situationally specific training and skill development process is integral to becoming part of a team (Call of Duty: Black Ops), guild (World of Warcraft) or corporation (Eve Online). And once part of a team situationally specific shared training regimes and their consequent skill sets (physical and linguistic) facilitate ‘totemic performances’. These performances, characterised by cooperation and synergy, can lead to a ‘collective effervescence’ which encourages gamers to remain part of a team and part of a

lifeworld. In Chapter 8 online video gaming communities – specifically video gaming forums – will be analysed with a view to understanding consumer behaviour. Herein it will be seen that video gamers who are advanced in their careers, and have thereby become knowledgeable, experienced and opinionated are sought after by designers and developers from the video game industry wanting to discuss, develop and test new, upcoming and potential projects. Video game companies try to achieve growth through ‘reflexive accumulation’ – ‘Knowledge on the basis of reflexivity operates via not just a single but a double hermeneutic, in which the very norms, rules and resources of the production process are constantly put into question’ (Lash & Urry, 1994). And for video game companies a significant element of their ‘reflexive accumulation’ involves the inclusion of consumers into the development process. However, as will be seen in Chapter 8, this reflexive process is not exploitative as gamers freely and willingly provide feedback to developers in order to both improve their gaming experiences and also protect and maintain their significant, valued and rewarding communities.

Chapter 3: Play a Historical Evolution – From Epic Contests & Cultic Games to Globalised Sports and Video Games

This chapter will trace the evolution of organised play and contest through, and as a reflection of, social change and posit video games and video gaming at the end of a historical, social, cultural and philosophical continuum. Historically significant forms of organised play and contest have consistently reflected and contributed to the wider socioeconomic environment in which they have taken place. And, in 2012, video gaming is the latest to do so. Video gaming extends the social order/play relationship and continuum. It is globalised, electronically networked, de-localised¹³, digitalised play/contest characterising, consequent to and contributing to the forces of globalisation. Sociological analyses of video games and video gaming require full acknowledgement of the socioeconomic environment in which they exist and take place. And they also require full recognition of the legacy from the social history of play and contest that preceded it. Video gamers' willing immersion into and engagement with video games and video gaming, the contents and maxims central to video games and gaming, the success of the video game industry and the extraordinary popularity of video games and video gaming both build upon and contribute to a social history in which organised, competitive play and contest have been central to human culture and expression.

Fundamental to this thesis is the principle that video games and video gaming cannot be fully understood through analyses of individuals indulging in isolated moments of play. The pursuit of video gaming, as Dovey and Kennedy (2006), Mayra (2008), Newman (2008), Thornham (2011) and Crawford (2012) point out, is socially, culturally, politically and economically significant. Therefore it is essential to recognise both the vital social aspects of video gaming - between video gamers – and the wider socioeconomic environment within which it takes place. The video game lifeworld, in terms of audience, technology (and the use of technology), and as we will see in Chapter 4, the requirement for global and national

¹³ The author recognises the importance of geography and technology (time and place⁴) in terms of the domestication of technology (Silverstone, 2007) and gendered power relations (Thornham, 2012) and how place and space influence social action and participation in the pursuit of video gaming and the use of technology in the domestic environment more generally – however in the context of this chapter the term de-localised is used neutrally, it is used solely in order to emphasise how whilst traditional organised sports necessitated participants meeting up at a particular time and specific geographical location (place), video gaming can, and does, take place amongst video gamers located around the world through electronic communications technology.

cultural and commercial sensitivities, global and national regulatory bodies, and global fan networks is characteristic of, and a reflection of, life in a globalised world. Furthermore, as video gaming cannot be understood as an isolated activity, so globalisation cannot be understood as an isolated social order. Video gaming is just one manifestation of play (though in contemporary society a very significant manifestation) in a long history of individual, cooperative and competitive play. And, globalisation is just one manifestation of dominant social order (though a very significant one) in a long history of social change and social orders. The popularity, social significance and draw of video games for the consumer – and, as we will see, with significance for this thesis, the dominance of men, and a culture of masculinity and therefore the marginal position of females in the video gaming lifeworld - cannot be understood through analyses that isolate the game or the gamer from history or from wider socio-economic factors, and neither can they be understood through analyses that isolate the present social order from those that preceded it, and how organised play/contest has evolved as a reflection of social history and social change.

Play and competition have held an exalted status throughout history. We know of games and contests from countries and cultures around the globe, and from ancient times to new. ‘The prehistoric sporting event best known and most frequently discussed by anthropologists and archaeologists is the Mesoamerican ballgame, known to the Maya as Pok-to-pok and the Aztecs as Tlachtli’ (Blanchard & Cheska, 1985: 99). We know that China gave us Cuju, Shuai jiao and Kung fu (a football game, wrestling style and martial art respectively). From Japan we have had Sumo and many other martial arts such as Jujitsu and Judo derived from the traditions of the ancient Samurai. The Mesopotamians gave us Backgammon, whilst Ancient Egyptian art from around 2000 BC points to the popularity of wrestling at this time. And in contemporary society the significance of organised sport cannot be missed – exemplified by association football which has developed into a global economic and cultural phenomenon. Play has always been given enormous significance by anthropologists and social theorists. Indeed Huizinga argued that ‘play is culture’ and set out to ‘... show that genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilization’ (Huizinga, 1949: 5).

Huizinga determined that there were three key characteristics of play: **1)** ‘... all play is voluntary activity’ (Huizinga, 1949: 7). Play belongs to the realm of freedom and play is superfluous to ‘man’s’ natural requirements. ‘The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need’, therefore, play is only a necessity in as much as it ‘adorns’ and ‘amplifies’ everyday life through its role as a ‘culture function’ (Huizinga, 1949: 8, 9). **2)** ‘...play is not “ordinary” or “real” life. It is rather a stepping out of “real” life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own’ (Huizinga, 1949: 8). Play is different from ordinary life. It is about pretending, it is just for fun, but the participants’ conscious awareness of it being pretend and just for fun does not prevent play being taken seriously. **3)** The third characteristic of play is its ‘... secludedness, its limitedness’ (Huizinga, 1949: 9). Play is limited in terms of time and space. It begins and ends at a certain time, it plays itself out, it operates within defined physical boundaries - the pitch, arena, court etc and it is a temporary space of order and rule bound activity ‘... a limited perfection... a ‘magic circle’ (Huizinga, 1949: 11).

Play is a ritual of social affirmation and or experimentation which, for Huizinga, is not just a significant and ubiquitous element of human culture, but it is integral to it. For Huizinga play is at the heart of all forms of cultural expression: an assertion he exemplified by identifying its driving role in language, war, law, knowledge, poetry, philosophy, the creation of myth and legend and also art. ‘In culture we find play as a given magnitude existing before culture even existed, accompanying it and pervading it from the early beginnings right up to the phase of civilization we are now living in’ (Huizinga, 1949: 4). As well as being central to, or even an integral and driving element of human culture, the most popular forms of organised play, their practices and organising principles, have developed as a reflection of wider social change and consequently they have mirrored dominant social orders; from the ritualistic games of the Greek and Roman pre-Christian epoch, to the medieval Christian pre-Enlightenment era, through the codification and rationalisation of the Enlightenment driven industrial age and more recently the transformation of organised play in ‘the phase of civilization we are now living’ - an age of globalisation.

3.1) Play and Contest in Classical Antiquity: Rituals and Cultic Games

Ancient texts and literature tell us of the significance and centrality of play and contest in the ancient world and its association with the then dominant religious order. The Epic of Gilgamesh (2200 BC), an ancient Mesopotamian script, relates the contests and challenges undertaken by the protagonist Gilgamesh, the despotic King of Uruk, in a symbolic battle to destroy evil. Initially Gilgamesh was challenged by the Gods who sent Enkidu in response to the citizens of Uruk's appeals for intervention into Gilgamesh's tyrannical oppression. Gilgamesh later received support from the God Shamash who sent wind to blind Humbaba the object of Gilgamesh's first challenge, and the embodiment of evil. Upon victory ritualistic offerings were made by Gilgamesh and Enkidu to the earth and to the Gods. In this epic poem other challenges/contests follow, such as when Gilgamesh rejects the advances of the goddess Ishtar, which causes her to ask her father to send Gugalanna the "Bull of Heaven" to teach Gilgamesh a lesson in this epic battle of Gods and men, and good and evil.

Tales from Greek classical antiquity talk of ritualistic competitions. In these tales women are conspicuous by their absence or by their 'submissive' parts in the tales. The protagonists in the stories are all heroic and athletic men. And the women, where they appear, are potential prizes for the athletes, not participants in the games. Homer's epic poem *The Iliad* tells of Achilles' role in the Trojan War, and depicts games organised by Achilles held in order to honour the dead - 'funeral games' held in honour of a fallen hero Patroclus. *The Odyssey* recounts tales of sporting contests in which young noblemen compete in Ancient Greek contests, not for prizes, but in order to display their talents to the King, impress their visitor Odysseus who had been discovered shipwrecked nearby and brought to the palace by the princess and also with the hope of sufficiently impressing the King and thereby winning the hand of his unwed daughter Nausicaa (Kyle, 2007: 65-66). The funeral games that take a central place in such epic poetry, which included a chariot race, boxing matches, wrestling, a foot race, armed combat, a throwing competition and archery are understood to be the foundations (along with emerging cultic games) for the sporting events enacted at the four Panhellenic crown games, ritualistic festivals in honour of the Gods held across Ancient Greece from the mid sixth century: including the Isthmian games near Corinth, the Pythian

games at Delphi, the Nemean Games at Nemea (near Corinth) and most famously at the Olympic games in Athens (Kyle, 2007: 75, Young, 2004: 10). The ancient Roman games followed a similarly ritualistic and religious theme ‘In Rome, the presentation of spectacles by the state apparatus begins early in the Republic with the *Ludi Magni* or *Ludi Romani*, held in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, chief God in the Roman pantheon’ followed by later additions to the calendar of sporting events including the ‘*Ludi Plebeii* (for Jupiter), the *Ludi Apollinares* (for Apollo), the *Ludi Megalenses* (for the Great Mother) and the *Ludi Florales* (for Flora)’ (Futrell, 2006: 2).

The origins of the Ancient Olympic Games in Athens are disputed. Legend has it that they were instituted by Herakles, as an honour to Zeus, as a celebration for successfully completing one of his twelve labours. However it is more likely that they were initiated in honour of local heroes (Swaddling, 1999: 8-9). And, although the official date for the establishment of the Olympic Games was 776, legend has it that competitions on the Athenian site appear to date back to the 9th Century BC when King Iphitos under the ‘guidance’ of the Delphic oracle, started the games in order to initiate a truce and restore peace in the land of Greece (Swaddling, 1999: 8-9). ‘The Olympic games, like the Pythian, the Isthmian, the Nemean, and the Athenaic, were sacred festivals, integral aspects of the religious life of the Ancient Hellenes’ (Guttmann, 1978: 21). ‘The Olympic games were sacred games, staged in a sacred place and at a sacred festival: they were a religious act in honour of the deity’ (Deubner in Scambler, 2005: 11).

As was the case in the Homeric funeral games, women did not compete in the Ancient Olympic Games or the other Panhellenic crown games. They were banned under punishment of death from participating, or even from attending the games as the quote below from Pausanias (a Spartan general) clearly illustrates:

‘On the road to Olympia... there is a precipitous mountain with lofty cliffs... the mountain is called Typaeum. It is the law of Elis that any woman who is discovered at the Olympic Games will be pitched headlong from this mountain’.

(Pausanias Description of Greece – 2nd Century AD)

When one woman, Kallipateira, was caught disguised as a trainer in order to gain access to the games so as to bring her son to compete a law was passed decreeing that the all trainers, like the athletes, must in future be naked when they registered for and attended the event (Swaddling, 1999: 41). However, in Ancient Greece women were encouraged to take exercise – even rigorous exercise. In Sparta they were obliged to do so by law. ‘The Greeks attributed the establishment of this compulsory physical training to Lycurgus, the Spartan lawgiver, who said that strong mothers produce strong babies who, in turn, become strong soldiers (Young, 2004: 116). When these teenage girls did exercise they, like the men, were nude. However unlike the boys and men this compulsory exercise was not taken in the spirit, or expectation of, competition (Young, 2004: 117). The nudity was not intended, as amongst men in order to encourage aesthetic appreciation of the body by members of the same sex, or as a tribute to the gods. And neither were the girls exclusively in the company of their own sex. They exercised nude in front of young men, which had the desired consequence of ‘affecting them “erotically” and instilled in the young men a desire for marriage”’ (Young, 2004: 117). In Ancient Greece, as today, for women sport was not ‘pure’, it was ‘sullied’ by promoting the ‘erotic sexuality’ of the female body for the pleasure of a male audience. As, in contemporary society when female athletes are depicted in the media ‘we are presented with images of contrived, alluring bodies, rather than ‘real’, everyday ones: the sporting one is incidental; the sexual one is of paramount importance’ (Hargreaves, 1994: 166).

3.2) Play and Contest in Europe, From Folk Sports to Association Football

There are significant differences between the games and contests depicted in Homeric poetry, enacted in the Ancient Greek Panhellenic games, the Roman Games and contemporary sporting events, however:

‘The point for us is that all these contests, even where fantastically depicted as mortal and titanic combats, with all their peculiarities still belong to the domain of play.’

(Huizinga, 1949: 55)

The association football that is so popular today ‘developed from rugby which developed from folk-games played in France and England’ and soccer, which was synonymous with Shrove Tuesday, ‘...was played by monks at Easter and Shrovetide, usually within the confines of a cloister’ (Guttmann, A. 1978: 126). Although folk football did not remain the exclusive pursuit of monks its association with Shrove Tuesday endured and games continued to be played in the church or on church land - ‘In the earlier Middle Ages, games were played in the church yard, or even in the church itself...’ (Roud, 2008: 37). When in the 14th and 15th centuries the prominence of Puritanism caused the church to clamp down on the playing of ‘frivolous’ games folk/traditional football moved out of the church and onto common ground. The community itself began to organise and oversee the games – although they were still played on or around Shrove Tuesday and Easter time as this was the time of year when harvesting has been completed and the *men* of the village had the opportunity to relax and enjoy ‘frivolous’ pursuits. ‘Traditional football games had virtually no rules, no limit on the number of players, and goals, if they existed at all, could be a mile or more apart. In most cases, the opposing ‘sides’ were drawn from different parts of the town or from different trades’ (Simpson, 2003). The rules regarding behaviour, boundaries, scoring and winning were minimal (Guttmann, A. 1978: 126).

Traditional, or folk football still takes place in Britain today and it remains, as it was then, a very male/masculine affair and one organised by community representatives primarily for the enjoyment of the local community. Alnwick in Northumberland still hosts a Shrovetide game of folk football. The game was originally an all male affair associated with, and to a large extent organised by, the apprentice boys of Alnwick and local villages who had a reputation for indulging in reckless and pleasurable pursuits on the last day before the restricted diets and activities of lent began. In the 1820s the chaos and damage caused by the game prompted residents and shopkeepers to complain, and the future of the game was threatened. Notices posted on the walls of the village (below) illustrate both the chaos of the game and the strict male only participation:

“The inhabitants of the Market Place, and other parts of the town, having complained to the magistrates of the practice followed by young men and boys playing football in the streets, to the great danger of their windows, and interruption to the public.

In the 1820s the Duke of Northumberland, in order to ensure the game could still take place, provided a venue in The Pastures. It is now organised by a 50-strong Shrovetide committee and contested between the men of the parishes of St Michaels and St Pauls.





(alnwick.journallive.co.uk)

Organised ritualistic play amongst adults in classical antiquity and Europe pre-enlightenment (where folk sports such as folk football were widely practiced) was far more violent than contemporary forms of play. Gaming becoming less violent was, according to Elias & Dunning (1986: 132) due to a civilising process which accompanied the establishment of the nation state. In contemporary society as opposed to, for example, Ancient Greek society, the nation-state holds a monopoly over violence and therefore it is no longer acceptable for individual, or team contests, to take their once violent form. ‘If a person was killed or maimed by a fellow citizen, it was, even in classical times [despite the civilising process and the emergence of city states - with the protection they offered], still a matter for his or her kinsmen, to avenge and settle the account’ (Elias & Dunning, 1986: 148). Consequently those living in this age had a higher accepted, and acceptable, threshold for violence in play and contest – exemplified by the comparative violence between ancient Olympic and contemporary wrestling and boxing’ and between folk games from the Middle Ages and contemporary sport.

Alongside the ‘monopoly on violence’ claimed by the nation-state, Elias & Dunning (1986) and Guttman (1978) also point to Enlightenment philosophy as a powerful cause of change

in the world of play and contest in the Western world – an Enlightenment philosophy which had the consequence of enforcing a previously unseen regularity of conduct and sentiment within European cities from the fifteenth century onwards (Elias & Dunning, 1986: 151). Secularisation, the state monopoly of violence and increasing regularity of conduct and sentiment had a significant impact on folk/traditional sport. Folk football, as we will see below, has been transformed into association football. Nineteenth Century additions to the folk sport calendar such as the annual Cheese Rolling at Coopers Hill in Gloucestershire¹⁴, although having changed little since 1912, is now subject to health and safety reports and quasi-bureaucratic organisation - it even was banned by Gloucestershire County Council in 1999 for health and safety reasons (Roud, 2006: 285). And even more recent additions to the ‘folk sport’ calendar, bog snorkelling for example, which started in started in 1976 in Llanwrtyd Wells in Wales¹⁵, entail no violence and many more rules than its folk football counterpart. Folk or traditional sports are often organised through bureaucratic committees, subject to rules, health and safety regulations and often take on a more functional role as well as a community bonding role¹⁶.

Historically access to organised play/contest was restricted to a privileged few – folk/traditional football was enjoyed by monks within church grounds, and in the middle ages sporting contests, such as jousting, archery for example, were the domain of the nobility. Knights would prove, and improve, their skills and bravery in the jousting arena and a privileged few from the social elite would have access to, and the time to enjoy sporting pursuits such as court tennis,. However, consequent to secularisation and enlightenment, according to Guttmann (1978), mirroring the rise of achievement not ascription in access to the means of production characteristic of the era of industrialisation, achievement not ascription became the necessary criteria for participation in organised sport. Reflecting social history and social change just as the industrial Fordist era emphasised, valued and was

¹⁴ This event, once part of a traditional annual gathering of the local community which involved a feast and an array of sporting activities including shin-kicking, used to be held each Whit Monday when the vicar initiated proceedings by rolling the first cheese, it was then moved to the Spring Bank Holiday with races initiated by a member of the organising committee.

¹⁵ This event may be better described as as an ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm, 1992) rather than a traditional, or folk, sport.

¹⁶ Events such as the ‘Tar Barrels’ in Ottery St Mary in Devon, for example, is a functional blend of sport, tradition, community and commercialism in a town which is suffering economically (www.otterytarbarrels.co.uk).

characterised by specialisation in the workplace so specialisation became emphasised, valued and characteristic of organised sport. Sportsmen specialised in their participatory roles, and an array of specialist support roles developed (owners, coaches and managers for example) and became commonplace as sporting life mirrored the specialisation and division of labour in the work place.

Sport in the age of industrial capitalism also underwent a process of rationalisation and commercialisation – reflecting the rationalisation characteristic of enlightenment philosophy and commercialisation of industrial capitalism. Consequently the rules of contemporary sport are very much more detailed and explicit – no longer defined by custom and negotiation but by reason, criticism and revision (Elias, 1998). Unlike the ‘rules of the Polynesian dart game’ the rules of modern sport are universal ‘the rules of basketball are basically the same in Tashkent and Topeka’ (Guttman, 1978: 41). And, furthermore, the equipment used to play the sports has also been universalised. The rationalising process that has transformed hunting to archery, for example, has created a sport where standardised equipment is used and manuals, guide books and rulebooks, instruct players and officials in how the sport must be played. Modern sports have also become subject to bureaucratisation, ‘One of the most important functions of the bureaucracy is to see that the rules and regulations are universal’ (Guttman, 1978: 47). A further development in sport characteristic of the post-enlightenment industrial age is quantification. Historically sporting pursuits have always entailed a degree of quantification. ‘The Polynesians of Tikopia scored their dart game...’, the Ancient Greeks recorded the winners of their Olympic contests as did the Romans at their games but characteristic of modern sport is ‘the accumulation of statistics on every conceivable aspect of the game’ (Guttman, 1978: 47-51). Quantification has led to the development of Guttman’s (1978: 51) final characteristic of modern sport that differentiates it from that which preceded it, ‘the quest for records’. Now, with the availability of statistics amassed through quantification, competitors can and do strive to set records beyond winning at particular meetings. Athletes compete against their own and others’ past achievements in the never ending pursuit of abstract records.

Specialisation, rationalisation and a regularity of conduct and sentiment characteristic of the transformation of organised sport in an era of enlightenment and industrial capitalism is exemplified by the 'The transformation of a polymorphous English folk game into Association Football or 'soccer' [which] had the character of a fairly long development in the direction of greater regulation and uniformity. It culminated in the codification of the game more or less on a national level in 1863' (Alias & Dunning, 1986: 127). Through a process of rationalisation beginning with a formalisation of the rules by a group of students in 1848, and the establishment of the Football association in 1863, folk/traditional football developed, through rugby into the highly organised sport, association football, that we know today. In association football roles are specialised on the pitch and amongst extensive support staff. The rules of the game, and the equipment used to play it, have been rationalised and universalised. The game is heavily quantified; league tables and statistics are compiled and disseminated by newspapers, journals and websites. In folk football simple records such as tallying goals in a single event or over a few years would have been kept - in association football in the quest for quantification and abstract records clubs want to beat the records of other clubs (most domestic championships, most European cups, most points in a season for example) and players compete to better the records of other players (golden boot awards, most goals in a season, most professional appearances, most career goals for example).

Association football is a secular game where the opportunity to compete is, according to Guttmann's (1987) criteria, characterised by equality – the ability to participate through achievement not ascribed through social class, gender, ethnicity or occupation. However, despite the apparent rationalisation of sports in terms of access, specialisation, rules and equipment, the transformation of sport (including folk to association football) has not been characterised by gender inclusivity and equality. The development of folk to organised sports was very much a male dominated process – it took place in a male dominated environment, its development was characterised by symbols of masculinity and there was a concerted attempt to limit accessibility to sports to gentlemen (Guttmann, 1978: 31). As Hargreaves (1994) argues games playing in public schools was intended, and organised, in such a way as to encourage pupils to schools recognise, aspire to and develop an ideal masculine identity – organised sport was deliberately constructed as a masculine environment, and participation therein was exclusively for men – masculine men:

‘Games-playing in the boy’s public schools provided the dominant image of masculine identity in sports and a model for their future development in Britain and throughout the world. Sports constituted a unique form of cultural life; they were overwhelmingly symbols of masculinity and chauvinism, embodying aggressive displays of physical power and competitiveness. In the nineteenth century there was no question that sports were the ‘natural’ domain of men and that to be good at them was to be essentially ‘masculine’

(Hargreaves, 1994: 43)

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, regardless of the movement towards secularisation and rationalisation of sports since the days of the Ancient Greek Olympic games, opportunities for participation in competitive sports, play and contest for women remained restricted to participation ‘for social reasons and seldom in competition’ (Hargreaves, 1994: 88). So women were not encouraged to play competitively, and the reasons for that remained, as they were in Classical Antiquity, tied into conceptions and typifications of ‘ideal’ femininity, and of the female body as ‘nature not ‘culture’. ‘Popular versions of masculinity and femininity which suggest sexual difference are repeated and become commonplace, universalised, so that they feel ‘natural’ and acceptable, whereas in reality they are preferred, constructed images’’ (Hargreaves, 2004: 163). In the 1900s as the transformation in sports took place the female body, as in Classical Antiquity, was represented and constructed by men in a patriarchal society as fragile and designed for procreation, whilst the male body was constructed as powerful, strong and inherently designed and intended for energetic displays of physical prowess.

So although Guttmann (1987) asserted that a key characteristic of modern sport is equality – in that theoretically everyone should have equal opportunity to compete and the conditions for competition should be the same for all contestants – he recognised that that equality had not included equality for women. ‘Exclusion on the basis of sex has been the third anachronism preventing the emergence of sport in its purest form... In actual practice, the exclusion of women from sports, i.e. from physical contests as opposed to physical education or play, has lasted longer than the exclusion of blacks’ (Guttmann, 1987: 33-34). And,

furthermore, the continued exclusion of women was 'enforced' due to prevailing representations and typifications of masculinity and femininity synonymous with those that excluded women from competition in Ancient Greece. Pierre de Coubertin, the inspiration behind the first modern Olympic Games, was opposed to the participation of women competitive involvement in the – declaring that competition should be reserved for men and the role of women should be to celebrate and admire male - a position that has had an enduring influence on the development of female participation in the Olympics and in international competitive sport in general (Hargreaves, 1994: 209). Pierre de Coubertin's attitude toward female participation endured under the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with lasting consequences for female participation in the Olympic Games. Women were barred from all Olympic events until swimmers were admitted in 1912, and excluded from participation in competitive sporting pursuits in general.

The road to equal participation for women at the Olympic Games has been a long one and it is not yet over. Until 1960 women were not allowed to compete in any distance running events, and then until the 1980s women were only allowed to compete in middle distance running as the organisers thought women were too weak to handle the required exertion. It was not until the 2000 Olympics that women were allowed to compete in weightlifting. The 2012 Olympics will be the first to host women's boxing. The campaign to include women's ski jumping and Nordic combined in the winter Olympics has thus far been unsuccessful. The main problem that women have had, and continue to have in achieving full participation in the Olympic Games, has been the male dominated National Olympic Committees (NOCs) who have prevented full female participation due to their enduring attitudes regarding 'suitable' activities for female participation. This situation where men have control of women's sport is not exclusive to the Olympics. Guttmann correctly recognised, and anticipated, the increased role of bureaucratisation in modern sports and its role in ensuring equality within, and accessibility to, sports for all. However it is clear that these bureaucracies are themselves not characterised by equality and are not accessible for all in the spirit of achievement not ascription, a situation that has consequences for female participation in competitive sport and the potential for women's sport to grow in popularity and acceptance. Association football is controlled by bureaucratic organisations such as The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), The Football Association (FA) and, the most powerful of all, The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). FIFA only appointed the first

woman (in its 108 year history) to its executive committee in 2012, and has as its president a man, Sepp Blatter, who recommended that the popularity of women's football could be boosted by its players wearing skimpier clothes¹⁷.

So, despite the primacy of the principle of achievement not ascription for participation in contemporary society the world of competitive sport remains dominated by men consequent to the enduring ascription of gendered characteristics rather than the potential for women to achieve in any chosen sporting pursuit – consequently:

‘If you go to your local library and look at the sports books, they will almost certainly be predominantly about men. If you go to a university library, the bulk of the writing in sports history and sociology assumes male standards. Switch on your television to look at sports programmes and it is the same story – you can be 90% sure to see male rather than female performers; or go to the pub and listen to conversations about sports and they will inevitable be conducted by men talking about male competitors.’

(Hargreaves, 1994: 1)

‘Sport has become, it is fair to suggest, one of the central sites in the social production of masculinity in societies characterised by longer schooling and by a decline in the social currency attached to other ways of demonstrating physical prowess (e.g. physical labour or combat’ (Whitson, 1990: 19). Sports are sites of ritualised aggression, hierarchies and intense competition. They promote and value typified masculine attributes: competition, assertiveness and hierarchy. As such they have traditionally been the prerogative of men and boys, a space wherein they can construct and enact their masculinity. Consequently the movement of women into sports has not been received passively by the male dominated,

¹⁷ "They could, for example, have tighter shorts. Female players are pretty, if you excuse me for saying so, and they already have some different rules to men - such as playing with a lighter ball. That decision was taken to create a more female aesthetic, so why not do it in fashion?" (Sepp Blatter in Christenson & Kelso, 2004)

masculine, world of competitive sports¹⁸. Whitson (1990: 24-27) suggests that this reaction by a male dominated culture to the movement of women into ‘their’ world can be theorised from three interconnected perspectives. Firstly, referring to Dunning (1986) they take the perspective that ‘male advantages are eroded when society is pacified and when segregation of the sexes break down’ (Whitson, 1990: 19). Secondly they theorise that when the breakdown of segregation occurs men lose ‘sport as a site of specifically male companionship’ (Whitson, 1990: 19). Thirdly they point to a darker side of male comradeship, noting that much male bonding in the sporting environment takes the form of demeaning and objectifying women and asserting a particular macho version of masculinity. Such social practices have the effect of forging social cohesion whilst deterring deviant voices. Often men will resist attempts for women to move into sports, and, furthermore, those women who do move into sports, even as specialist journalists will be unlikely to integrate easily into the sporting culture, regardless of their sporting ability: “The locker room is a sweaty place. You want to belch. Maybe you want to scratch. It doesn’t seem like a good place for women to be’ (King, 1990 in Messner, 1994: 43)

The elimination of violence from and the rationalisation of play and contest in these times of philosophical and social change did not remove its appeal. In fact there was, according to Elias & Dunning (1986), a surge in popularity - whereas early man played to learn, in post-enlightenment industrial society play became a quest for excitement in an unexciting, or disenchanted age. Organised play and contest became more significant and widespread as society became safe from famine and danger, and there was a dominant social imperative for self-control and for rational and reasonable conduct. With such disenchantment apparent in the world, one where spontaneous expressions of joy, fear or any other powerful emotions lay unused or greeted with disdain, play became ‘refreshment for the soul’ (Elias & Dunning, 1986: 72)¹⁹. For many living in contemporary society Elias &

¹⁸ As we will see throughout this thesis women have been excluded from the world of video games and video gaming due to enduring typifications of women as suited to cooperation and nurture not competition – and in Chapter 6 we will see that video games are sites of masculine performances, and locker room mentalities, that actively maintain the exclusion of women from 21st Century competitive play.

¹⁹ ‘In a society which blocks, destroys or ignores the natural impulses of generosity, elation, heroism, grace, decorum, there are few corners of the culture which sponsor and cherish such impulses. Sport is one’ (Ingليس, 1977: 11).

Dunning (1986: 89) argued, working life, family life and private life is the same form one day to the next which has the consequence of lowering their ‘tonus, their vitality, or whatever one might call it’ - and amid this disenchantment athletic activities become cathartic, an opportunity to for a short while restore to the individual a taste of those lost pleasurable and exciting feelings.

3.3) Play and Contest in an Age of Globalisation

The sporting contests of Ancient Greece and Rome took place in temples in honour of the Gods. Traditional/folk sports were originally organised by the Church for monks to enjoy, until the advent of Puritanism meant that games moved away from the Church and Church property onto common land, streets and fields where events were organised by the community, for the participation and enjoyment of community. When sports became more organised, and rationalisation established formal rules, sports became the pursuit of gentlemen. Sports and sporting events took place in public schools for the enjoyment of pupils and their audiences. Although contentious in terms of its extent, impact and ubiquity, from around the 1970s onwards a period of globalisation occurred due to structural, political, and technological advances (Held et al, 2003). The period of globalisation had a significant impact on the structure, politics, technology and practices central to organised play and sport. Local, national, amateur and professional bureaucracies were subsumed by international bodies and corporate sponsorship as sporting events were beamed across the world via a global telecommunications network.

‘The period from the 1870s to the 1920s represented a ‘take off’ phase, an important period in which international competitions, tournaments and tours began to occur with increasing frequency’ (Smart in Guilianotti, 2007: 7). International bodies became established and the first international sports matches took place. There was a drive to encourage mass consumption of sports related goods because sports was ‘... already beginning to display the potential to become ‘a great and profitable industry’’ (Smart in

Guilianotti, 2007: 11). ‘... TV in particular [was] inseparable from global sport, as both a marker of globalisation and one of its prime movers’ (Miller et al, 2001, 60). Global television coverage facilitated by globalised telecommunications technology created opportunities for corporate sponsors to reach a global audience, thereby further increasing the commercialisation of sport as broadcasters fought over the rights to the most popular sports (Smart in Guilianotti, 2007). From the late nineteenth century the global diffusion of modern sport gathered momentum. The potential for, and realization of, profit led to the emergence of economically and culturally powerful sporting goods companies. And the cultural capital of sports figures was recognised as potentially useful for product promotion, encouraging the growth of the sporting celebrity.

Consequently in our globalised age ‘sports are universal signifiers, they ‘travel across borders’, rise above differences of politics, culture and religion, and promote a positive feeling of shared experience and a sense of common meaning. They achieve this through the rituals of competitive play, themselves rendered universal by the formation of a global sporting network, to which the growth of media coverage and corporate sponsorship has made such a contribution’

(Aris in Smart, 2007: 24)

3.4) Globalised Play: Video games an Organised Sport in the Domestic Environment

Organised play and contest, in the form of social games in the domestic environment, has a long and established history. Dice games have been popular in England since the fourteenth and fifteenth century when young gentlemen were known to ‘dice away their thrift (Armitage, 1977: 28). Although ‘no one knows when cards reached England’ there is mention of them in letters written in the fifteenth century (Parlett, 1991: 45). The first documented reference to the game [of backgammon] in English was in The Codex Exoniensis first published in 1025 AD (www.backgammon-play.net). Chess has been

popular in England since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when gentlemen, and some women, played the game at home during the winter and when bad weather prohibited more active outdoor pursuits (Armitage, 1977: 21). The game Go, a development of the Chinese game Wei-Hai which originated in approximately 3000AD has been played in England since the 1600s. There is a history of inventing board games in England going back to the creation of Hoppity in 1854 (Joseph, 1979) – and playing board games has remained a popular pursuit ever since, exemplified by the enduring success of Monopoly, Scrabble and Trivial Pursuit.

In the 21st century video gaming dominates the world of social play in the domestic environment. Millions of video gamers from around the world (see Chapter 4.1 for statistics) come together to play and compete individually, in teams, guilds or corporations - often together in the same physical environment but increasingly via networked communities. There is an established social and cultural history of people entertaining themselves at home through play and contest but this latest manifestation of domestic play is especially significant, not only because of its enormous popularity and global reach, but because unlike traditional domestic social games: card games, chess, board and dice games for example, video gaming is a physical contest. Immersion into video gaming, and a successful and rewarding gaming experience, requires more than an understanding of, a willing immersion into and surrender to a ludic structure. It demands the timely execution of physical skills developed through reiterated practice in order to achieve a rewarding competitive experience²⁰. Domestic play, in the form of video gaming, facilitated by electronic technology and global telecommunications is characterised by a physicality and regularity of conduct and sentiment more familiar from the world of organised sport than domestic play. The pursuit of video gaming, both MMORPGs²¹ and console games is a physical, competitive sporting experience - one that demands, from the gamer, embodied skills such as physical coordination and well timed skill execution, and an understanding of competition, participation, winning, losing and competitive play synonymous with the world of organised

²⁰ As this thesis progresses, particularly in Chapter 6 and 7 the requirements for physical skill development for participation, immersion and success in the video game lifeworld will be illustrated and discussed in more detail.

²¹ Within this analysis there is an emphasis on console video gaming, however the practices central to playing MMORPGs are also characterised by the necessity for physical skills and contest. MMORPGs are the successor of role playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons and then MUDs – however unlike their predecessors MMORPG players do not negotiate and discuss where their characters will move to, or whether or not they will be successful, movement and success is attempted and achieved through the skilful use of micro-practices on the keyboard.

sport.

The video game lifeworld from production to consumption, and the video gaming communities within, are the prerogative of men and boys (see Chapter 4 & 6). They are sites where masculine performances of physical and verbal aggression, hierarchy and intense competition are central, and where the inclusion of women is resisted through enduring typifications of women as suited to cooperation and nurture not competition - a locker room mentality synonymous with the world of organised sport actively prohibits the full inclusion of women into this 21st Century competitive sport (see Chapter 6). Competing, winning and losing in competitive video gaming is not negotiated, as it was in Dungeons and Dragons (Fine, 1983) or MUDs (Turkle, 1995) and neither is it built into games' ludic structures as it has been in traditional domestic games where winning and losing is determined by a roll of a dice or the turn of a card. Competing, winning and losing are determined by competitive play that prioritises skilful physical micro-practices on the controller or keyboard. Developers designing video games (see Chapter 4) are keen to recreate the 'mindset', emotions and feelings familiar from traditional competitive sports (Hare, 2011), and emphasise the importance of a recreating a sporting culture for capturing the imagination of video gamers – in particular the opportunity to gain peer recognition and establish a hierarchy (Goodchild, 2011).

When video gamers discuss their pursuit the terms and cultural references they use have become synonymous with the world of traditional organised sport; for example games and gaming are discussed as adrenaline sports, and the importance of training and team work and synergy are emphasised (see Chapter 7). And, furthermore, enduring video gaming teams, or guilds or corporations are not determined by family loyalty or domestic friendships but they are created consequent to reiterated social training practices, familiar in traditional sporting environments, taken into a competitive sporting environment (see Chapter 7). Whether pursued by gamers in the same physical location, or online, video gaming is organised, competitive sporting play and contest in a form that reflects the social order in which it has formed, developed, thrived in and now contributes to. And, as has been the case throughout the history and evolution of play and contest, video gaming both maintains and advances familiar features of organised play and contest. Features through which participants are able

to understand the requirements of game-play: practices of competition and cooperation, aspects of specialisation, rationalisation, commercialisation and regularities of conduct and sentiment, for example, that facilitate immersion into new (because they digitalised and increasingly de-localised), but in terms of game-play and sentiment necessarily familiar sporting environments.

From Huizinga's (1949) perspective video gaming is the integral and determining factor of human culture played out in a form coherent with today's 'civilization' – an era of globalisation. Video gaming is the cultural imperative to play enacted by millions across the globe, people of all ages, both genders and all social demographics in an accessible, digital/simulated environment either at home together or amongst the many networked communities that are becoming increasingly characteristic of contemporary society. In today's 'civilization' the electronic technology through which video games are disseminated, accessed and played has become widespread and familiar to a global population. And the use of electronic technology and the global telecommunications networks through which people communicate when 'in the game' has become part of 'everyday' practice. And, furthermore, consequent to a process of globalisation, commercialisation and the televising of organised sport a global population is now accustomed to turning to 'the screen', electronic technology and multi-national corporations for their provision of commercialised sporting (and other) entertainment. However access to video games and their content and structures through electronic technology, and familiarity with and everyday use of that technology are not enough to explain the popularity of games and gaming and video gamers' willingness *and ability* to immerse themselves in video games. People are keen and willing to engage with video gaming because, when play is a cultural imperative, people will seek out and develop ways of playing and people to play with. In contemporary society there is widespread accessibility to the internet, gaming technology, games and gaming networks that allow them to do so but, in order to play video games together, or against each other, there must also be certain collective understandings, practices and praxes – and these have become established through the history and evolution of competitive sport.

A willingness and enthusiasm to play video games must be matched by collectively understood fundamentals of play; familiar and accessible ‘ludic structures’ but also a regularity of conduct and sentiment that makes organised social competitive play possible. And these exist and make organised sport, including video gaming, accessible and widely accessed consequent to the legacy of the historical evolution of play and sport outlined above. Games technology and the internet are the mediums through which video gaming, modern organised sport, is carried out but in order for gamers to achieve immersion and engagement games must have sufficient familiar elements of play and contest upon which new developments can then be added. Modern video games, therefore, necessarily incorporate elements of sporting game-play that date back to pre-enlightenment, with influences from the rationalisation characteristic of the age of enlightenment, commercialisation from the age of globalisation and they now also incorporate technological advances which are accessed by a willing, participatory and able global audience. The pursuit of video gaming, although distinctly characterised by elements of contemporary society – it is pursued through an electronic medium and played ‘alone/together’ (Turkle, 2011) amongst global networked communities and operates within a simulated digital environment - is also, necessarily, characterised by familiar and popular elements of game-play (content, practices and praxes) from the history of organised sport, play and contest.

Video gaming belongs to the realm of freedom and play, it is superfluous to ‘man’s’ natural requirements - ‘we do not run [or play video games] in order that the earth be more fertile. We till the earth, or work in our factories or offices, so that we can have time to play’ (Guttman, 1978: 26). So, when video gamers enter the world of video games and video gaming they anticipate indulging in a non-instrumental pursuit²². Video gamers are prepared for, and are aware of the requirements to enter a fantasy world wherein they are equipped to play appropriately consequent to a history and culture of non-instrumental play. Video gamers ‘pretend’ for a limited period of time, although with a view, expectation and ability to take that pretence seriously (Huizinga, 1949). Although some have questioned the religious

²² This may explain why, despite the efforts, and recommendations of educators such as Angelone, L (2010), Gros (2000), Garret & Ezzo (1996) et al, 2002), Bowman (1982 in Squire, K. 2003) creating popular, successful and widely used educational video games remains elusive – young video gamers are often reluctant to see their playful pursuit co-opted for educational purposes.

content of particular games, such as those developed as part of the Harry Potter franchise (www.jesus-is-savior.com), video gaming is, in itself a secular pursuit. When gamers enter the world of video games and video gaming they anticipate individual and team pleasure and reward, not spiritual development, spiritual gain or to pay tribute to ‘the Gods’. The world of video games and video gaming is, theoretically, characterised by equal opportunity to play - video gamers expect that video gaming will be an activity accessible through achievement not ascription²³. However, although achievement not ascription is an implicit expectation in the video game lifeworld video gamers are not entirely free to indulge in their pursuit – regardless of their abilities gamers are restricted from certain games and activities due to age restrictions and obscenity laws for example (see Chapter 4.2). When traditional sports enthusiasts pursue their hobby they are accustomed to its pervasive bureaucracy (Guttmann, 1978: 47) wherein organisations are charged with the responsibility of monitoring their relevant sports for the benefits of the sport itself, key corporations, audiences and participants. Similarly when video gamers pursue their hobby they can expect, and do accept, the controlling power of an ever growing bureaucracy including The British Board of Film Classification charged with the responsibility protecting the public from inappropriate content and The Entertainment Software Association which is ‘...the U.S. association dedicated to serving the business and public affairs needs of the companies’ ([www.theesa.com\(2\)](http://www.theesa.com(2))).

Video game consoles vary across manufacturers, however each model is globally uniform, as are the controllers and games – so when entering cooperative or competitive play video gamers have a ‘sporting expectation’ that they will play one another ‘on a level playing field’²⁴. Some gamers may choose to adapt their consoles (known as chipping) however this merely serves to give access to otherwise inaccessible games – it does not provide any advantages to the gamer in terms of game-play. Success in traditional organised sport/contest is measured by medals and leader boards and there are different levels (stratifications) of excellence - local, regional, national and global for example. Video gaming has its equivalents, built into game designs are an array of opportunities for quantification which are only meaningful consequent to a sporting expectation of ‘a level playing field’: points, goals,

²³ Statistics that depict video gaming participation by age, gender and socio economic status (see Chapter 4.2) indicate widening accessibility and participation as the opportunity to play and compete is being taken up by a diverse gaming population. However, as we see will throughout this thesis, gaming patterns and participation are heavily gendered.

²⁴ In chapter 8 there will be a discussion about gamers modifying games thereby producing non-uniform games – however here the discussion focuses on standard products.

high scores, top speed, time spent in the game and many more which allow for personal achievements to be recorded, and hierarchies to be climbed and abstract records to be kept, pursued and broken by companies and consumers alike. There are achievements to earn, levels to aspire to and reach, leader boards to climb and levels to achieve and publicise. When video gamers play they encounter familiar, and therefore meaningful, means of measuring performance, individually, as a team and in comparison to their peers.

Video gaming involves a high degree of specialisation across the field from professionals, to gamers to support staff. The video game industry is increasingly characterised by a highly specialised workforce including artists, designers, programmers, project managers, support staff and many more. Industry professionals believe, and there is evidence of this becoming the case, that ‘Language and terminology will become universal and established... [and]... there will be qualifications and degrees in video game design and other roles... job titles will become standardised’ (Goodchild, 2011). For gamers the choice of video games is divided into specific genres, consumers can choose a console/game for different gaming experiences, and there are specialist games for male, female and child gamers. And, once a game has been chosen in-game roles can become highly specialised. MMORPGs offer selective roles within games, and specialised attributes for chosen characters, that are all built into the game mechanics. Within EVE online, for example, some choose to specialise as PvP (player versus player) combat specialists. In combat situations some gamers will choose to be scouts, others tacticians and others out and out fighters. Some team members choose to operate as ‘care bears’ - players who avoid PvP combat and specialise in building the infrastructure necessary for effective team play. Others specialise in mining (or other careers) in order to earn money for the team. Some choose to be a smuggler, a pirate or a scientist – each specialism contributing to the overall good and strength of the team. In order for a corporation to operate at full strength it is desirable for all these, and other, roles to be fulfilled - which is a task for the specialist recruitment officers and diplomats to fulfil through explaining the merits of team work and allocating different roles to new recruits. Team work is anticipated, expected and central to the social competitive gaming experience.

Outside of game-play ‘The more complex a game is, the more likely it is that players will specialize in certain areas of knowledge or ability’ (MacCallum-Stewart, 2011: 47). EVE Online exemplifies MMORPGs and other online gaming wherein if corporations have grown to a substantial size - and thereby game play has become highly complex - members will often take on specialist positions in support roles. During an interview one Eve Online corporation member explained that when the original two players of his corporation (of which he was one) decided to work together and form a corporation one of them became the official CEO of the group. As the group grew another player specialised in recruitment – they had to decide how to advertise their corporation on the designated areas of the bulletin boards, with descriptions of the particular group’s ethos, interests and approach to the game. As a group got bigger and the team needed to gel together another member of the corporation took on the role of a diplomat with responsibility for forging alliances with other corporations and also for dealing with disciplinary issues: rewarding, punishing or admonishing corporation members who excel or step out of line in their dealings with other corporation members or in their approach to others in the game. One corporation member took responsibility for fund raising (treasurer), if the corporation wishes to work together to buy a specialised piece of equipment, a battle ship for example, that gamer will press the importance of the equipment to the corporation, requesting funds off the team, keeping track of and informing the corporation about progress. The amount of data required to play Eve effectively became overwhelming for the group as there was no system in place. Therefore one of its members kept and maintained spreadsheets concerning ship acquisitions, fuel requirements, financial margins and many other logistical issues. Often these specialist positions develop through collaboration and agreement. However something of the Weberian ‘iron cage’ can emerge wherein individuals who join the game to immerse themselves in the lifeworld for organised play become, for example, reluctant bureaucrats with responsibilities that reduce the opportunities for unencumbered play, but facilitate the success of the team as a whole.

Guttman’s (1978) analysis of modern sports pointed to a process of rationalisation, a process that reflected the emergence and domination of Enlightenment, Fordism and the ‘supremacy’ of industrialised capitalism. Elias and Dunning (1986) contended that the age of enlightenment, and its associated rationality, was also one of disenchantment, an age where spontaneous expressions of powerful emotions were either subdued or greeted with public

and personal disdain. Consequently, they argued, that although play/contest had become more rule bound and lacking in ‘charm’ organised play and sport became increasingly popular as it was an environment in which the population could induce and release tension and excitement. Video games, and video gaming continue in this tradition – they are appealing, immersive, engaging and popular because video gamers seek that ‘release’ and recognise that it can be achieved, as people have done historically, through organised play and contest. Although video games and video gaming may have lost some of the charm of the 1980s (Hare, 2012) they have become a far more popular activity than ever before. In an era of bureaucratisation, commercialisation and disenchantment video games are ‘refreshment for the soul’ - a common characteristic of each video game and video gaming experience is ‘... not release from tension but rather the production of tensions of a particular type, the rise of an enjoyable tension-excitement, as the heart-piece of leisure enjoyment’ (Elias & Dunning, 1986: 88).

The success of the video game industry and the popularity of video gaming, therefore, is consequent to key facilitators and outcomes of globalisation – electronic technology and the electronic telecommunications network. And through its technology and interactive products video games and video gaming also contribute to the process of globalisation by promoting and facilitating a globally connected population. The digital technology that connects gamers, distributes and allows content to be downloaded and facilitates the communication necessary for online team gaming is transmitted by the telecommunications networks. The hardware, and software used for video gaming is produced and distributed through global distribution networks controlled by game developers and publishers companies: Crytek²⁵, Activision²⁶, Nintendo²⁷ for example who are now multi-national corporations. Within this globalised world people are familiar with, and used to being part of, a connected world and with the idea, and reality, of communicating and interacting (through the use of technology) with a global audience. Video games and video gaming have thrived because they utilise,

²⁵ Crytek is an independent video game developer and publisher. Its headquarters are in Frankfurt (Germany), with additional studios in Kiev (Ukraine), Budapest (Hungary), Sofia (Bulgaria), Seoul (South Korea), Nottingham (UK) and Shanghai (China).

²⁶ Activision is an American Game developer and publisher with offices in California (USA), Quebec City (Canada), Leamington (England), Dublin (Ireland) and elsewhere.

²⁷ Nintendo is a Japanese multinational with divisions in England, Germany and the USA.

and contribute to the circumstances and characteristics of a globalisation, whilst retaining significant and familiar elements of game-play, 'ludic structures', content and practices that allow gamers' immersion into games and organised play - game-play, content and practices that developed through, and as a reflection of the social history of play.

In conclusion, a central tenet of this thesis is that in order to develop a comprehensive analysis of video games and video gaming it is imperative to look beyond the immediate moments of game play and consider the social and cultural environment in which video gaming takes place. In this chapter it has been confirmed that it is important to consider the contemporary social context within which gaming takes place in order to understand its popularity and global reach, and stressed that it is also imperative to consider today's social and cultural environment within a historical analysis of organised play and social change. Video games and video gaming are extraordinary popular in contemporary society, and their global popularity has been facilitated by, and has contributed to key aspects of life in a globalised world: multinational industries, global logistics systems for distribution, global telecommunication networks and a consuming public at ease with instant electronic communication with a global population. However the ability to access video games globally, and familiarity with global telecommunications networks and global communication, does not fully explain the popularity of video games and video gaming and the ability, and willingness, of consumers to engage with them. The desire of people to play and compete – one that is now manifest in video gaming - is not driven by content and systems, or by telecommunications networks, but by a social and cultural history in which organised play and contest has been central, or integral, to human culture and expression.

Video games facilitate the 'need' to play through technology and telecommunications – they do not determine it through content and systems. Despite the appearance of novelty apparent in their digital format, digital distribution and gaming technology and an unprecedented ability and willingness of a global population to engage with each other in organised play, video games and video gaming rely upon and require a regularity of conduct and sentiment, collective understandings of competition and cooperation, familiarity with, and a willingness to accept and operate within 'ludic structures' that have developed over time and become familiar consequent to, and as a reflection of, a social history. A familiarity

with ludic structures, and regularity of conduct and sentiment, enables (but does not determine) immersion into video games and facilitates organised and open competition amongst video gamers. However, as we will see throughout this thesis, beginning in Chapter 4, in the world of video games and video gaming, as was the case in Ancient civilisations, pre-Christian Europe and the Enlightenment age these ludic structures' and regularities of conduct and sentiment also operate to exclude women from competitive play by maintaining typifications and representations of men as inherently active and competitive and women as naturally passive and suited to nurturing and cooperation.

Chapter 4: Video games and video gaming - a 'System of Provision'

The use of a single point of reference to explain consumer behaviour - such as focussing exclusively on video game addiction, game content or game systems in order to explain video game consumption - is, according to Fine (1999, 2002, 2011), to take a 'horizontal approach'. He argues that economists, having undertaken a horizontal approach to theorising consumer behaviour in terms of the extraction of maximum utility from a commodity and the impact of pricing, have neglected to consider social, cultural and historically contingent factors. And in light of the culturalists turn to post-modernism, there is also a need to '...convince culturalists on the consumption turn to take the material seriously' (Fine, 2004: 334). Fine ultimately rejects horizontal approaches. He believes that by generalising commodities and theorising their consumption from a single standpoint they tend towards a false reductionism.

In theories of consumption the term 'consumer goods' has been utilised as a catch-all term (Fine, 2002: 82). And, in general, grand theories of consumption have assumed that consumption of 'consumer goods' can be understood from the perspective of 'consumer sovereignty' where informed consumers operate in a world of perfect competition, or from the perspective of 'monopolised capital' where mass and manipulative advertising directs consumer behaviour in a world of malleable consumers (Fine, 2002: 82). Problematically, Fine contends, these two approaches tend to substantiate their arguments by focussing on cases where their argument has most purchase and fail to take account of powerful factors that arise in the opposite approach. Fine's argument can be exemplified by a review of some prominent theories of consumption. Veblen (1934) focuses on conspicuous consumption, exemplified by analyses of the consumption of luxury items, but failing to consider where the 'lower' classes develop their own valid and sustained culture, or where there is 'trickle up' consumer behaviour such as when the culture of the 'lower' classes influence the consumption patterns of the rich. Haug (1986) focuses on the role of advertising and the creation and use of aesthetics in the production of exchange value, whilst failing to reflect upon the consumption of everyday goods, such as plainly packaged and un-advertised, generic, own brand supermarket products. On the other side of the coin Miller (1998) focuses on the consumption of everyday goods in terms of love and obligation, without

adequately considering the consumption of luxury items. Each theorist therefore, from Fine's perspective, is guilty of tautology by choosing to analyse the consumption of goods that will best exemplify their theory.

As Fine (2002) points out cars, clothes, food and other products may be subject to similar process in their life cycle, for example they may be built (or produced) in a factory, be promoted through advertising and their consumption patterns may be emulative. However production methods vary significantly between products and for each product the process of production will be subject to different cultural and historical contingencies. For example producing cars for the mass market requires a degree of Fordist production techniques and a substantial labour force. At different times the process of production will alter dependent upon advancements in technology, the wider political and social culture in terms of the extent of unionisation and drives towards flexible working hours. Whereas the production of high fashion may also take place in a factory environment and vary according to some of those factors that affect car production, the nature of high fashion precludes production line processes and makes it constantly subject to the changing whims and culture of the fashion industry. Similarly, as consumers, we may choose a new car, or a new item of fashionable clothing because of its advertising or because of emulation. However we are also likely to consider other, and significantly different, factors such as the potential second hand exchange value of a car, or the occasion for which a particular item of clothing is most suitable.

‘Given the inadequacies of existing theories, it is reasonable to consider an alternative approach, one that is consciously sensitive to the difference between commodities, not so much as items of consumption alone, but in terms of the economic and social processes and structures by which they become such. Even where these economic and social processes are shared, the way in which they interact may well be different across commodities. All tend to be the product of wage labour, but production processes are organised differently, products develop differently, are distributed and sold differently, are consumed and disposed differently; they serve needs that are themselves socially constructed and satisfied (or not) very differently. These separate processes are not independent of each other, nor is there a rigid one way line of determination between them.’

(Fine, 2002: 82)

The approach recommended by Fine (2000) in order to overcome such reductionism is to abandon horizontal approaches to consumer theory and to look at consumption from a 'vertical' perspective. A commodity specific approach focussing on the 'commodity chain' which examines the 'history' of the product from its original conception and consequent design process, through the process of production, journey through retail and finally its consumption (Fine, 1999: 404). An approach that takes into account the interaction between economic, social, cultural and historically specific factors without the reductionist tendency to give absolute priority to any one aspect on the chain. This 'vertical approach involves developing a 'system of provision' (SOP) for each commodity, or sector, with the intention of eliminating the tautologies generated through generalising and reductionism (Fine, 2002).

The uniqueness of the video game lifeworld, in terms of production, active consumption and the economic, cultural and social factors that facilitate and constrain it, makes it an ideal site to implement a case study guided by Fine's (2002) notion of 'systems of provision'. So, in this chapter there will be a vertical analysis of the video game lifeworld that presents a 'system of provision' (SOP) which reflects the distinction between video games and other commodities, and reveals the interplay and relationship between historical, economic, social and cultural factors as they are manifest on video games' path from production to consumption. The chapter will begin with a quantitative (economic) analysis of the video game industry from the perspectives of production and consumption. It will then move on to a qualitative analysis of video games and video gaming that looks at cultural impacts and active social practices, relations and networks that have been, and continue to be central to this still evolving lifeworld. The video game lifeworld will be shown to be a historically evolved network of social practices and social relations which thereby challenges problematic (horizontal) analyses of video game and video gaming that focus on structure/agency and technological determinism. It will also be shown that throughout the evolution of the world of video games and video gaming there has been (at least) one constant – it has been, and remains, a male dominated and masculine environment²⁸.

²⁸ In later chapters the social and cultural impacts on the video game SOP, and the social practices and social relations that are revealed here will help to inform this lifeworld analysis of video games and video gaming.

4.1) Size and Structure: A Quantitative Analysis

As we have seen Fine (2002) argued that an economic analysis is not sufficient to reach an adequate picture of, or understanding of, the consumption of a commodity, or commodity group. And regarding video games and video gamers specifically Crawford (2012: 1) argues ‘... the significance of video gaming cannot be captured in sales and participation rates alone, as video games also matter in many other ways – educationally, socially, culturally and theoretically’. However an economic and participation analysis is, nonetheless, an important and necessary element of a comprehensive SOP – and one the ‘culturalists’ need to take seriously (Fine, 2002: 334). And, furthermore, a quantitative analysis of the size and structure of the video game industry is important as it supports the need for an analysis of mundane everyday video gaming behaviour by establishing that the vast majority of participants have a non-problematic relationship with their pastime and the community of gamers with which they interact - as millions of video gamers joining the lifeworld, and increasing hours spent video gaming, has not been matched by an exponential increase in the numbers of video game addicts, as defined by the core components of addiction discussed in Chapter 1.3. A quantitative analysis illustrating the enormous popularity of video games and video gaming amongst young people, especially young men, also illustrates why when violent incidents such as riots and school shootings take place, it is easy for those who want to find a connection between young perpetrators and video games to do so.

So what follows is an examination of the size and social pervasiveness of the video game industry which will look at its economic impact and consumer demographics using quantitative data from a variety of sources. Initially the global industry will be considered before narrowing the size of the field in order to present facts and figures concerning the video game industry in the USA and the UK. Then statistics relating to specific corporations within the video game industry and the commodities they produce will be offered. The first example, Nintendo, has been chosen to illustrate how one big player in the industry has had a continuous impact on the industry and global economy for a significant number of years. The second example, Activision/Blizzard, has been selected because they are now the most

successful video game developer and publishing company in the world, in terms of economic power and size of user base²⁹.

Five years ago a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, a global professional services firm based in London and New York (www.pwc.co.uk), published a report predicting the short term financial future for fourteen industry elements within entertainment and media industries – including internet advertising, book publishing and others. This 2007 report (as is now customary) included a section focussing on the state of, and future for, the video game industry. The report – summarised in an article by J, Scanlon (2007) on www.businessweek.com - predicted that the already powerful video gaming industry would continue to consolidate its firm foundations and maintain considerable growth. The report envisaged an expansion in the global video game market, specifically in terms of spending on games for all platforms throughout the Asia Pacific region, the Europe/Middle East/Africa region, the U.S., Canada and Latin America. It forecast that this global expansion would be facilitated by an expansion in on-line gaming due to the increased availability of broadband internet in these regions. As a whole ‘Stated in hard cold cash, PwC estimates that the video game market will increase from \$31.6 billion in 2006 to \$48.9 billion in 2011’ (Scanlon, J, 2007). In more recent studies business analysts have predicted that the video game industry is likely to grow by 16% over the next five years despite changing consumer behaviour that has involved moving away from traditional retail units and towards digital delivery or subscriptions. So, although in the short term the rate of growth is expected to slow down somewhat ‘The worldwide video game industry is poised to reach \$70.1 billion by 2015, thanks to the combined growth of console, portable, PC, and online video games, according to market researcher DFC Intelligence’ (Takayhashi, 2010). So, in 2007 the video gaming industry was seen to be primed for enormous growth through growth in sales of consoles and other platforms, spurred on by widespread availability and uptake of broadband internet and wireless. By 2010 little had changed in terms of expert analyses and expert forecasts. Although consumer spending was predicted to change, and consequently in the short term the video game industry might require some restructuring and reorganisation involving the

²⁹ Activision/Blizzard are producers of the world’s leading video game franchise Call of Duty; a franchise that will be referred to and analysed in considerable detail in the chapters that follow, and producers of World of Warcraft (WoW) the world leading Massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG).

opening and development of new markets, the overall prediction was of a bright future for the video game industry.

The highly positive outlook by PricewaterhouseCoopers (cited above) failed to predict some difficult times for the video game industry. Although the video game industry has always remained highly profitable, figures show that at the beginning of 2009 there was a dip in growth especially in the video game software market where Japan experienced a decline of 2% in sales of software units and the US a fall of 7 per cent (Parfitt, 2010). In the UK the video game and console market shrank from £2,700m in 2008 to £2,295m in 2009 (Fig.1.). As a whole 'For 2009, NPD [a market research organisation] said, the industry posted total sales of \$19.66 billion, 8 percent less than the \$21.4 billion generated in a record-setting 2008. Software sales were particularly hard-hit for the year, coming in at \$10.5 billion, 11 percent lower than the \$11.7 billion in sales a year earlier' (Terdiman, 2010).

Fig 1

Sales fail to match 2008's high point

Videogame and console market size, 2006-10

	£m	Index
2006	2,055	94
2007	2,476	114
2008	2,700	124
2009	2,295	105
2010 (est)	2,180	100

Data based on trade research, Mintel's market size database and company results

Source: GMI/Mintel

- Sales fell sharply in 2009, hit by the recession, a lack of blockbuster titles, and the point in the main consoles' lifestage.
- The fall in sales should be less pronounced in 2010, as the likes of *Halo Reach* and *Medal of Honor* boost software sales, while PS Move and Kinect could help support console sales.
- As would be expected, software sales have become more important to the market as the main consoles have aged.

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By the end of 2009 however the global video game industry was beginning to recover lost ground. According to the analyst firm The NPD (www.npd.com) in the US year on year sales were up 4% from \$5.32 to \$5.53 billion by December 2009 boosted by hardware sales which saw 16% growth (Terdiman, 2010). The study 'Video Games in the 21st Century: The 2010

Report' found that 'the entertainment software industry's real annual growth rate from 2005 to 2009 exceeded 10 percent, more than seven times the growth rate of the U.S. economy as a whole' generating \$10.5 billion in 2009 and adding nearly \$5 billion to the U.S. economy (www.theesa.com (1), (2)). The 'Video Games in the 21st Century: The 2010 Report' also shows how, in the US, the video game industry is responsible for high levels of job creation, particularly in Texas, and makes a remarkable contribution to both the local and the national economy through investment. 'In 2009, the video game industry spent \$234 million in Texas and employed 3,400 permanent workers with a positive economic impact on the state and on their local communities' (www.theESA.com(3)). The same picture of a vibrant, powerful and influential video game industry is echoed in the UK. As mentioned above, in line with the US, the UK video game market also declined in 2009 (Fig 2.). However, the UK's videogame market remains one of the biggest in the world with millions of users across all platforms and game genres (Fig 3.).

Fig 2

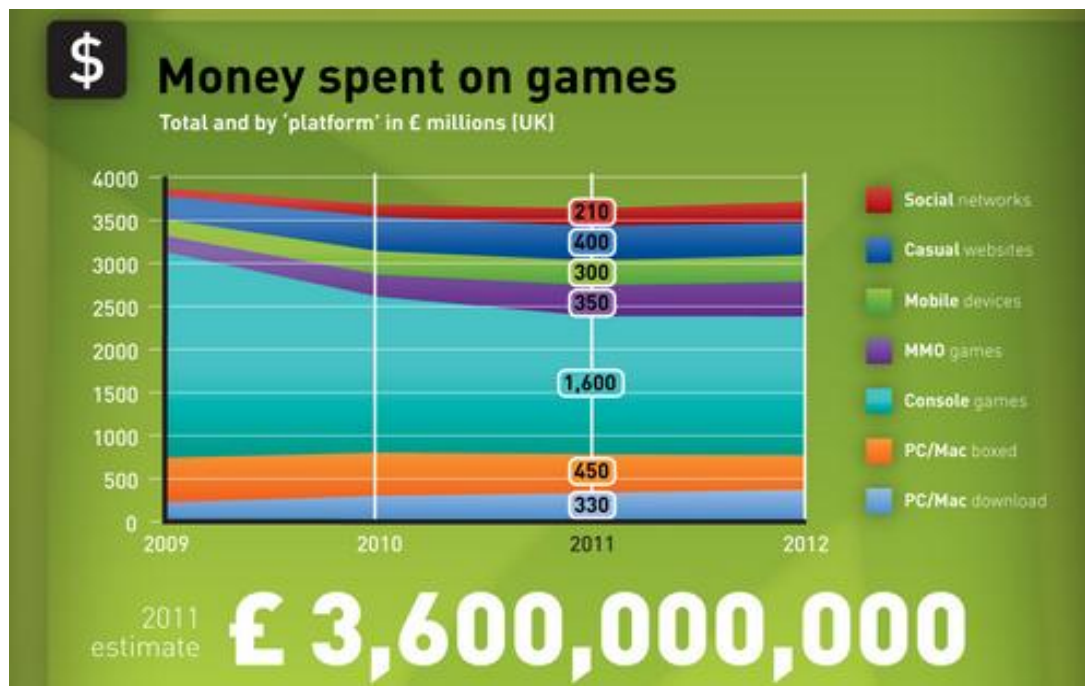
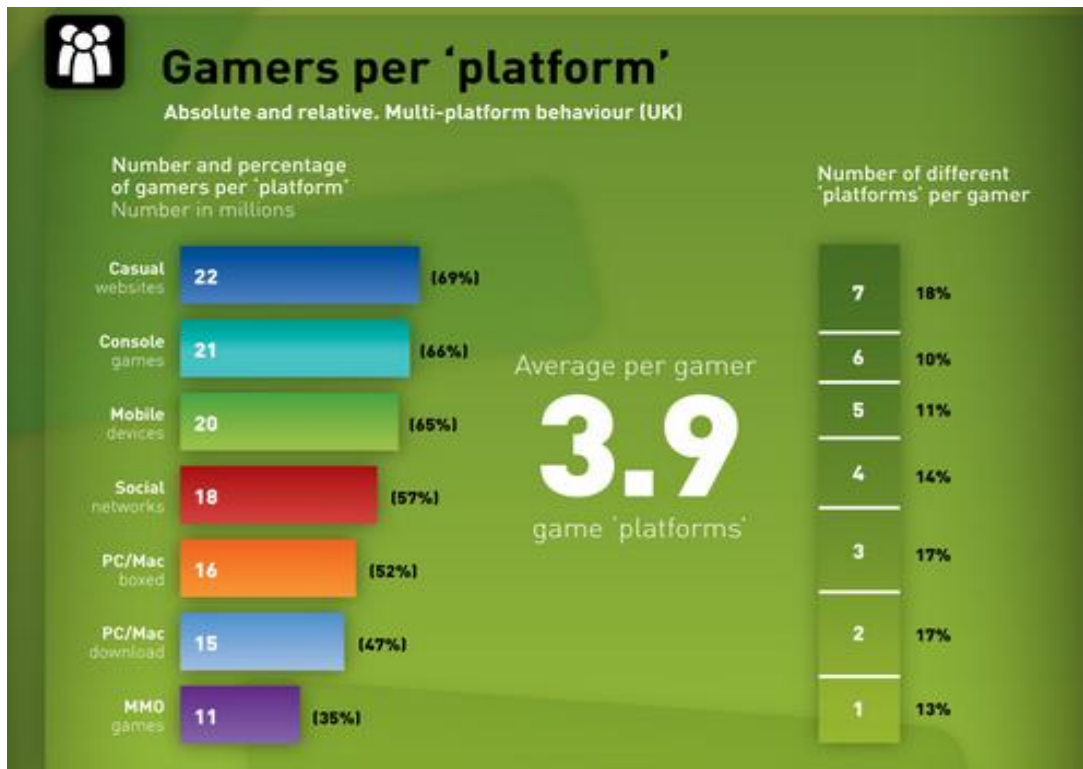


Fig 3.



(2011 Newzoo – National Gamers Survey 2011)

The video game console market has been highly competitive for many years. Atari dominated the 8-BIT era of the mid to late 1980s, Sega and Nintendo dominated the 16-BIT era of the early 1990s, the Sony PlayStation dominated 32/64-BIT generation of the late 1990s, the 128-BIT era of the late 1990s was dominated by the PlayStation 2 and the Nintendo GameCube and now The Sony PlayStation and the Microsoft Xbox battle for supremacy. This is an industry where heavy financial investments are made with a view to long term profits, where drastic cuts in console prices and consoles sold as loss leaders have been common tactics used by multi-national corporations as they fight to attract and maintain a share of the same user base. 'The incentive to sell units below costs is created by the need for a large installed user base; since the systems are proprietary [they run only their own software], competition for the hearts and minds of consumers is fierce' (Williams, 2002: 44). Such fierce competition has seen transitions in market place leadership and some companies becoming the victims of others' successes.

In the early days of the 16-BIT and 32-BIT eras Nintendo faced powerful competition from Sega who had a more substantial 'stable' of games for their consoles. However Sega struggled after an unsuccessful release of the Sega Saturn system (blamed on a lack of games available to gamers on release) compounded by the release of the popular, and heavily financially backed, Sony PlayStation. Sega's 'misfortune' continued following the release of the phenomenally successful Sony PlayStation 2, which, along with popular games and a well-liked user experience also had the support of billions of pounds of investment coupled with a long term view to recovering profits. Sega responded by significantly reducing its console prices early in 2000 but this was not enough to save them and they eventually left the console market in October 2000. Meanwhile Nintendo, who had also suffered after the release of the Playstation 2, responded by cutting the price of its N64 model and investing heavily in the handheld market: a market that it dominates today, almost to the point of monopoly, following the success of the Game Boy and more recently the DS followed by the DSi, the DSiXL and the 3DS released in 2011.

'The original Playstation had the market to itself. Now the typical gamer has many platforms to spend their time and money on. Facebook, iPhone, DS, MMOs etc. The average gamer is now promiscuous with their attention'.

(Everiss, 2010)

The battle for the hearts and minds of the console consumer has been won (for now) by the XBOX360 – although this in no way means that others, particularly the PlayStation 3, have not gained significant market shares and made remarkable profits. In the UK 'Presently: The Xbox 360 leads with a 33.5% value share in the last 52 weeks, with PS3 on a 25.7% value share. Nintendo Wii is further behind on 16.4%. The Nintendo DS is the most heavily gifted platform with a 55% value share, whilst PC games are the least gifted with 22.2%. The Nintendo Wii continues to lead within family use with a 34.6% value share. PC games are bought the most for personal use with a 58.6% value share' (Kantar, 2011). But the Xbox did not have a problem free rise to the top. On release it was short on available software,

particularly recognisable and popular games, having only 19 options in comparison to its rival at the time the PS2 which had a stable of franchised and lesser known games and which also managed to secure exclusive access to highly anticipated games such as the Grand Theft Auto series and the sequel to Metal Gear Solid - Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty. ‘... success in consoles has historically been the result of establishing a large title base for a system’s launch through an established network of developers, brand recognition and a ‘killer app’ (Williams (2002: 45). However (and this is a point that will be returned to later on in this chapter) the Microsoft corporation were determined to break into this industry – one they had not any previous experience in – so as well as releasing the most powerful and advanced game console in terms of processing power, multi-media features and pre-emptive broad band capability they also consulted with more than 5000 gamers and industry experts in the development of the Xbox. Advertised as the gamers’ console, the capacity of the console, combined with the gradual release of successful games, beginning with Halo – which is now a phenomenally important and profitable franchise – and the financial backing of the Microsoft corporation allowed it to remain in business whilst originally unprofitable, and thus overcome early issues regarding software availability and reports of the machines damaging DVDs.

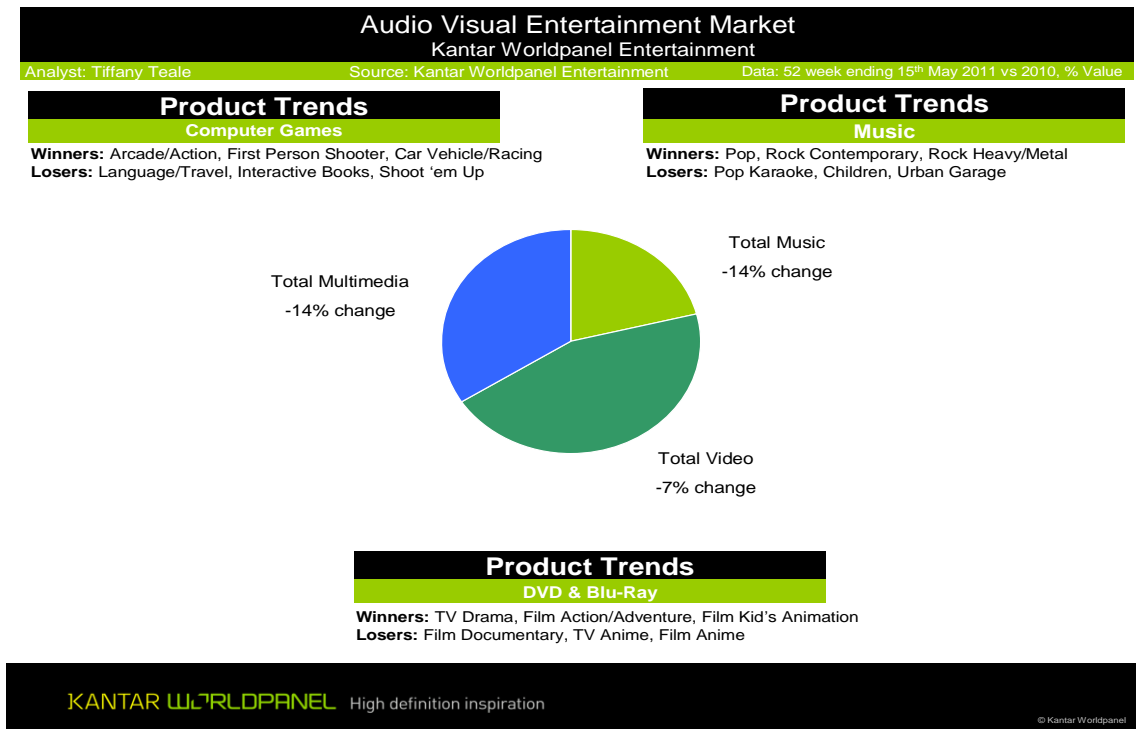
Statistics from ukie, the UK’s leading videogames trade body, show that 2010 was another good year for the UK video game industry in terms of cross platform sales and predicts future growth of 7.5% between 2009 and 2012 (www.ukie.info (1), (2)). Along with being a prime motivator for choosing a particular console, software selection is also where a considerable amount of the industry’s profits are now made. ‘Profits are made on the software side through licensing agreements with developers and publishers, and through contractual obligations to manufacture the software using the main firm’s plant’ (Williams, 2002: 44). And game software sales data is truly remarkable, especially when considering how relatively new the video game industry is when compared to other traditional entertainment industries, such as film and music, which have had many decades to develop. Around the world video games are challenging the dominance of traditional media. A shift that began in earnest in 2008 – which as we have seen was a bumper year for the video game industry – and which has been consolidated in recent years. In 2008, sales of video games – including console, handheld and PC - were more profitable than those made from traditional media (DVD and Blu-ray)

combined – whilst video game sales increased by twenty percent over 2007 movie sales saw a ‘six percent drop from 2007’.

In 2009 international research group Media Control GfK International predicted continued growth in the global games market – and continued increases in profitability – estimating that games sales would increase by 12% over this period resulting in ‘57% of entertainment software sales’ in the year contrasting a predicted drop of 4% in DVD and Blu-ray combined (Ridgeley, 2009). This remarkable success, as a stand alone market – and in comparison to traditional media was also experienced in nations across the world exemplified by Australia where the video games industry grew to be ‘double the size of the box office and more than 40 per cent larger than the movie disc industry’ (Moses, 2009). And in the UK where predictions made in 2008 of 42% growth in the video game industry leading to a bigger percentage of the entertainment software market than music and video combined (Foster, 2008) proved to be accurate when in 2009 ‘the UK videogames industry pulled decisively away from cinema, recorded music and DVD sales to become the country's most valuable purchased entertainment market’ (Chatfield, 2009).

Moving onto the present day and figures from the UK show that despite some problematic years for the video game industry (see above), in terms of the entertainment industry as a whole computer game sales figures are continuing to challenge traditional media such as DVDs and Blu-Ray and out selling music (Fig 4.). And, furthermore, in terms of consumer interest, the releases of the most popular video games induce more internet activity than Hollywood blockbusters (Fig 5).

Fig 4



(2011 Newzoo – National Gamers Survey 2011)

Fig 5.



www.google.co.uk/trends

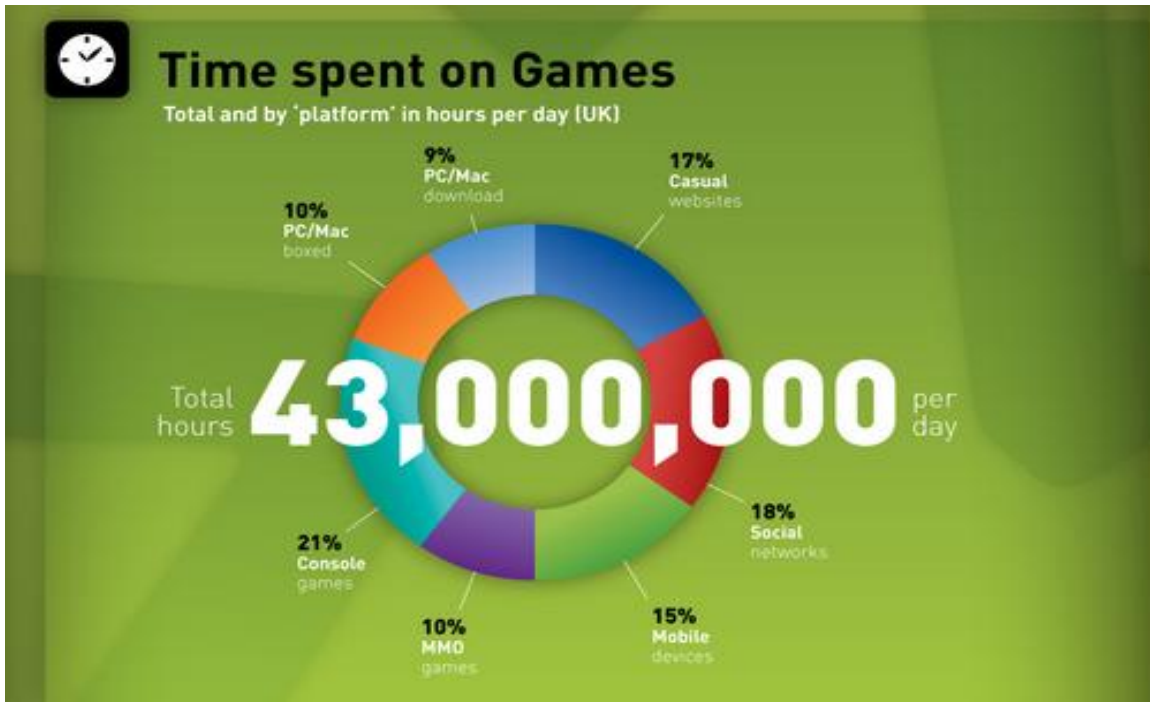
Apart from a select few board games, Monopoly, Scrabble, Trivial; Pursuits for example which have a broad appeal, play and games have historically been the domain of children. Particularly those which would feature cartoon characters, such as Mario, the chubby Italian Plumber who hails from the Mushroom Kingdom. But when we look at the range of demographics that enjoy and indulge in video gaming it becomes clear that something significant has changed. The economic power of gaming and play in the contemporary world is not dependent upon the children's market. Far from it in fact; as it stands it appears that there few groups in society which have not entered into the world of video gaming in one form or another.

Consumer behaviour statistics from a national survey reveal the overall popularity of video gaming in the UK (Fig 6, Fig 7), whilst figures from international gaming surveys reveal the popularity of video gaming around the world by showing the proportion of active internet populations who are also active gamers (Fig 8).

Fig 6.

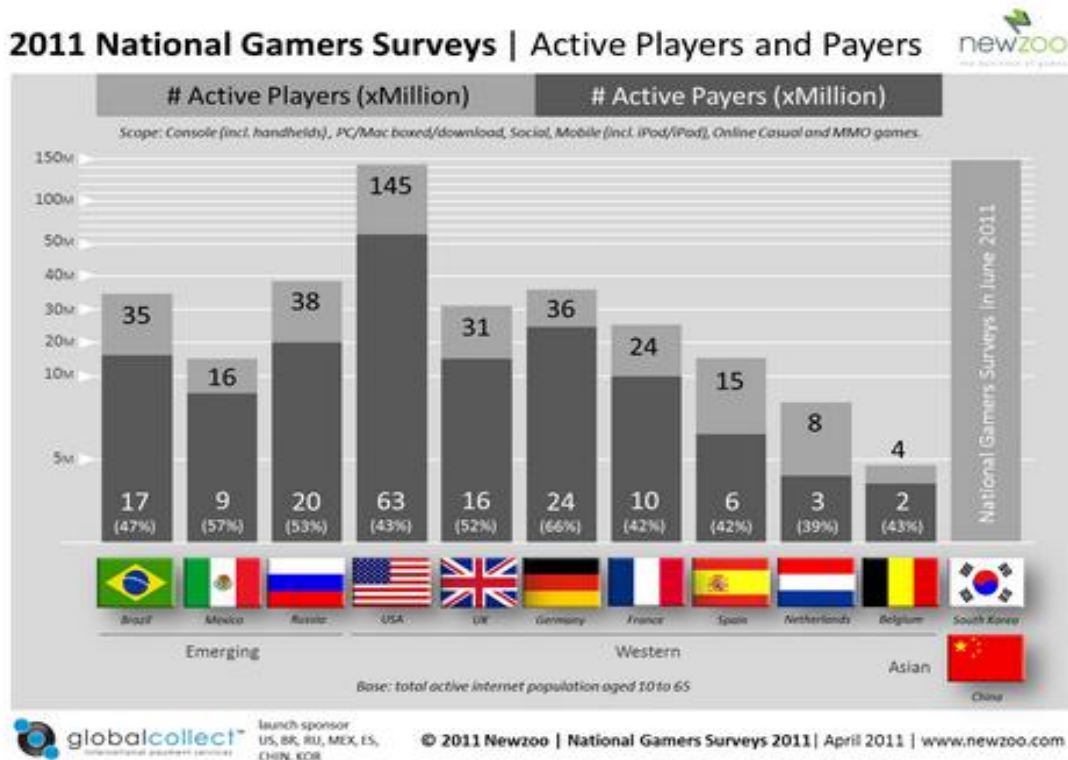


Fig 7.



(Newzoo – National Gamers Survey, 2011)

Fig 8.



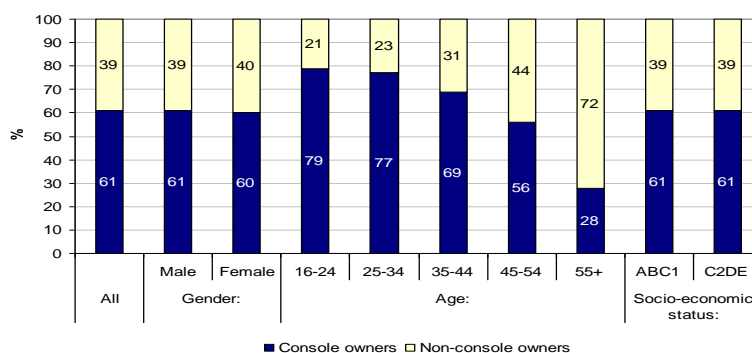
(2011 Newzoo – National Gamers Survey 2011)

Insights from world-leading market intelligence company Mintel (www.mintel.com) show that video gaming is not confined to any particular social class (Fig 9). And in terms of age and gender it is clear that 'Video games are no longer just a form of entertainment for children and young adults alone, and the old stereotypes of a gamer no longer apply. The ESA's "2010 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry" showed that 67 percent of American households play computer and video games' (www.theesa.com (4)) with an increase to 72% showing in the ESA's "2011 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry" (www.theesa.com (6)). Further statistics from the report consolidate the idea that gaming is not 'just' for children and go some way towards revealing how the video game industry is able to make such substantial profits, and make its significant contribution to the global economy. The age of the average game player was 34 years old in 2010 (www.theesa.com (4)) up to 37 by 2011(www.theesa.com (6)), with the average number of years that an adult gamer has been gaming remaining at 12 years year on year. In 2010 26% of gamers were over 50 years old and 40% were female, 'the average age of the most frequent game purchaser is 40...Of game purchasers, 54% are male and 46% are female' in total '67% of American households play computer or video games' (www.theesa.com (5)). By 2011 29% of gamers were over 50 years old and 42% were female (www.theesa.com (6)). 'In the UK – Males continue to be the dominant player in the games market with a 64.1% value share compared to females with 35.9% of the market. The largest age group is the 35-44 year olds with a 25.2% value share. This is followed closely by the 25-34 year olds with 22.6%. 44.6% of computer game buyers have children' (Kantar, 2011).

Fig 9.

...and gaming is reaching a broad demographic

Videogame ownership, by gender, age and socio-economic status, May 2010



Base: 1,999 internet users aged 16+

Source: GMI/Mintel

Gaming crosses demographics, but age is still significant. 'Younger adults are significantly more likely than any other game group to play games, and as age increases game play decreases. Independent of all other factors, younger adults are still more likely to play games (Lenhart (1), 2008). 'The first national survey of its kind finds that virtually all American teens play computer, console, or cell phone games'(Lenhart (2), 2008). The same picture that we can see in America is also evident across Europe. The Interactive Software Federation of Europe has revealed research on the trends of European gamers. Wide reaching research with people between the ages of sixteen and forty nine found that videogames were among the top leisure activities for Europeans. "Our research findings cement what those who work in the industry understand as a given, namely that videogames hold a recognised place in today's entertainment culture. The people that are videogaming today are of all ages, of both genders and of all nationalities," said Jens Uwe Intat, chairman of the ISFE board' (Lee (2) 2008). Amongst this cross demographic mass of users are a small segment of extreme gamers who put in as much time as somebody would in a full time job (45 hours average). This group contributes significantly to the market. It has been estimated (although these figures do not account for gamers making pirate copies of games or 'chipping' their consoles) that '5.22 million people are putting both serious time and money into the video game industry. If you were to break out your calculator you would find that at around \$40 a game, this ends up working out to just over 5 billion dollars spent per quarter by this small fraction of the gaming market' (Brazil, 2008).

Market Leaders – Market Impact

Nintendo

A brief analysis and overview of just one of the video game industry's most prominent and successful corporations Nintendo, manufacturers of leading game consoles and the most successful video game franchise, Mario, illustrates the strength of the video game industry and where a considerable proportion of the profits in its economic sector come from. The economic impact that Nintendo has had on the global economy in recent years has been significant. In 2006 an operating profit of 100 billion yen for the following year was predicted and achieved (Martin, 2006). In 2008 net profit at Nintendo had risen to 107.2 billion Japanese yen. Over six million units of Mario Kart Wii and over three million units of

Wii Fit were sold in a three month period adding to profits from continuing high volume sales of Wii Sports and Wii Play amounting to ‘total sales of Wii software for the quarter [hitting] 40.41 million units, an increase of 24.42 million from the same period in 2007’ adding to profits from DS software totalling ‘36.59 million units up 2.33 million units year-on-year’ (Martin, M. 2008). So despite 2009–2010 being a difficult year where profits fell for the first time in six years Nintendo’s market share and profits remain significant. In 2010 (year ending March 31st) full year profits at were still 228.64 billion yen (Lewis, 2010).

Activision/Blizzard

Nintendo’s position as the leading developer, producer and publisher of video games has been usurped in recent years by Activision/Blizzard. In Activision Blizzard’s 2002 financial report the company marked their tenth consecutive year of revenue growth with a total net revenue of \$786,434 (shareholder, 2002) and emphasised the importance of franchises on their continued success by stating that ‘The vast majority of Activision’s games are based on well-established consumer franchises. Recognized brands provide us with consistency and predictability in our financial results. The remainder of our portfolio is based on emerging brands that offer us growth and significant potential financial upside’ whilst emphasising a future ‘development focus on products that will become franchise properties’ in the image of their Tony Hawkes Pro Skater which was the largest U.S. independent video game franchise that year. 2003 marked Activision/Blizzard’s eleventh year of consecutive revenue growth helped by the continued success of the Tony Hawkes Pro Skater franchise and, significantly, the addition of the Spiderman franchise to their stable of games culminating in net revenue of \$ 864,116 (shareholder, 2003). In 2004, Activision/Blizzard published a ‘game changing’, and wholly owned by the company, franchise Call of Duty. In 2006 they added another company owned franchise to the market, Guitar Hero, along with publications of film to game franchises such as Shrek and Transformers (shareholder, 2006). By 2008 thanks to a firm focus on franchises, and with over a billion dollar life time sales of both Call of Duty (4) and Guitar Hero (3), which were the number two and number one best selling games in the U.S. and Europe respectively, Activision/Blizzard became the number one U.S. console and handheld game publisher (in dollars) for the first time ever with a net revenue of 2.9 billion dollars (Shareholder.com, 2008). In 2009 they reported a 4.8 billion net revenue (shareholder, 2009) maintained through 2010 with net revenue of approximately 4.5 billion dollars

(shareholder, 2010). Activision Blizzard's 2010 financial report (shareholder, 2010) also revealed that the company had now become the number one video game publisher of all time, with the all time highest retail share price and that it was the market leader across genres and platforms achieved through the Call of Duty franchise, StarCraft the fastest selling strategy game of all time and World of Warcraft the number one subscription based MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) of all time and the fastest selling PC (Personal Computer) game of all time.

2012 looks like it will be another bumper year for Activision/Blizzard. The perpetually successful Call of Duty franchise is now (in December 2011) not only the best selling video game of all time (shareholder, 2010), but the latest edition of the franchise, Call of Duty *Modern Warfare 3*, has 'crossed the \$1 billion mark in sales since its launch on November 8, 2011... With more than 30 million gamers, the Call of Duty community now exceeds the combined populations of the cities of New York, London, Tokyo, Paris and Madrid' (activision, 2011). Call of Duty *Modern Warfare 3* has '[become] the fastest entertainment offering of any kind to achieve \$1bn in sales. The game arrived at the milestone 16 days after its release on 8 November - one day less than Avatar took on its release in 2009' (Cox, C, 2011) and with the inevitable add-ons and map-packs to be released in the future (for Call of Duty *Modern Warfare 3* and previous editions of the franchise) revenue flows are show no sign of abating. In addition to the Call of Duty franchise World of Warcraft, despite a reduction in subscriptions in recent years due to an unsuccessful release of Cataclysm (its third expansion pack) continues to be, far and away, the most popular, well subscribed and profitable MMORPG (and PC game) with approximately 11 million subscribers worldwide, eight million more than the second most successful MMORPG Aion (mmodata, 2011). Each World of Warcraft subscriber pays the equivalent of \$14.99 (US Dollars) a month to play - with reductions for three monthly or yearly subscription packages. Call of Duty and World of WarCraft are more than just entertainment and commercial phenomena in their own rights. They are the templates against which other games are measured by companies and gamers alike. Fans of first person shooter games want other first person shooters to live up to the excitement and game play that they find in Call of Duty. Those gamers who do not like first person shooters will condemn new versions of the genre as just another Call of Duty. A similar story is also true for World of WarCraft which is the MMORPG against which all

others are compared. And, furthermore, World of Warcraft is the MMORPG that academics have turned to in order to exemplify and analyse the social and cultural context of world of online gaming (Crawford et al, 2011, Brown, 2011, Glas et al, 2011, Drachen, 2011).

4.2) Qualitative Analysis of a Historical Evolution³⁰

The mainstream video game industry in the United Kingdom employs highly skilled and specialised individuals working in an environment wherein the profit motive is paramount. It is, furthermore, one part of a highly rationalised global video game industry. However this has not always been the case. The mainstream video game industry of today has its roots in home computing and this world of computer game production was far from the glamorous, globalised world of heavy financial investment, high profits and high rates of specialised employment evident in today's corporate environment. The UK 'industry' was originally populated by self-taught and self-motivated (male) programmers, hobbyists and enthusiasts. Games were developed by individuals (and occasionally small groups) and were primarily distributed amongst networks of likeminded people. These programmers and hobbyists did not have financial motivations; they were motivated by a desire to prove themselves to themselves and their social networks of peers and friends. Computer programming and gaming was a vehicle through which a group of pioneers and innovators expressed themselves and their capabilities, and thereby pushed the boundaries of technological knowhow. Seeking, expecting or welcoming corporate involvement in their projects was rare in this world.

³⁰ This analysis was developed using data derived from interviews with Jon Hare, Tom Goodchild and Greg Bryant.

As a renowned British computer game designer - founder and director of Sensible Software (responsible for iconic games of the 1980s and 1990s including Sensible Soccer), driving force behind Tower Studios a leading UK based computer game company he has witnessed, and been involved as an enthusiast and professional, in the development of the UK video game industry from a grassroots movement to its present format. Jon Hare is currently (2011) a video game design and development consultant, and at the time of interview (2011) maintained a position with The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) as a voting member on all mediums including the prestigious British Academy Video Game Awards.

Tom Goodchild was, at the time of interview (2011), lead game designer at Monumental Games (Nottingham UK)

Greg Bryant was, at the time of interview (2011), project manager at Crytek (Nottingham UK)

The world of video games and video gaming which began as a cultural and social phenomenon was contingent upon advancements in technology that allowed hobbyists to experiment and produce in a new field of discovery. At its inception, it would have been difficult for even the most entrepreneurial programmer to turn their hobby into a viable business. Although a range of games of differing complexities could be developed and enjoyed, they required a time consuming process of programming reams of numerical data into each individual computer before they could be used. Portable technology was not convenient enough to share, or widely available enough to disseminate games at an affordable (for the consumer) and financially practical cost (for the developer) to run an economically viable business. The video game industry required a further technological advancement which was a portable and affordable means of data transfer and storage before an economically viability video game industry could be possible.

By the late 1980s when computer technology improved and gaming became more widely accessible the early hobbyists' enthusiasm for computer games developed into a British gaming industry. However it remained idiosyncratically British and although profits were desirable it was not the primary motive of those involved. The shift towards the corporate dominance we see today, characterised by uniformity of business practice, uniformity of output, dumbing down of difficulty and challenge and primacy of the profit motive began in the 1990s, especially 1994 – 1995 with the emerging power of the Sony Corporation spearheaded by its PlayStation console, and a movement in America and Japan away from home computer games and towards console gaming. In order to compete, UK computer game companies began to adopt American and Japanese business practices and models 'without considering British culture' (Hare, 2011). The UK industry could not cope with the direct importation of US and Japanese corporate methods and began to struggle in terms of finance, production levels and quality of output. Consequently it was forced to take US or Japanese money in order to change platform (from computer to console) or to be bought outright by US or Japanese firms, resulting in corporate and output uniformity – the take over of UK firms by US or Japanese firms not only took the financial power away from UK based industries it also removed the potential for UK industries to make idiosyncratic games for the UK market:

‘When the UK industry was taken over or took on foreign business methods it was not just power that left the UK industry. The input of British culture

into games by designers was also lost. The idiosyncratic British humour characteristic of games produced by Sensible, Bitmap and Lionhead studios was reigned in and eventually lost. Games like Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll [a multimedia game and music project produced by Jon Hare and Richard Joseph] was considered unsalable on a global market and was never published despite early interest from publishers'

(Hare, 2011)

Instead of, like the early days, game designers (hobbyists) being able to produce work by and for themselves, taking on challenging new and original concepts and circulating ideas and innovations around their social networks, cultural sensitivities and the potential for profit needed to be considered before a game had any chance of being produced, published and financially successful.

'The US doesn't like sex in their games but loves violence. The Germans won't tolerate blood but like a bit of sex. Humour doesn't translate. Drugs can be used as an effective game mechanic; it can speed things up or slow it down. In Britain it would be accepted because of our sense of humour but in America they would take it too literally and not be allowed. Corporate requirements meant that the idiosyncratic elements of cultural humour became diluted and the profit motive meant that in order to be accessible games began to lose that intellectual capacity'.

(Hare, 2011)

And, furthermore, the American and Japanese models brought an economic culture very much more driven to profit than the British industry had ever been. The impact of this new corporate culture on the video game SOP was highly significant as the games produced by the new look British industry were now intended for a global market. Production and development of new output required a cultural sensitivity never considered before, and the historical tendency of British game designers to develop complex and challenging games for a niche and specialised market was lost in the newly globalised environment. There was a

dumbing down of expectations regarding users' abilities and a dumbing down of content to ensure mass-appeal. The new SOP now provided 'non confrontational, non original stuff that had already been done before and that tends to reach the market' (Hare, 2011).

As the video game lifeworld evolved into a global entity, striving to create, reach and engage an expanding customer base meant that many video games were (and are) created for the adult market and, therefore, like films for the adult market they often have adult content such as violence, sex and gore. Consequently, with cultural sensitivities now prominent, video games have also come to the attention of concerned parents, retailers, censors and both national and global bureaucratic guardians of morality. Now, as in the film industry, before a video game can be put on general release it is classified in terms of age rating. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), for example, is a self-regulatory organisation that assigns age ratings to video games in Canada and the United States. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) serves the same role for the British market. Different nations having their own organisations for video game classification impacts on the video game SOP as what gets censored, or not, what gets released, or not and how games are classified is culturally specific. For these reason developers, producers and publishers of video games intended for global release have to temper their SOP to comply with the cultural sensitivities of multiple nations and cultures.

The game *LA Noire* demonstrates how game developers must walk a fine line between cultural sensitivities and profit. *LA Noire* had to feature enough familiar features to work and profit in big game markets such as Europe and the USA. However in doing so the content was considered unsuitable for audiences in the United Arab Emirates and was banned by the National Media Council (NMC). Although the NMC did not release an official statement explaining the decision it is safe to assume that the ban was due to representations of female nudity, violence, drugs and other controversial themes. The image below is a screen grab taken from the game *LA Noire* which illustrates an example of the imagery that led to the game being banned in the United Arab Emirates.



A graphic scene of murder and female nudity as portrayed in LA Noire

The video game SOP is also influenced by self regulation at a non bureaucratic level ‘Game developers and parents take some responsibility, and need to take a lot more responsibility to ensure that games are produced that are credible and responsible (Goodchild, 2011) – a viewpoint shared by Bryant (2011) who stated that:

‘Bully [a game published by Rockstar Games released in 2006 and 2008] is the sort of game young kids should be playing, it is a game that establishes core values and allows experimentation in a safe environment, young gamers can choose whether they want to be the bully or the bullied – it’s credible and responsible’

(Bryant, 2011)

Cultural sensitivities do not only impact on the video game SOP at an international level. Games may also run into problems on a national level with governments and individual (but powerful) retailers taking moral, as opposed to rational economic, stances on certain products. In 2010 the British defence secretary Liam Fox called for the game Medal of Honor to be banned from British stores after reports that the game allows gamers to take the role of the Taliban and thereby ‘kill’ British soldiers: Fox (in Cowen, 2010) said: "it's shocking that someone would think it acceptable to recreate the acts of the Taliban... At the hands of the Taliban, children have lost fathers and wives have lost husbands. I am disgusted and angry. It's hard to believe any citizen of our country would wish to buy such a thoroughly

un-British game. I would urge retailers to show their support for our armed forces and ban this tasteless product". In America, major retailers Kmart and Wal-Mart promised to get tough on sales of violent video games to under age customers whilst Montgomery Ward and Sears, and Roebuck and Co stopped selling video games classified for an adult audience after reports of their propensity to cause violent behaviour amongst consumers (McMurray, 2000). So along the video game SOP economic imperatives can become complicated as producers and retailers implement, and have to consider, social and cultural contingencies associated with their products.

Hare's view of how the industry has evolved since the 1980s, particularly in terms of the 'target market' for products made by early game designers was supported by Greg Bryant who asserted that whereas game developers in the 1990s developed games for other game developers, in the 2000s it became imperative to develop games aimed at the consuming public. The historical evolution of the video game industry which began with the movement from computer games to console gaming, and the adoption of American and Japanese business models that usurped idiosyncratic British ways of working, paved the way for the development and expansion of the video game industry into the economic powerhouse that we can see today. However expanding into an economic powerhouse has not meant an expansion in terms of creative freedom. The production of video games, like the production of other major forms of visual media, has to comply with market conditions and corporate demands for profit and as such 'the individual producer has a very narrow margin of choice over what they can make at any given time' (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006: 43). Within the modern video game industry taking a game to market from initial idea to 'the shelf' requires operating, professionally, within a rational profit driven global corporate environment: in terms of game development practices, business practices and targeting a core audience. Similar to the production process involved in the making of blockbuster movies, in the production of a new game intended for commercial release a publishing house – who has the money – approaches a game design and production company with an idea which is already formed, or a game design and production company approach a publishing house with a new idea or an existing intellectual property, they then look to sign a deal to produce a game (or franchise) for any platform within a given time, which can be flexible depending on the project' (Goodchild, 2011).

Crytek (a large multi-national organisation with offices in Nottingham UK and elsewhere in Europe) operates a business model characterised by ‘rational’, capitalist, corporate motives. Any opportunities for increasing profits have to be maximised. Although Crytek is a major independent company and there is some room for risk and waste because of the amount of investment that goes into producing a game, the financial risk means that the opportunity to come up with, and produce, an original game is a rare opportunity and it’s difficult to get complete freedom in terms of game design and development. Therefore they often use existing successful I.P.s [intellectual properties] or use best of breed analyses, such as looking at successful racing games. This is a non-agile form of development and it involves designers and developers looking at strengths and weaknesses of previous games. Ideas are boiled down over short period of time and worked out how to put it into practice. A pre-set budget is allocated and when it is developed the game is sent out for review. Everything has to be maximised. Teams have to own the aspect of the game they are working on. It’s good; it works well, but doesn’t breed originality (Bryant, 2011). Consequently the game industry is where the film industry has been. Whilst there is a lot of inventive and original stuff being produced, with the high price of production companies tend to play safe leading to many – repeats, sequels, franchises and licensed products reaching the market. Crisis [a game produced by Crytek] had a hundred people working on it in Nottingham and one hundred and fifty people in Germany working on it so it needed six figure sales to justify the investment. High production prices mean that the risks of original output are just too big for developers. So even though Crytek, as with large film producers, are able to develop their own games and not rely on franchises and external publishers, once a business decision on which game to make has been made there are rationalised systems in place to guide the production process towards maximising profits. The development of a video game from an original idea, or established intellectual property, involves executing a rationalised system of production in which specialist positions are filled by specialist workers each working on a specific part of a wider project. The specialists who fill these positions are organised by managers, and senior managers, operating on behalf of the corporation in the pursuit of profit.

Despite the prominence and power of rational business models, capitalist motives and globalisation it is wrong to consider the video game industry as a coherent, autonomous structure imposing itself on the consuming population. Within the video game lifeworld

there are social networks that traverse the producer/consumer 'divide'. These days many industry professionals, just like those grassroots computer programmers of the 1980s and early 1990s, are also video game enthusiasts. They play video games in their spare time – and for fun and social reasons not just for professional research. They are also, like those grassroots computer programmers of the 1980s and early 1990s, interested in advancing their game development skills, both in their free time and in their professional practices and activities, in order to produce content that engages themselves and their social networks - peers and their colleagues - as much as non-professional consumers. Although the business model under which modern day professionals in the video game industry operate has developed into a rationalised global entity, members of small social networks comprised of game designers and other industry professionals are, like those innovators of the 1980s, enthusiastic consumers of their own, and their industry's products. Tom Goodchild and Greg Bryant are representative of many video game professionals who do not just earn a living in the video game industry; they are also keen consumers playing video games in their spare time on their own and amongst social networks and communities. The enthusiast and the hobbyist element in the video game lifeworld was never completely lost, only usurped in the evolution of the globalised video game lifeworld and the emerging dominance of 'rational' business practices.

Within the industry new technology has created opportunities for new development processes. This has led to enormous financial returns: 'The video game industry contributed £1bn to the British economy last year, as the rise of smartphones and tablets brought down the cost of launching new games and fuelled a surge in self-publishing' (Rushton, 2011). But, significantly, it is also facilitating the video game SOP and lifeworld to continue evolving with a re-emergence of independent hobbyists, solo designers and producers making a significant mark on the industry. Accessibility to new technologies has facilitated a period of change, innovation, novelty and risk not seen in the video game lifeworld since the 1990s. Tom Goodchild discussed the the iPhone sensation *Angry Birds* in this context:

'Angry Birds was a success partly through good luck and good fortune. It's a good game for many reasons but for every Angry Birds there are 1000s of failures. But there are opportunities out there now. I have a friend who is selling his house to start a company - rather like the indie

record movement of the 70 and 80s – or Francis Ford Copolla selling everything he owned to make movies. There are possibilities out there now due to digital distribution and multiple platforms.’

(Goodchild, 2011)

With the advent of new technology, new ways of communicating and new ways of forming communities there is evidence that ‘traditional development is being subverted by indie developers’ (Goodchild, 2011). Goodchild (2011) further exemplified this development with reference to a video game called Minecraft [a building block construction game] which was created by one man, Markus "Notch" Persson, and now (2011) has a small team working on it. The development of Minecraft circumvented traditional rationalized publication and distribution methods. It was created by one man and was sold through Paypal [an online payment specialist] totalling sales of over one million by 2012. It did not have a publisher and was exclusively digitally distributed. So digital distribution and new platforms are facilitating the opportunity for ‘indies’ to re-emerge and there are new opportunities because games do not have to be released on consoles whose output is controlled by major corporations. ‘The business has gone full circle. In the 1980s Indies were bought out by big companies but now digital distribution and new platforms are giving the opportunity for indies to re-emerge. There are new opportunities, opportunities for self-employed developers or for employed developers to do side projects’ (Goodchild, 2011). Tom Goodchild is one such enthusiast keen to try out, amongst his network of peers and colleagues, new ideas, regardless of their financial success, for personal satisfaction and fulfilment. For Goodchild these are ‘exciting times’, as an enthusiast and developer there is the potential to take a game to market without getting anyone else involved. He is currently involved in a couple of projects with friends. Obviously they would like to make some money so they can reap the rewards of the work, but their financial investment has not been enough cause anxiety and concern if the project ‘fails’ financially. The projects have been enjoyable, the development not too expensive and promoting them might just involve going to forums and self-promoting.

4.3) Marketing and Sales: Networks and Social Relations

Moving along the video game SOP from production to consumption, by looking at the release of a new video game, marketers use a variety of methods in order to increase awareness of the product and thereby boost sales – TV advertising campaigns, YouTube advertising campaigns, billboards, conventions and social networking for example. The effectiveness of these marketing and advertising techniques is reliant not (only) upon ‘structural imposition’ onto the public, but upon game developers and publishers managing to tap into historically contingent social networks that are facilitated by electronic and cultural developments. The success of conventions, beta releases and pre-release date sales and discounts relies upon a culture of information and a culture of communication characteristic of an era of globalisation.

One of the features of contemporary Western society is that people are in communication all the time and information is passed around electronic networks with immediacy and urgency. Furthermore, we live in a digitalised and globalised world where communities can become established quickly and easily either in online groups and forums or, as is becoming increasingly popular through social networking sites, especially (2012) Facebook. Conventions, beta versions of games and pre-release day sales of video games are intended to encourage sales, but they are only initially available to a select few consumers – it is only when these select few have the capacity and the facilities to become evangelists (through electronically mediated social networks) that the news of a new game, its content, mechanics and playability can become successful marketing techniques. This type of evangelism, a significant element of what can be called ‘fan culture’ – which will be examined in significant detail in Chapter 8 - relies upon contemporary society’s historically specific technology and how it is understood, developed and utilised through social practices enacted within electronically mediated social relations, groups, networks and communities. Using/exploiting³¹ contemporary fan culture – a culture comprised of historically contingent and evolving social networks that are active, and take a participatory role, in the wider video game lifeworld - is not limited to marketing. Companies encourage evangelism amongst consumers post development and release, and refer to fan networks in the process of design and development. Networks of professionals from the industry engage with networks of consumers, through forums, to discuss development and receive feedback on theirs, and others’ products in order to understand what positives to pursue and how

³¹ A point of interest that will be returned to in Chapter 8

adaptations to existing games, and game genres could be made in order to improve their mass appeal.

Digital beta versions of products are often sent to select groups of gamers for testing and in order to gauge their reactions to upcoming games. EA Games have an expert club that they use in order to carry out function tests – this involves a process called Test 200 where the games are given out to employees (who are also video game fans and enthusiasts) to try out. Crytek also have their own function test team for finding glitches but they, and other companies, also interact on a professional level with forums where they get feedback on products under development and invite forum members into the studio to play and to discuss them further – ‘it’s good advertising, forum members make good evangelists – it’s all part of the process’ (Bryant, 2011). Recently a new online game Little Horrors developed by Monumental games in the UK used the popularity of Facebook - itself a myriad of electronically mediated social networks - in its development and testing process. The game developers set up and encouraged membership of a group, or community, of users who were given early access to the beta version of the game. This fan community was then encouraged to play the game and report back to the developers about both positive and negative aspects of the games, including enjoyable aspects of game-play, or glitches in the graphics, through the group’s Facebook messaging facilities - thereby assisting the process of development at every stage. ‘And a few people, without public knowledge, like Nintendo, have been doing it [testing on consumers] for years and one of the reasons that he had hit after hit was because he tested on kids’ (Bryant, 2011).

The contemporary movement towards utilising global technological and telecommunications networks to form communities (mentioned above) is essential for the success of social games such as Farmville and Mob Wars, and for marketing console and PC games. And, furthermore, purchasing video games off the internet relies upon a new consumer culture equally comfortable with the electronic, global environment. Since the popularity and accessibility of the internet has grown, it has become a huge retail environment and gradually shoppers have learned to trust internet transactions. Amongst the teenage generation purchasing games or credits for games online is commonplace. We live in an era of globalisation and in a social environment where gamers are confident about digital media, digital payment, digital storage and digital distribution. There is a new culture of trust

in the online market place that is crucial for the SOP of mainstream and independent video games. This culture also impacts on the traditional video game market as gamers are now encouraged to purchase patches, new maps and game extensions on line so that an SOP never needs to end. Having a customer base that is confident operating within the online world does not, however, come without a price, and a price that has to be built in to the SOP. In a world of free flowing information copyrights have to be pinned down, but, more importantly perhaps, in a world of online file sharing and data exchange anti piracy measures have to be implemented in order to protect the integrity of the product and the intellectual property.

4.4) An Enduring Culture of Masculinity: Linking Production and Consumption in the Video Game Lifeworld

In its evolution from a network of enthusiasts and hobbyists to a global phenomenon the UK video game SOP has felt the impact of a variety of economic factors: capitalist priorities and American and Japanese business practices and models for example. And it has also been influenced by many social and cultural factors: globalisation, developments in technology, global cultural sensitivities, national and corporate sensitivities, global and national regulatory bodies, pioneering innovation amongst networks of peers and fan networks united through historically contingent technologies. However, within all this change and evolution there has been (at least) one constant. The world of video games and video gaming has been, and remains, a male dominated world in terms of workforce from early hobbyists to the present day, and it remains a world influenced by a culture of masculinity in terms of the process of development, target audience and the content of its dominant output.

Hare began designing games long before he first got his first computer, and the social and cultural factors which influenced those early days of game design had a lasting influence on the computer and video games he later produced as an enthusiast and professional developer.

‘I have always been a massive game player and a game inventor outside of computer games. So I think the complex issues are about game playing and what it means. Computer games are a branch of game playing that can

be traced back to other sorts of games that existed before computer games existed. Computer games fulfil a function – activity and feedback’.

(Hare, 2011)

And his fondest and most (professionally) influential memories were centred on family time and the school playground.

‘I used to invent games with my sister’s soft toys. I used them as opponents in board games, I invented new games with them. The first football game I invented used them and a ping pong ball’

(Hare, 2011)

‘I used to love Subbuteo. I used to nag my Dad to play every day and those memories were one of the reasons I created Sensible Soccer... Sensible Soccer was made with the times when my Dad wasn’t at home in mind – Sensible Soccer is electronic Subbuteo. It was created to give kids something I never had – a substitute for those times when playing with my Dad never was not an option. As a game maker what you do is fall back on what was attractive as a child. Commercial considerations aside, if these restraints didn’t exist that’s what you would do’.

(Hare, 2011)

Games produced by Sensible Software and Tower Studios were designed for and aimed at a particular demographic, boys, and towards facilitating the developers’ perceptions of certain masculine character traits and ‘needs’. Hare’s priorities when developing a new game were not economic imperatives (although as a business owner these would necessarily have been significant). His focus was upon cultural factors, particularly the family, and an awareness of social change. Hare’s opinions about social and cultural change and its impact on the world of video gaming are personal, and developed exclusively from his own interpretations of the social world, so there is no attempt to generalise attitudes across the video game industry. However, significantly for this piece of work, they demonstrate how representations and

typifications of social and cultural forms - especially those associated with masculinity: the need/drive/compulsion to compete in particular - have had an enduring impact on the SOP and lifeworld of video games and video gaming.

As a young game enthusiast Hare found games engaging, not because they had an effective variable rate reward structure, but because they were meaningful in terms of masculinity: especially in terms of his needs as a male child for paternal bonding and fulfilling the masculine tendency to compete and achieve its associated rewards. And, in turn, as a developer for Sensible Software the games he developed were designed to be engaging, not through imposing an effective variable reward structure, but by being meaningful to other male enthusiasts and consumers who he saw as 'hungry for' the same sense of belonging and security that had been so significant in his early life. Games were designed in ways that would remind the gamer of 'real world' emotions and memories. And they were intended to recreate the emotional and meaningful interaction their developer had felt as a male child, and designed to facilitate ways of *expressing masculinity* as traditionally found within the family unit and enacted when playing, boisterously and competitively, with friends in the streets and in local parks.

Hare suggested that games have become so popular in contemporary society, not because of advancements in content and structure - reward structures and graphics for example - but because of social change, changes to family structures, litigation, feminisation, masculinity and other sites of social interaction, social relations and social networks: exemplified for Hare by a change in what 'we' do with our leisure time - children no longer playing outside unsupervised and a safety first mentality that means children are kept 'safe' at home and away from the dangers that lurk outside. Hare argues that 'Society has been over feminised', and boys no longer have the opportunities, freedom and confidence to express their masculinity that they used to - so the inspiration for Hare's game development, and which still influences his consultancy work today is a belief that 'There is a need to replace the freedom and expression that boys used to have when they could play out and cross roads and take risks'.

(Hare, 2011)

He sees the games that traditionally used to be played by boys in the playground and on the streets: war games and football (or other sport games) reflected in popular video game genres and considers them to be an extension of, or replacement for, these ‘lost’ activities and those lost, traditional expressions of masculinity. When creating games developers think about male children in these basic camps and professionally lean towards developing games that reflect these interests. Thereby video games reflect masculine interests, and the masculine social practices found therein - characterised by competition and peer recognition amongst a hierarchy. For Hare sports games are like real competitions that can be imagined in the real world – unlike shooting games. You have to act in terms of (with the exception of boxing where overriding emotion is fear) execution, beating, being beaten and think in terms of the emotions of sport. So sporting games reflect sporting activities – not so much real physical sports but the same mindset as pool, darts or something similar.

Professional video game developers working in the corporate environment described above also draw parallels between video games and sports – not in the sense of the physical skills required (although that is something that will be returned to in Chapter 6) but in terms of the cultural and social priorities of masculinity and how they are enacted through social networks central to the video game lifeworld and those who inhabit it. Explaining why it is that some games become so popular and succeed in capturing the imagination, engagement and motivation of gamers (whereas many others do not) Goodchild (2011) reflected upon how competition through video games can lead to recognition amongst your peers through establishing yourself, through competition, in a hierarchy – as Goodchild expressed:

‘Recognition amongst you peers is an extra reward on top of collecting things through successful exploration for example. To get a particular sword on World of Warcraft, for example, which only a few thousand out of 11 million players get is a massive social status coup... World of Warcraft is built on tiers of peer reward. There is a feeling of recognition when someone above you says – come along lets to this quest together... That peer recognition from faceless players is not different from wanting peer recognition form faceless people in your academic, work or sporting arenas.... as well as faceless peers you also have your core mates who you play with all the time - similar to 5 a side football

team – and you want to be the best in the company or the best in your industry’

(Goodchild, 2011)

Hare’s personal views on changes to family life and its impact on play have theoretical precedent. In order to expand and maintain an adult user base for video games not only is it necessary to produce games that are appealing to adults, it is also necessary to have an adult demographic with the will and capacity to play them and the money and free time to enjoy them. In the United Kingdom, thirty one million active gamers spend forty three million hours a day gaming (Newzoo., 2011). Family life and how it is structured has changed dramatically since the 1980s and this, along with other social and cultural changes, such as historically contingent access to new and affordable technology have impacted on the video game SOP by enabling the development of video games, and also altering who has access to video games and who has the time to indulge in their pursuit. In the UK there are now more single person households than ever, men and women are marrying (and cohabitating) later in their lives and a significant proportion of the population is choosing to have children at an older age. All these factors have facilitated the adult pursuit of ‘play’ which is reflected in the UK gaming statistics. For example, single men living alone have the time and freedom to spend considerable time at ‘play’ before they choose, or don’t choose, to take on the responsibilities of family life.

Parents, often Dads, teach their children, particularly sons, to play games and enjoy spending many hours enjoying their time together gaming. For this to be the case there has to be a social and cultural environment that encourages fathers to spend time with their children, and to have a hands on role in their upbringing. A father’s role used to revolve around work, and the mother’s role included, amongst a great many other things, the socialising play of their children. ‘Fatherhood, friendship, and partnership all require emotional recourses, such as patience, compassion, tenderness and attention to process, that men have traditionally shunned’ (Kimmel, 1991: 678). However, the cultural expectations and pressures on fathers have changed and in contemporary society there is an expectation that fathers will play hands on roles in their children’s development. And, for a variety of reasons, many more fathers

than ever are raising their children alone and talking on the nurturing role – including play. Fathers who live with their children, and those who live in separate residences, are increasingly expected to share the nurturing responsibilities with the mothers – providing an opportunity for adult males to play with their children long into their own, and potentially their childrens’ adulthoods. These economic, social and cultural developments, alongside historical contingencies such as technological advancements and fathers’ own childhood and early adult experiences of play have extended play into adult life, thereby changing the characteristics of play in a domestic setting and also, therefore, changing patterns of consumption.

In the United Kingdom video gaming is hugely popular amongst young children and teenagers. Video game consoles and video games are expensive commodities and these are the social demographics without an income – apart from pocket money provided by parents or guardians. Most young gamers, therefore, rely upon their parents to fund their pastime at a great and continuous expense. The parental funding of video games relies upon more than rational, economically driven, decision making by parents or guardians. Parents look for the best deal for their future purchase, but there is more to the consumption of video games by parents, for children, than simple economic imperatives. The enormous popularity of video games puts pressure on children and teenagers to ‘fit in’ in a school environment, and that demands not only an interest in video games, but also access to the game of the moment – and for boys this means access to boys’ games - Halo, Assassins Creed and Call of Duty for example. Miller (1998) studied the shopping habits of residents of an East London street and recognised that it can be an egalitarian pursuit. He found that housewives, and women with families, tended to make purchases for their family in order to express ‘love’ (in terms of obligation and respect). A good house keeper, wife and mother makes sensible food purchases for reasons of good sustenance, uses thrift in order to ensure that sufficient purchases could be made and that the hard work and effort that went into earning the money is respected. And they buy those more expensive consumer goods to facilitate husbands and children to successfully socialise into their peer groups – which for boys who are video game enthusiasts means those games required for integration into a social video gaming network of male peers.

Hare's assertion, that males in our society have lost traditional masculine freedoms, and means of expression, also has theoretical precedent. 'There is widespread popular and academic agreement that something is troubling men and that this trouble is made visible in a variety of forms from 'laddish' behaviour in public spaces to rising suicide rates among young men' (McDowell, 2000: 201). Consequent to rapid social and economic restructuring in the 1990s, traditional representations and expressions of masculinity are unavailable to young men, such as workplace machismo or a dominant role in the household as more and more women enter the workplace and take an equivalent place in domestic power relationships. Many men are confused about masculinity and 'One of the responses of disaffected young men is to engage in sporadic forms of urban violence, whether the noticeable riots of the early and mid-1990s or more frequent bouts of fighting in streets, bars or on football terraces' (McDowell, 2000: 205). Kimmel (1991: 678-679) argues that society has always associated the capacity for violence with masculinity, 'During peacetime, a new generation needs to demonstrate its manhood in ways that its predecessor did on the battlefield. Each generation therefore, constructs its own fantasy battlefields to prove its manhood under fire. For example, men create individual skirmishes – on the streets, on the freeways, on the job – or little wars in which victory (and someone else's defeat) is not an effort to seek truth, or even pleasure, but to prove manhood'. In contemporary society, thanks to advances in technology, disaffected men no longer have to skirmish on the streets when they can (individually or part of a 'gang') fight wars and battles in fantasy battlefields from the safety and comfort of their own home.

The enduring culture of masculinity that has pervaded the world of video gaming since the 1980s is now being maintained through its male dominated work force. Alex Pham (in North, 2008) pointed out that 'women make up only about 20% of the industry, according to a 2007 survey, and only 3% of game programmers' however 'a 2008 survey showed that 94% of girls now play video games (compared with 99% of boys)'. And the contemporary British industry is dominated by men – Goodchild (2011) believes that if girls are only now being courted by the industry to game then they haven't grown up with it and aren't motivated to join the industry – 'but give it twenty years though and things will have changed'. A drive to profitability has certainly impacted upon the output from the industry, as games are increasingly produced that are intended for female consumers. And one large player in the

video game industry is trying to becoming more inclusive and therefore more profitable by employing more women:

‘EA Games are now actively trying to employ women, it’s not active discrimination, but they are very keen. They want to understand that demographic, understand male/female learning patterns’

(Bryant, 2011)

Video game developers are aware of the gender division in gaming choices, and have been aware that, until recently, male gamers have made up the vast majority of the gaming demographic. There have, therefore, been concerted efforts to drive profits by increasing the female gaming demographic through games developed in order to satisfy perceived feminine propensities (nurturing, dressing up, looking after, making something better etc), and by developing boy/girl crossover games such as Moshi Monsters and Club Penguin. And within the development of The Nintendo Wii, the Microsoft Xbox Kinect and the Sony PlayStation Move, console and accessory development which are part of an economic movement towards removing barriers to play and thereby increasing profit, there is also a drive for ‘correcting’ the history of a dominant masculine culture in video gaming. Although the barriers to entry are not inherently masculine, they have developed consequent to the dominance of a masculine culture in video games and video gaming. There is a cultural history of fathers teaching their boys to play video games and playing alongside them. Consequently, from a young age, boys have learned a complex skill set which allows them entry to the world of video gaming. Girls, however, have been denied this skill set by an enduring masculine culture reflected in the industry’s consumer base, work force and output.

Although female consumers are now being courted by the video game industry there is a marked distinction between games, and genres of games, developed for male and female consumers, and consequently between the games boys and men are encouraged to play and enjoy, and those games that girls and women are encouraged to play and enjoy. This distinction is recognised by professionals in the video game industry as it has also become apparent in their own research (Goodchild, 2011). Video game companies are aware of their user base and, especially with franchised products; develop games to satisfy the requirements of their ‘core gamer’ user base – a priority reinforced by engaging with ‘core’ gamers on forums wherein the population is predominantly male with an interest in masculine games.

There will, therefore, be a persistent focus within the video game industry on satisfying masculine culture through developing and publishing games orientated to a male audience, through representations and narratives that appeal to these core consumers (a fuller examination of which will be found in Chapter 5), and developing games that encourage gamers to establish themselves in a competitive hierarchy, amongst friends and a wider community of gamers, and thereby satisfy the masculine desire to ‘gaze’ down upon those of less ability.

‘Women and girls who game favour interactive/co-operative games. However men want to beat each other – to know where they are in the hierarchy – in whatever that arena that may be. That has a massive impact on game play mechanics. Game play mechanics tries to feed into this masculinity. As men we find our place and try to keep it or increase our position in it’.

‘MMORGs appeal to the hierarchy – i.e. boys and men are motivated to return to the game - not to win or lose because winning is easy and losing is not an option – but in order to maintain their status in a group – they are encouraged to do so and become compelled to do so through peer pressure and the knowledge that if they don’t they will either be deleted from their collective/guild/community or will fall so far behind the others that they will have effectively left their peer group anyway’.

(Hare, 2011)

4.5) Utilising the SOP as a Foundation for Further Research into the Video Game Lifeworld

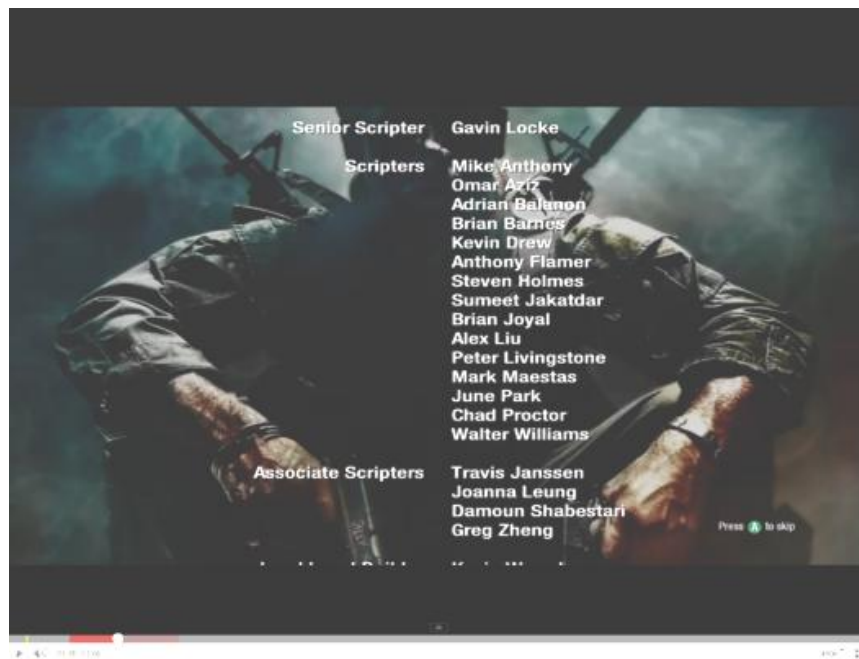
It would be possible to analyse the modern rationalised video game industry that has developed since the 1990s ‘horizontally’ (Fine, 1999, 2002, 2011) by considering it from a purely economic standpoint – as depicted early on in this chapter. In doing so we would find an organised and rationalised industry that invests capital into an established market place. Within the industry there are experts in their field who analyse the market place looking for good business opportunities. Specialists in these organisations, or in outsourced partnerships,

develop products which will appeal to established markets, whilst new risky developments are tried, tested and modified before general release. In this way development costs are controlled, risks are mitigated and products are released of a suitable quality, and acceptable price, for an established audience of video gamers. In addition, driven by the profit motive, established companies are aware of the need to increase their customer base and do so by analysing the market and looking for opportunities to expand and the means to do so. On the other side of the coin established video game consumers, who will have bought from established companies on prior occasions, make purchasing decisions based on a rational, predicted cost to enjoyment ratio.

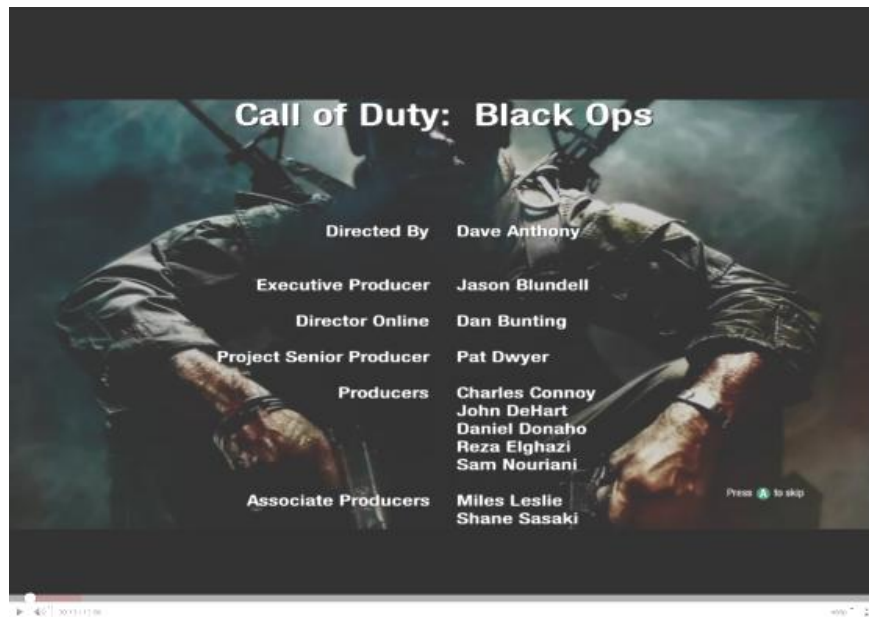
However, taking a purely economic standpoint for analysing the video game industry is reductionist. It wrongly dismisses all the cultural and social factors that impact on the video game lifeworld - ones that have become evident through the construction of this SOP that followed its 'entire trajectory... through conception and design, through production, retailing and final consumption' (Fine, 1999: 404) and that affirms the social and cultural significance of video gaming, and the need to reflect upon video gaming beyond the immediate moment of game-play. In the chapters that are to follow these social and cultural influences on the video game lifeworld and those who occupy it, an enduring culture of masculinity, representations of masculinity, embodiment and skill development, team work, competition, social cohesion in the online world and relationships between networks of gamers and industry professionals will help to inform an analysis of the career, or potential career, of the video gamer as they progress from lone gamer to fully immersed MMORPG enthusiast and thereby becomes a sought after (by the industry) expert consumer from the video game lifeworld. This analysis of the video gaming career will be done with particular emphasis given to representations, typifications, practices and performances of masculinity that reflect their enduring, consistent and influential role in organised play and contest (Chapter 3), within the video game SOP (above) and amongst the male and masculine research field sites central to the following chapters.

Chapter 5: From Audience to Agent - Representing and Enacting Masculinity in the Video Game Lifeworld³²

The Hollywood film industry has been, and remains a significant influence on the production of mainstream video games. Video game developers and publishers utilise specialist professional staff, such as distributors, producers, directors and script writers in order to produce and distribute commercially successful products - as the screen grabs below taken from the final credits of Call of Duty Black Ops demonstrate.



³² Within this chapter and in Chapters 6 – 7 Images are presented in order to depict the lifeworld of video games and video gaming as experienced by the gamer, or the participant researcher. They are included for two reasons: 1) They are included for the non-game game playing sociologist (or other reader) who has no experience of playing video games and therefore they are intended to assist a contextual understanding of the descriptions and analyses presented through text. 2) Throughout this thesis the multisensory nature of video gaming has been emphasised, therefore illustrations have been included in order to add some of the colour and vibrancy of the pursuit to the thesis. The illustrations are non intended as additional data – they are for illustrative purposes only.



And, furthermore, advertising for video games on television, in cinemas and on YouTube (YouTube, 2012 (a), YouTube, 2010 (b)) is increasingly replicating advertising for Hollywood films with widespread use of high action trailers and high profile stars endorsing their products.



A scene from an official trailer for Call of Duty Black Ops featuring the protagonist Mason and the game environment the video gamer can expect to experience



Call of Duty Black Ops advertisement starring Kobe Bryant
(American professional basketball player).

Alongside Hollywood style production techniques and advertising video game developers are increasingly incorporating cinematic tools of engagement within their products. God of War [an action adventure game], for example, incorporates cinematic ‘camera’ techniques and angles in order to engage gamers and maintain their suspension of disbelief, from a developers perspective:

‘God of War is a game with very high quality graphics. The way the game works is that it drives you through this filmic experience. The way they have decided what they are going to have control of and what they are going to let the player have control of, the hand holding Balance, works very well for this sort of game. They constantly control the camera – they make it look like it’s a film because they control what you see all the time. So wherever the player rotates it hardly alters what happens on screen. Always in the background amazing things are happening. The sounds are constantly amazing and it keeps moving and moving. So you are constantly held – as a player – psychologically in the experience. The momentum is never lost and the suspension of reality is kept which is so vital for these games which resemble films. A lot of games fall down because this suspension of reality is not maintained. For example when the menus drop down or when the sounds slow or change. Like a fruit machine designer who cannot let the player detach themselves from the game (there is I think a 2.5 second rule) as they

re-connect with reality and walk away - so the game designer has to maintain the player's attention through the suspension of reality'

(Hare, 2011)

In addition to incorporating production, sales and camera techniques video game developers are also exploiting representational strategies co-opted from Hollywood cinema to drive game content and design. Cinematic representations of aspirational masculinity - ones that are both socially acceptable and those which, although heavy with cultural currency, are socially unacceptable – are being used to initially grab the attention of, and then maintain the interest and immersion of video gamers. However, whilst film allows for a range of aspirational masculine performances, from debonair gentleman, comedic buffoon, professional everyman, song and dance performer, to comedian and dramatic actor, the video game industry necessarily operates within a more limited range of aspirational masculine representations. Video game developers need to simultaneously appeal to their audience whilst functioning within the limitations of video game mechanics - mechanics that work very well within a violent paradigm, a paradigm that allows for winning and losing, progression and achievement, and immersion and engagement:

‘So many video games are violent because it is an easy paradigm for game design and play. In these games you win or you lose, you survive or you die, you kill someone or they kill you. This matches the basic structure of video game design so well that it's the default position. It applies very well. These things are much more ambiguous in non-violent games. How do you win or lose in love and express that in the mechanics of a video game? How do you explore and solve problems in games of love?’

(Goodchild, 2011)

In the days of ‘Pong’, ‘Snake’ or ‘Pacman’ game developers focussed on game mechanics and academics explained immersion through psychological reward and reinforcement – exemplified by Loftus and Loftus’ (1983) examination of PacMan (discussed in Chapter 1). Eskelinen (2001) argued that ‘In abstract games like *Tetris* there are settings, objects and events but definitely no characters. In addition there are events in games that

change situations but do not convey or carry or communicate stories'. Juul (2001) argued that 'games share some traits with narratives: Many games feature reversals such as movements from a lack to the lack being resolved' however, focussing on arcade games such as Space Invaders and Star Wars, Juul (2001) argued that 'games and stories actually do not translate to each other in the way that novels and movies do' because 'there is an inherent conflict between the *now* of the interaction and the *past* or "*prior*" of the narrative' - in these games the gamer knows, the 'narrative' before the game begins: creatures from space are evil and must be destroyed, and the 'evil galactic empire' must be resisted. Whereas narratives in novels and movies operate in the future – the participant seeks to find out how the narrative **will** unfold. Atkins (2003) examined the content of video games Tomb Raider, Half-Life, Close Combat and Sim City and consequently asserted that the narrative of a game was often 'wafer thin', and that there was a low level of expectation on the part of gamers and game developers when it came to the narrative content of a game (Atkins, 2003: 57). An assertion exemplified by the game Duke Nukem released in 1991 (see image below).

However in 2012 video game developers are pushing professional standards in script, plot and narratives having recognised that these aspects of video game development will have to improve if new games are to stand out in an already crowded market. So now the engagement of the gamer is being courted through graphics, plot, narrative, dialogue and representational strategies – specifically representations of aspirational masculinity - co-opted from mainstream cinema, as well as through game mechanics and a reinforcement schedule,³³. And, furthermore, to be exemplified through an analysis of Call of Duty Black Ops, the narrative operates in the future – the gamer plays and progresses from one cut scene to the next in order to discover how the narrative will unfold.

'Games developers have begun, and will increasingly in the future, look at how other arenas engage their audience, like TV, Dramas and Films. They will bring in top quality script writers so that the reward structure is reinforced by the gamers' desire to see where the narrative is taking them. There are script writers now, but they are not the best

³³ For a more comprehensive discussion on video games and narrative structure see Crawford (2012, 88-91)

you can get. Over the next 20 years or so this is likely to change with big names script writers and narrative story telling. As people get used to the psychological motivation you will need something to keep people engaged in that product’

(Goodchild, 2011)



Duke Nukem – a first person shooter – was first released in 1991. The story was undeveloped - ‘wafer thin’. The story was all told in some very brief introductory text and a few short cut scenes. Duke Nukem was an early example of cinematic representations of aspirational masculinity being co-opted by the games industry. The basic premise was that this hyper-masculine man (an aspirational character reflecting Hollywood’s then obsession with hard bodied men) had to single handedly save The Earth from Alien invasion. Duke Nukem reflected Hollywood cinema’s representational strategy of the 1990s through an assertive, mostly silent, violent muscular man ‘whose’ women were compliant, passive sex objects.

A sequel to Duke Nukem, Duke Nukem Forever, was released in 2012 which maintained the same 1990s imagery and representational strategy. Widespread condemnation of the game for its content and lack of originality reflected changing attitudes towards aspirational masculinity and femininity. The latest version failed to achieve the popularity and commercial success of the original

Interviews with video game developers, data from focus groups carried out with school aged children, and observations and conversations with adult gamers emphasise the importance of gender divisions in the world of video gaming in both the spheres of production and consumption³⁴. However, whilst a gender divide does exist in video gamers' choices and practices³⁵ it is common for girls and women to cross, or to be encouraged to cross, the video game gender divide and play masculine games, whilst boys' and men's' choices remain stoically masculine. Therefore it has remained economically sensible - with boys and men being their core consumers - for video game companies to focus on producing games designed to appeal to the male audience in the expectation that some girls and women will engage with them rather than, in an industry where the profit motive is central (as discussed in Chapter 4), taking financial and credibility risks by adapting content towards a mixed or female audience. This Chapter will examine ways in which the video game industry utilises an intermedial strategy in order to court and engage the male video gamer, or potential video gamer, and the active processes and practices through which the video gamer consequently immerses themselves into the interactive world of video games and video gaming. Many video gamers do not seek out social play, whether that is in the physical company of others or in the online video gaming world. It is the processes though which these lone gamers³⁶ are courted and then immerse themselves into video games and video gaming that will be the focus of this chapter – although as we will see as this thesis develops the process of immersion for lone gamers is often the initial stage of immersion for 'career' video gamers i.e. those who wish to partake in competitive and cooperative social play.

Jameson (2009: 443) argues that '... alongside the free market as an ideology, the consumption of Hollywood film form is the apprenticeship to a particular culture...' - an American late-capitalist culture. The consumption of Hollywood film is also an

³⁴ A study suggests the proportion of women working in UK gaming dropped from 12% in 2006 to 4% in 2009' (Morrison, 2010). And, despite EA Games actively trying to employ more women the British video game industry remains (in 2011) a male dominated environment (Goodchild, Bryant, 2011).

³⁵ Crawford and Gosling (2005) found a propensity amongst women to play "simple and quick 'mini games'" on mobile devices, the reason offered for this was that 'mobile telephones tend to be less gendered than many other information and communication technologies; hence, these are often more readily accessible to women and less controlled by men'.

³⁶ Although the term 'lone gamer' is widely in this thesis and in the video game lifeworld it is inaccurate as the practices of lone gamers inevitably have meaning in a social context – see Chapter 7.1.

apprenticeship into the lifeworld of video games and video gaming³⁷. Within this chapter a consideration of ‘video gamers as a media audience’³⁸ will convey how, through established cinematic techniques and representations of aspirational masculinity co-opted from Hollywood cinema the video game industry is encouraging video gamers to take an interest in, and then purchase new video games. An analysis of high profile mainstream video games will reveal that that video gamers, or potential video gamers, are being courted by the video game industry through cinematic techniques, methods and content that have become familiar through, and have been successful for, mainstream Hollywood cinema. As Dovey & Kennedy (2006: 88) assert ‘[However] it is clear that contemporary mainstream console games and popular online games participate in what we might call an intermedial representational strategy. Techniques of film, graphic and text are combined in ways that reference existing forms of representation such as cinema, television, sport or literature’. Hollywood cinema has developed a ‘stock’ of representations of masculinity which it uses to engage a male audience - which will be illustrated in Chapter 5.1. And, as we will see in Chapter 5.2, these same representations of masculinity are now being used in mainstream video games in order to court a predominately male audience. Whereas Duke Nukem from the 1990s relied upon graphic representations of masculinity to appeal to the male audience, tools for content analysis common within the field of film studies will reveal (in Chapter 5.3) that video game developers are now also incorporating nuanced cinematic narratives of masculinity in order to not only initially appeal to their ‘core’ male audience, but to gain and then maintain gamers’ enthusiasm, immersion and engagement as they experience and progress through a video game.

Considering video games as an interactive as well as a visual media, beginning in Chapter 5.4 (continued in Chapter 6, 7 & 8), will move this analysis of the active and interpretative video gamer from ‘audience to agent’. Whereas Baudrillard (1993) argued that that in front of a screen the isolated viewer is a non-interpretive and passive receiver of the hyperreal, the images and representations of masculinity that have come to prominence in the world of video games and video gaming, which this analysis will focus on, are firmly grounded in

³⁷ With a progressive convergence in output between the film and video game industries it is worth considering whether the consumption of video games similarly draws the video game consumer into an American late-capitalist culture.

³⁸ Crawford (2012, 32-46) and elsewhere makes an argument for considering video gamers as media audience.

social history and social change; in particular the rise of feminism and the decline of patriarchy from the 1940s and the end of World War 2. Just as film theory asserts that the audience actively interprets onscreen events and is consequently able to engage with and identify with characters and protagonists, here it will be argued that video gamers are similarly encouraged and able to interpret, identify with and engage with characters and protagonists. And they are also, when immersed in this interactive media, able to exert agency - as recognised by Carr (2002) - with the multisensory practices through which the protagonists' actions are directed on the screen³⁹. Furthermore, within this chapter an assertion will be made that video games and video gaming facilitate more than active interpretation of, explicit identification with, and the overt power required to control a protagonist and direct onscreen events. Active interpretation and interaction with video games allows video gamers to *perform* 'authentic' masculinities inculcated through a cinematic apprenticeship - 'authentic' masculinities with social currency, and that are aspirational, but which are inaccessible in everyday life. Idealised practices and performances of masculinity established outside of the world of video games and video gaming and with significance beyond the moment of game-play are brought to and performed within the video game lifeworld. And these practices and performances of masculinity actively contribute to the enjoyment of, immersion into and engagement with video games and the video game lifeworld. Holt and Thompson (2004) asserted that men can craft themselves, and perform, as heroes on an attainable level through 'compensatory consumption'. The consumption and practices central to video gaming similarly allow men to craft themselves as heroes (or anti-heroes) but, exclusive to video games, when operating in a virtual environment video gamers can safely craft themselves and perform inculcated ideals of masculinity which, although high in cultural currency, are not only unattainable in everyday life (even accounting for compensatory consumption) but are also, very often, absolutely unacceptable.

5.1) Cinematic Representations of Men and Masculinity

Whilst younger girls playing video games may struggle to 'negotiate complex performances which demand qualities traditionally ascribed to masculinity alongside those ascribed to femininity' (Walkerdine, 2006: 519) older females, such as the teenage girls and

³⁹ In this chapter video gamers identification with, and agency over, protagonists in heroic, or anti-heroic, roles will be the focus.

women who informed this study, have been exposed to complex representations of the female and can negotiate crossing, or bridging the masculine/feminine ‘divide’. Older girls and women have been exposed to, and positively interpreted, aspirational representations of the female from both sides of the assertive and the submissive binary and, as Hills (1999) argues, those that traverse both polarities. However, whilst cinematic ideals of the female are represented through characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity, ideal and aspirational representations of men and masculinity remain firmly within the ‘active’ male paradigm. Intermedial representations of aspirational masculinity, presented in Hollywood films (and now video games), ‘screen out’ the feminine.

‘Hollywood cinema: the apparatus put him on screen, it hides him behind a screen, it uses him as a screen for its ideological agenda, and it screens out socially unacceptable and heterogeneous cultural constructions of masculinity’

(Cohan & Hark, 1993: 3)

Throughout its history Hollywood cinema has constructed and promoted aspirational representations of masculinity, many of which have, over time, become familiar to and idealised by the viewing public. Amongst these there are some representations of masculinity that although they are aspirational, in that they are high in cultural currency, they are, beyond the screen, socially unacceptable. These antiheroes and criminals - characterised by the stars of the Gangster Genre – have become a staple of cinematic output and, and as we will see in Chapter 5.2, now feature heavily in popular video games. ‘During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the exploits of gangsters such as Al Capone, John Dillinger, “Baby Face” Nelson, and “Pretty Boy” Floyd became national news, fuelled fictional accounts, and captured the popular imagination. These real life gangsters rose above ordinary criminals by committing their crimes with bravado; they were blatant transgressors of the boundaries between good and evil, right and wrong, and rich and poor’ (Gardaphe, 2006: 4). Early (1930s -1970s) Hollywood gangster films invariably depicted the gangster as a psychopath – a two dimensional character which displayed ‘unmixed criminality’ and irrational brutality towards men and women (Gardaphe, 2006: 21-22). This changed with Mario Puzo’s character Vito Corleone, star of the book, and later film *The Godfather* (1972) who was shown as a complex

character, morally certain and steady (even though the morals he follows do not necessarily adhere to those of wider society), generally respectful to women and men, and a man whose criminality did not stem from inherent psychopathic tendencies but from a rational original need to survive, with limited options, as a new arrival in an America suspicious of Italians/Sicilian immigrants. In the character of Vito Corleone 'Puzo revises earlier notions of the gangster as a social deviant to create in Don Corleone a gangster who can arguably be considered a bona fide culture hero' (Gardaphe, 2006: 22). Don Corleone, and other characters from this genre, such as Tony Montana star of *Scarface* (1983) depict a particular form of masculinity – in the face of changing notions of American masculinity consequent to feminism, and social change that threatened patriarchy in the wake of the Second World War, there were the 'Corleone Dons, tragic and violent versions of Peter Pan, upholding all that was traditionally manly for men who were afraid of becoming feminized' (Gardaphe, 2006: 42).

Gardaphe's (2006) judgement that particular genres of film, and the characters portrayed within, are fundamentally related to a crisis of masculinity is not limited to analyses of the Gangster genre. 'For example, film noir, which flourished in the 1930s and 1940s, is understood by scholars today as being largely about the acute sense of disempowerment men felt returning home from World War II to find that during the war women had left the domestic sphere and entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers. Masculinity in film noir is often depicted as struggle for the male protagonist to maintain his normative identity' (Grant, 2008: 25). Although Grant (2008) went on to challenge this conception it was, and remains significant within film theory. Krutnik (1991), for example, asserted that film noir reveals and confronts a crisis in masculinity, and male anxieties concerning dwindling patriarchy, consequent to social change in the 1940s and 1950s. And, as we will see in Chapter 5.3, Film Noir and the gangster genre, both developed to appeal primarily to a masculine audience through aspirational representations of masculinity - one socially acceptable and one socially unacceptable - have featured within successful mainstream video games aimed primarily at a male audience.

Jeffords (1989), maintained that contemporary cinematic representations of positive and aspirational *and acceptable* masculinities have their roots in social history and social change. Jeffords (1989) stressed that in The United States of America understanding and performing masculinity became problematic after the Vietnam War. In the 1960s American men lost their place as warrior, wage earner and professional to women, and women's emancipation and consequent new social status came at the expense of the Vietnam veterans who lost their jobs, power, place and privilege - but it also came at the expense of American masculinity as a whole⁴⁰ (Jeffords, 1989). Prior to Vietnam American men were, and were seen to be, dominant, powerful and respected in a patriarchal society. However returning veterans came back to a nation that was disenchanted with the war, with the veterans, and with the notion and virtues of masculinity. Reports had reached home concerning the atrocities enacted by some American soldiers, leading them to be depicted by protesters as barbaric and even as baby killers.

"Bomb them back to the stone age."

U.S. General Curtis LeMay during the Vietnam War

'Vietnam changed American notions about the virtues of masculinity and femininity. In the 60s during the great violence of the war, masculine power came to be discredited in many circles as oafish and destructive...Femininity was the garden of life, masculinity the landscape of death' (Wheeler, 1984: 24).

The cinematic revival of paternal, and patriarchal, frontier masculinity as positive and aspirational – traditionally characterised by heroes of the Westerns - began when Hollywood films started to depict Vietnam veterans as victims not monsters: victims of the enemy, victims of the American public and their response to returning soldiers, and as victims of betrayal by their own government and their allies (Jeffords, 1989). Films such as *Rambo First Blood* (1982) and *Missing in Action* (1984) had a “dependence on the strategy of

⁴⁰ For a discussion of male emasculation consequent to socioeconomic changes see Holt & Thompson (2004, 425-427)

victimization” - so the war-as-hell, the American G.I. as sympathetic, and the veteran as victim’ (Studlar & Desser, 1990: 104-5). Films, dramas and personal accounts circulating from, and about, returning veterans created a growing conception amongst the American population that the American soldiers had fought bravely, followed their orders and were not to blame for the position they later found themselves (and their country) in. There was a new sympathy for the Vietnamese veteran and, in mainstream cinema, attention for the failure of the war turned away from the veterans and towards the government. In films such as *Rambo First Blood* (1982) and *Missing in Action* the government was portrayed as emasculated and ‘feminised’ – they lacked the moral certainty to face their enemies, the courage of their convictions to see the war through to a victory and were unwilling to act decisively and swiftly in order to organise and fund the war effort sufficiently to support the efforts of the brave and loyal soldiers. By reinvigorating the American male - and absolving them of moral responsibility for the context in which they fought - the American film industry, in the 1980s and early 1990s, refreshed the some of the myths upon which the United States was founded, ones that began to crack before the Second World and they thereby reinvigorated the once struggling hegemonic representation of aspirational masculinity as brave, assertive and heroic.

Revitalising hegemonic representation of aspirational masculinity consequent to the loss of traditional symbols and performances of masculinity - as worker, patriarch and father (Tasker, 1993) required a marked cinematic response. That response was a complete rejection of the feminine, and the presentation of a hyper-masculinity – a hyper-masculinity expressed through exaggerated male aesthetics and masculine characteristics. The male body became a spectacle and ‘The well-displayed muscles of such icons as Sylvester Stallone and Jean Claude Van Damme [have] worked within a narrative space that presents masculinity as an excessive, almost hysterical performance’ (Brown, 1996: 52). ‘Both actors [Stallone and Schwarzenegger] often resemble an anthropomorphised phallus, a phallus with muscles, if you like... They are a simulacra of an exaggerated masculinity, the original completely lost to sight, a casualty of the failure of the paternal signifier and the current crisis in master narratives’ (Creed, 1987: 65). Creed (1987) presents a false logic in that there is an assumption of ‘an original masculinity’ – however the point being made here is that without traditional symbols of patriarchal masculinity to fall back on Hollywood cinema began to represent masculinity as pure spectacle.

A new, and now instantly familiar, enduring and aspirational representation of idealised masculinity was born – a masculinity characterised and embodied by ‘hard bodied’ (Jeffords, 1994) actors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Jean Claude Van Damme, and one that found its way into video games through the character Duke Nukem (see above). These actors rarely spoke (and neither did the video game character either through speech or text) in their early films - and when they did they were barely intelligible through strong accents and, in the case of Stallone a speech impediment – this necessarily focussed the film audience’s (and the Duke Nukem gamer’s) attention on the protagonists’ externalisation of emotions through violent and destructive actions. They were intellectually ‘simple’, physically spectacular ‘first men’; men whose spectacular bodies alone were a weapon - a weapon that set apart male action heroes of the hardbodied genre from ‘normal men’ or ‘female victim heroes’ from the ‘final girl’ trope (Clover, 1987) - exciting, assertive and aggressive women who had become a staple of mainstream cinematic output characterised by Ripley from the film *Aliens*. These hardbodied characters (Jeffords, 1994), epitomised by the character Rambo - star of the eponymous film franchise were driven by an internal and unfaltering sense of morality to assert themselves into heroic roles, voluntarily taking on frontier missions in order to defend ‘our’ honour and repel external threats to ‘our’ security

‘US masculinity in Hollywood films of the 1980s was largely transcribed through spectacle and bodies, with the male body itself becoming often the most fulfilling form of spectacle. Throughout this period, the male body – principally the white male body – became increasingly a vehicle of display – of musculature, of beauty, of physical feats, and of a gritty toughness’

(Jeffords, 1993: 245)

Cinematic representations of masculinity, embodied in action heroes, became central to a multi faceted ideological programme of representing America (and Americans) at home and abroad. The Reagan government was a government characterised by narratives of heroism, strength and Americanness (Jeffords, 1994: 15). Its ideology facilitated a rehabilitation of an

aggressive US military - once demonised consequent to the Vietnam War - and it regenerated the public's belief in, and desire for, a strong and assertive 'masculine' government, a government that would not be feminised either by internal processes or by an external enemy. 'Ronald Reagan... presented himself as a modern-day gunfighter who stood up to government bureaucracies and the communist threat. Reagan's potent rhetoric melded the evangelical tradition... with the frontier myth' (Holt & Thompson, 2004: 428). 'Hollywood films of the 1980s - in conjunction with the premier politician produced by that system, Ronald Reagan - highlighted masculinity (and Reagan's collaborative nationalism) as a violent spectacle that insisted on the external sufficiency of the male body/territory' (Jeffords, 1993: 246). By eliminating the feminine, and through performances of the masculine as a spectacle, war films of the 1980s and early 1990s were consistent with an ideology that reinvigorated the status of the masculine status of the veterans, the government and the United States of America - whose "masculine power, as well as its status as the 'redeemer nation were seriously put into question" during and immediately after the Vietnam War (Willoquet-Mariocoini, 1994: 7). The 'hardbodied' hyper-masculine all action hero, instated as the hegemonic representation of aspirational masculinity, became synonymous with the Reagan government and American foreign policy, and this particular form of masculinity, used for an ideological agenda, expressed the aspirations of how the American government, and its people, wanted to be seen at home and abroad.

'The war films of the 1980s are viewed as ideologically powerful texts which erase any notions of 'Vietnam syndrome' and reinvigorate American national identity...'

(Straw, 2008: 132)

'In the 1990s, externality and spectacle have begun to give way to a presumably more internalised masculine dimension... More film time is devoted to explorations of their [men's] ethical dilemmas, emotional traumas, and psychological goals, and less to their skill with weapons, their athletic abilities or their gutsy showdown of opponents' (Jeffords, 1993: 245). However this shift away from 'hardbodied' spectacle in the early 1990s was not accompanied by a complete rejection of action and heroism as central to performances of

aspirational masculinity. The significant development in films in the 1990s was that a Hollywood man must be able to cope and thrive in a violent environment, but as the narrative progresses the protagonist ‘... instead of learning to fight, learns to love (Jeffords, 1993: 245). Furthermore, a shift away from ‘hardbodied’ spectacle did not end cinematic representations of masculinity being used as metaphors for American national identity, or as ideological performances depicting how the United States of America, and its people, would wish to be known at home and abroad. Action films in the late 1990s and early 2000s featured a new representation of aspirational masculinity - a part-feminised hyper masculinity. These ‘new men’ are morally certain, assertive and aggressive men of action, however they are also eloquent able to express themselves vocally – not just through the externalised physical action characteristic of the ‘hardbodied’ era - and they may even choose to love women, nurture their children and sacrifice a life of unencumbered hyper-masculinity in order to develop a domestic life.

‘The new Hollywood war film sees a shift from the war films of the 1980s in terms of the representation of heroism - from hypermasculine heroes to idealistic ones.... the new Hollywood war film glorifies its heroes and their desire to “do the right thing, moral men who think for themselves and, no matter what their orders, act humanely and heroically’ (Gates, 2005: 301). *Behind Enemy Lines* (1986) places America and its troops in Bosnia as the Bosnian war (1992 – 1995) comes to an end. Situating the war in Bosnia marks a departure from the ‘eye for an eye’ Hollywood war films of the 1980s and 1990s as it posits America as part of a united NATO *humanitarian* mission. And, furthermore, the plot follows the ‘adventures’ of the moral and vigilant protagonists, Flight Navigator Lieutenant Chris Burnett (played by Owen Wilson), and Pilot Lieutenant Jeremy Stackhouse (played by Gabriel Macht) after being shot down on a reconnaissance, not a revenge, mission over Bosnia. Having been shot down the surviving protagonist Burnett manages to contact his commander Admiral Leslie Reigart (played by Gene Hackman) and the remainder of the film depicts Burnett’s struggle to survive in a hostile frontier environment whilst Reigart organises a humanitarian military rescue mission.

Similarly *Black Hawk Down* (2001) is set in a Somalia gripped by famine and civil war. With the Somali militia, under the orders of ruthless warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid, having declared war on the few remaining UN peace keeping soldiers The United States Army Rangers Delta force is dispatched to capture (not kill) Mohammed Farrah Aidid. The American soldiers, and by association the American nation and the American government are depicted as strong, assertive and masculine, but not as the vengeful vigilantes of the hardbodied 1980s Hollywood era, but through an increasingly familiar cinematic representation of aspirational masculinity, a masculinity that is intelligent and humanitarian but also aggressive (when necessary), assertive, morally driven, and morally certain. Having failed to achieve their humanitarian mission to stop the Somali warlord the film focuses on the American soldiers' heroic efforts to save the lives of their friends and colleagues. Through their heroic actions, and by implicitly⁴¹ embodying America and its government, *Black Hawk Down* and *Behind Enemy Lines* – both based on real life events – are characteristic of contemporary Hollywood war films that act as ideological texts, ideological texts that revitalise an aspirational frontier masculinity and revitalise the image of America and the American people by presenting to a global audience 'who we really are' humanitarian, moral and vigilant (Weber, 2006: 55).

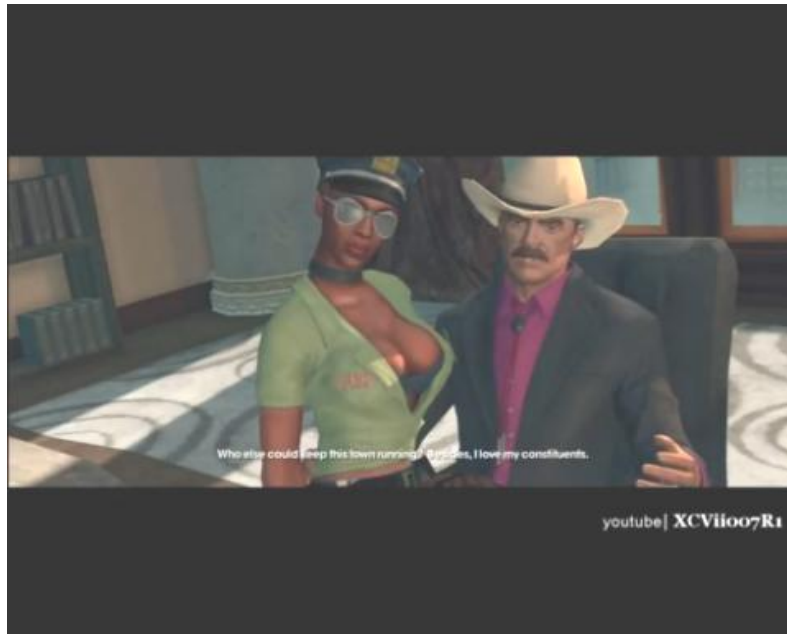
5.2) Representational Strategies: Aspiration Masculinity in Mainstream Video Games

Concluding with an in-depth analysis of *Call of Duty Black Ops* (in Chapter 5.4 and 5.5) - the biggest selling video game of 2011 - this chapter will now examine how the contemporary video game industry courts and engages an audience through a representational strategy co-opted from Hollywood cinema - specifically how it utilises plots, narratives (explicit and implicit) and representations of aspirational masculinity (as seen in Chapter 5.2) that have successfully attracted and engaged a male/masculine cinema audience.

The *Saints Row* video game franchise exemplifies how the video game industry co-opts representational strategies from the film industry in order to attract and engage an audience. Not only does *Saints Row The Third* (the third game in the *Saints Row* video game franchise)

⁴¹ Content analyses of films often expose explicit and implicit plot lines which are both utilised to engage the audience. In Chapter 5.6 an exemplification of content analysis will be provided, and in Chapter 5.7 it will be shown that whilst many video games utilise explicit cinematic techniques, representations and narratives to appeal to consumers, increasingly video games – exemplified by *Call of Duty Black Ops* – are incorporating explicit and implicit plots and narratives co-opted from cinema featuring aspirational masculinities to appeal to and maintain the immersion of the video gamer.

include an ‘acting role’ for a recognisable film actor with masculine capital - legendary film actor Burt Reynolds appears as the City Mayor in a guise and role reminiscent of his personal and cinematic heyday when he was known as a macho ladies man – as the image below illustrates -



Burt Reynolds playing Burt Reynolds Mayor of Steelport in Saints Row the Third

but the game-plots and narratives in this franchise are also comparable with, and reminiscent of, films from early Hollywood’s gangster genre. In Saints Row The Third, for example, the protagonist in the game is an anti-hero who in order to satisfy his objectives - both in terms of character development and achieving the financial reward through which success (in the game) is measured – operates as morally certain, if socially unacceptable, ruthless and immoral gang leader, a man capable of *arbitrary* and extreme violence. Similarly Grand Theft Auto: Vice City stars a Mafia hit man Tommy Vercetti, who, after release from prison sets about remorselessly establishing a criminal empire, and ruining rival criminal organizations in the city of Miami. And the latest game in the Grand Theft Auto series, Grand Theft Auto IV (the game with the most developed narrative in the franchise) stars Niko Bellic, a war veteran from Eastern Europe who arrives in the United States to chase the American Dream. However while protecting his deviant cousin Roman, Bellic shows himself to be a man capable of ruthless criminality who quickly becomes immersed in a world of guns, gangs and organised crime. Although the scripts, plots and narratives in these games are becoming progressively more coherent, they are not (yet) as well constructed as some of

the films from the gangster genre, however the influence of representational strategies from films such as *The Godfather* (1972), *King of New York* (1990), *Boys ‘n the Hood* (1991) and *Scarface* (1983) are clear.

LA Noire (2011) has received significant attention for its originality, and reviewers have called it a ‘breakthrough’ in the development of the video game (Brooker, 2011, Boxer, 2011). *LA Noire* is a single player game, without a multi-player option, that relies on a narrative in order to engage the lone gamer. It is a slow pace video game in which the protagonist, Cole Phelps, is a detective with the Los Angeles police department. Success in the game is measured by how well the gamer (reflected on screen as Phelps) does in both investigation and interrogation – with both these things then directing the course of the game’s narrative. *LA Noire* is derivative of the film noir genre – a genre which has been a mainstay of American cinema’s representations of aspirational masculinity, and a genre developed (as discussed in Chapter 5.1) to appeal to a male audience. Aaron Staton, Andy Umberger, Myra Turley, Michael Gladis and Joseph Culp all stars of video game *LA Noire* have been previously seen ‘on the small screen’ in the American drama series *Mad Men*. The imagery of *LA Noire* is also reminiscent of the imagery of *Mad Men*, both of which have borrowed cultural capital from the film noir genre; a genre characterised by action and machismo and one which has maintained a cultural impact on the film industry since the 1940s.

The images below have been taken from high profile output of the film noir genre and illustrate how the imagery has remained consistent throughout history and across media – from *The Maltese Falcon* film, published in 1941 through to a contemporary film noir *LA Confidential* published in 1997, a TV drama series from 2007-2012 and the video game *LA Noire* published in 2011.



The
Maltese
Falcon
(1941)



LA -
Confidential
(1997)



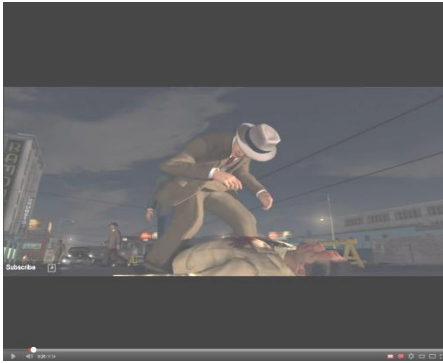
Mad Men
(2007 -
2012)



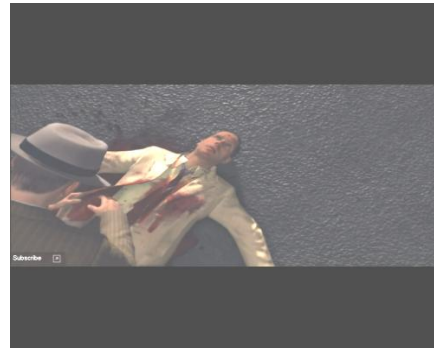
LA Noire
(2011)

Film Noire is synonymous with early gangster and police films in which there stars a lonely, or loner, protagonist with an unfaltering sense of morality, an assertive attitude and a resolute attitude towards achieving their goals. Film Noire protagonists such as Mike Hammer, creation of author Mickey Spillane, is contemptuous of the emasculating limitations of the law and driven by an unfaltering and certain morality is prepared to use underhand means or violence in order to ‘crack the case’. Actors from classic Film Noire movies, such as Humphrey Bogart, star of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *Casablanca* (1942) built reputations and careers from playing womanising men in hard-bitten masculine roles. The protagonist in *LA Noire*, Cole Phelps, follows in this tradition. Cole Phelps is a war veteran – ‘in fact’ he is a war hero, something which we are reminded of at regular intervals through the game – thereby reassuring the gamer of Cole’s aspirational sense of moral certitude. So, although the plot, content and structure of *LA Noire* is significantly different from your ‘average masculine’ video game it engages the gamer through familiar, idealised and aspirational masculine representations co-opted from cinematic history. And although its protagonist, Cole Phelps, is not the ruthless killer of the *Saints Row* or the *Grand Theft Auto* model he is nonetheless a familiar representation of aspirational masculinity - a man of moral purpose and certitude prepared to use extreme violence in order to achieve his ends, although for Phelps that violence and has to be morally justified not for personal or financial gain.

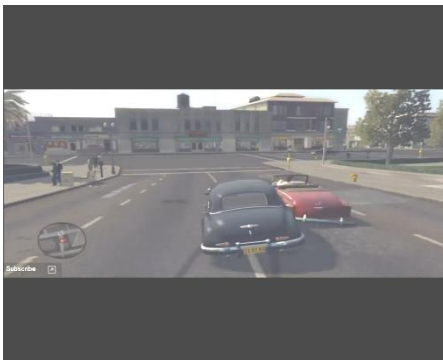
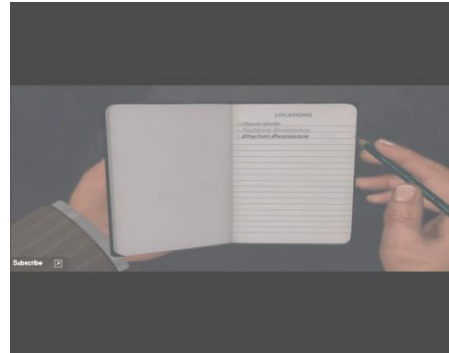
The images below, presented as a story board illustrate the imagery and game-play found in *LA Noire*. Phelps takes the traditional macho (but moral) film noire role as a policeman. The use of a note pad shows the originality of the game play – game play that necessitates investigation and problem solving rather than gung ho violence. Further on illustrations depicts how, when faced with the necessity for violence, Phelps is willing to act accordingly – however violence is not enacted without empathy and humanity. Phelps is spooked, not enlivened, by the requirement for violence and by the ensuing death of the criminal and his partner is able to recognise this and express concern over his colleagues feelings.



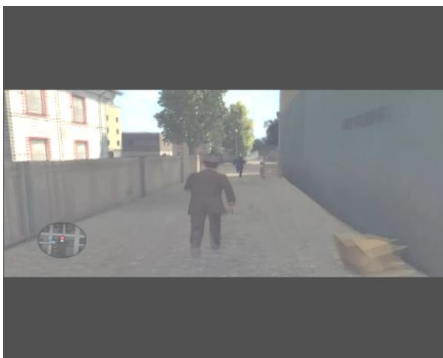
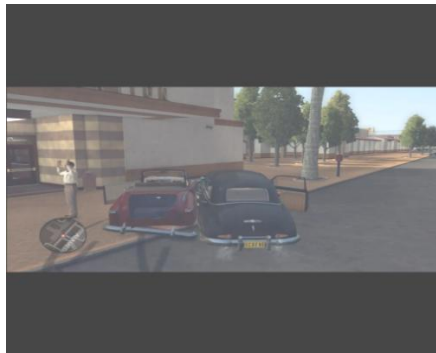
Phelps investigates the dead man in the street.



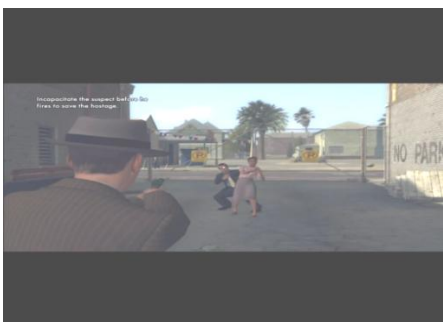
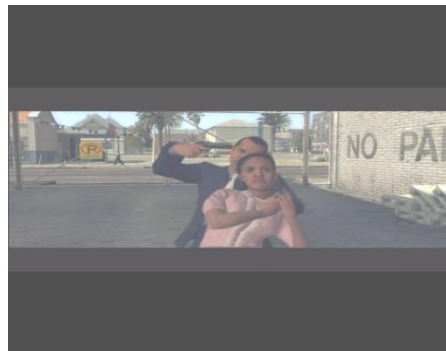
Phelps interrogates a witness and makes use of his notebook.



A car chase is followed by a peaceful arrest



A foot chase is followed by a hostage situation.



After the hostage is killed Phelps and his partner walk away 'you look spooked Phelps'.



5.3) Content Analysis: Theory, Exemplar and Methods

‘Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use’ (Krippendorff, 2004: 18). It is not used to determine exact interpretations of texts whether that is newspapers, advertisements, bill-boards, plot lines, scripts or narratives. ‘...content analysis begins with some precise hypothesis (expectation) or question about well defined variables’ argues (Bell, 2001: 13) from which an interpretation (one of many possible interpretations) of a script is derived. What follows is an example of content analysis carried out by Gabbard (2001) on the film *Ransom* (1996). This content analysis demonstrates how implicit narratives are used by writers and directors to engage the audience, and how those implicit narratives can be uncovered and analysed. Carrying on from here, in Chapter 5.4, an equivalent content analysis will be carried out on the game *Call of Duty Black Ops* in order to illustrate how implicit cinematic representational strategies have been used in this game in order to engage, and maintain the attention and immersion of the video gamer.

‘*Ransom*’ is a film starring Mel Gibson as the protagonist Tom Mullen. Explicitly *Ransom* tells the story of a powerful millionaire (Mullen) whose child is kidnapped and held to ransom and the worthy battle the protagonist fights with the kidnappers, and the authorities, in order to recover his son. Although Mullen is neither soldier nor fighter, he is nonetheless a masculine man. His masculinity is represented in several ways, most significantly for a comparative analysis of *Call of Duty Black Ops* which will follow in Chapter 5.4, by his ‘gaze’ and his ethnicity (Gabbard, 2001). Tom Mullen is a rich and powerful white man and has the associated lifestyle. He lives in penthouse apartment from which his ‘gaze’ descends providing him with a physical and symbolic superiority over the neighbourhood and its population. He displays his wealth by hosting parties for the wealthy (white) citizens of New York which are staffed by those Mullen sees as from inferior social classes and inferior (non-Caucasian) ethnicities (Gabbard, 2001).

Implicitly Ransom takes the protagonist through a journey from one who gazes, to one who is gazed upon and back to one who gazes. A path from aspirational masculinity to emasculated man and back once again to the aspirational masculine. When the film begins Mullen's financial success allows him to escape the 'gaze' of others whilst allowing him to 'gaze' upon them all. Mullen's 'gaze' is highly significant 'as the large body of psychoanalytic film theory suggests, looking in movies usually involves empowerment while being looked at often means the opposite' (Gabbard, 2001: 8). When his son is kidnapped Mullen becomes the subject of the 'gaze' of others (ones who he feels are his inferiors – both in terms of social class and ethnicity) thereby he becomes disempowered and emasculated. Not only is he subject to the gaze of the working class kidnapers, but also to the gaze of the FBI characterised by a black officer FBI Special Agent Lonnie Hawkins (played by Donnie Lindo), Mullen's wife Kate (played by Rene Russo), his family, the press and everyone following the story through the media. The black officer in charge of the case, and the feminising effects of family life are both, according to Gabbard (2001) inhibiting to the 'authentic' masculine desires of Mullen to take charge of the situation and deal with the kidnapping in his own way, inhibiting factors that he eventually overcomes by ignoring the wishes of these people and following his own autonomous path to a successful recovery of his son, and thereby his masculinity and his superior gaze.

Reasserting the autonomy of the white man and reconfiguring the 'gaze' are integral to an analysis of the implicit content of 'Ransom'. Tom Mullen's mission is not only to rescue his son but also to rescue his aspirational and autonomous masculinity by escaping the emasculating gaze, and thereby reversing its direction. In true (hyper) masculine style after the kidnap of his son Mullen cannot be constrained by the emasculating wishes of his family, or the directions of the police officer in charge of the case who wants him to behave appropriately and follow procedure, so he acts autonomously in order to not only regain his son, but also his masculinity. Gabbard (2001: 11) concludes 'The white hero in Ransom re-establishes his autonomous masculinity not just because he resists the feminizing effects of family and not just because he kills the mastermind behind the kidnapping of his son. As I have suggested, Tom Mullen also overcomes the attempts of a powerful black man to control his dealings with the kidnapers. Furthermore, Mullen enhances his success by escaping the gaze and control of members of the American working class, both black and white'.

5.4) Content Analysis: Call of Duty Black Ops

As we have seen the developers of video games such as Grand Theft Auto and The Saints Row franchises have made significant efforts to engage the male gamer through the use of plot lines scripts, narratives and representational strategies made familiar through mainstream Hollywood cinema. However, although these games feature narratives and representational strategies that are significantly more substantial (and improving with every iteration) than the plots of Duke Nukem (above) and Tomb Raider, or other games analysed by Atkins (2003) there are still few demands made of gamers or efforts made by developers in terms of scripts, plots and narratives. In the Grand Theft Auto and The Saints Row franchises there is initially some character development but as the games progress the cut scenes, where the narrative is explicit, become primarily pathways between gaming episodes and over time the plot development loses pace and significance. The characters remain two dimensional – the gangsters who star in the Saints Row franchise, for example, are more reminiscent of the stars of the psychopathic gangster films of the 1930s (discussed in Chapter 5.1) than the complex and aspirational culture heroes of The Godfather (1972) or Scarface movies (1983). The plots, scripts and narratives are explicit, there is no underling implicit plot adding substance to the narrative - they are ‘wafer thin’ (Atkins, 2003) and undemanding of the gamer/audience.

The developers of Call of Duty Black Ops, Treyarch (a subsidiary of Activision) however have created a fully immersive plot, script and narrative (explicit and implicit) starring well developed characters⁴² and representational strategies. The game-plot is explicitly grounded in the enduring and familiar cinematic theme of adventure into ‘the frontier’. It incorporates explicit representations of aspirational, and morally certain masculinity. And it features the implicit narrative subtlety of masculinity lost and found in order to maintain the interest and immersion of the gamer throughout the game-plot. Its representations of America, embodied by the (aspirational and morally certain) protagonist Mason, and of other nations (portrayed

⁴² With the video game industry under pressure to maximise profits and minimise risk, and doing so by seeking inspiration from games that have succeeded in the past, consequent to the enormous financial success and popularity of Call of Duty Black Ops it seems likely that the use of well developed characters, scripts and immersive narratives will be further incorporated into mainstream video games.

as immoral and hostile) embodied by supporting characters such as Castro (Cuba) and Dragovich (Russia) makes it an ideologically powerful text, and one that is synonymous with Hollywood war films from the 2000s (discussed in Chapter 5.1) that represent how America wants to be seen, morally and purposefully, at home and on the world stage.

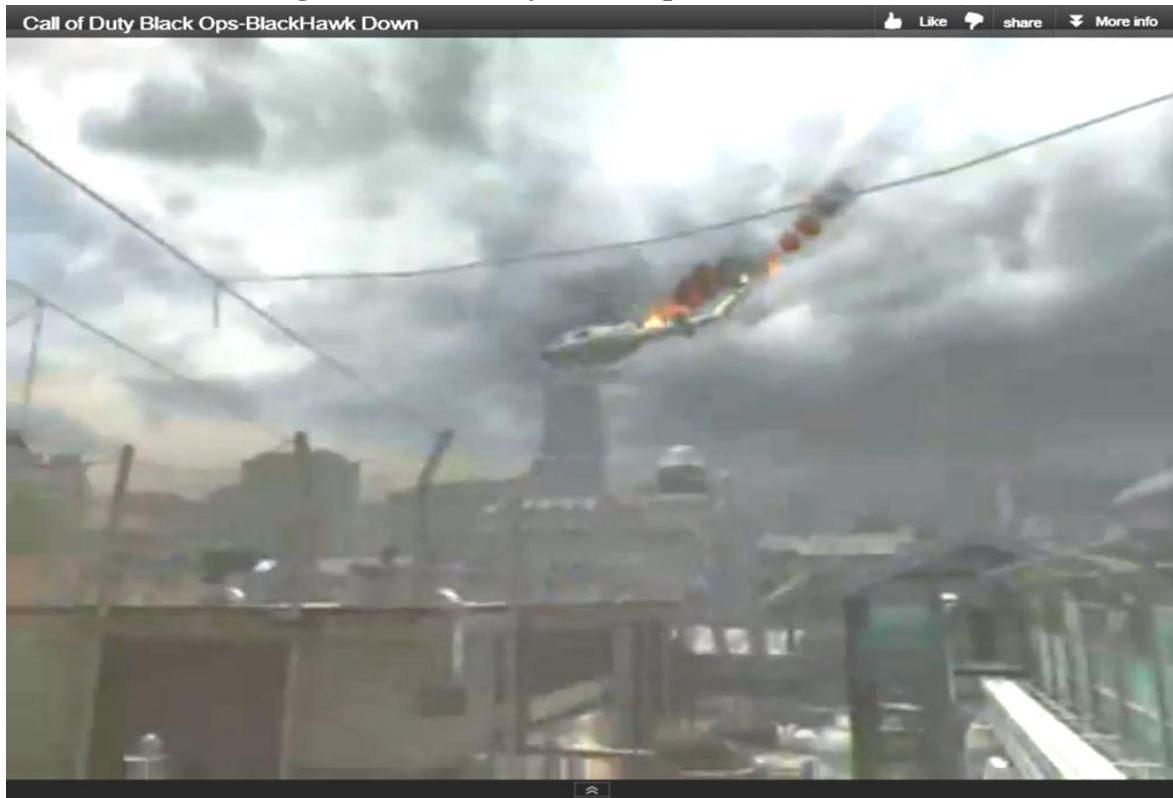
The quality of the plot, script and representational strategies in Call of Duty Black Ops reflects the professionalism behind its development – a professionalism brought from Hollywood Cinema. Treyarch, the game developer, employed David S Goyer – script writer for the hugely successful Batman film Dark Knight (2008) - as script consultant and to support story development. And they employed Gary Oldman (star of Goyer’s Dark Knight) and Ed Harris, BAFTA and Academy Award winning actors respectively, to star as key characters Reznov and CIA agent Jason Hudson.

“Oldman, Harris and Goyer are considered some of Hollywood’s finest talents and they perfectly complement Call of Duty: Black Ops’ ambitious and immersive single player experience,”

“Their contributions have helped us to push the boundaries of our story telling and character development far beyond anything we have ever attempted before in the franchise.”

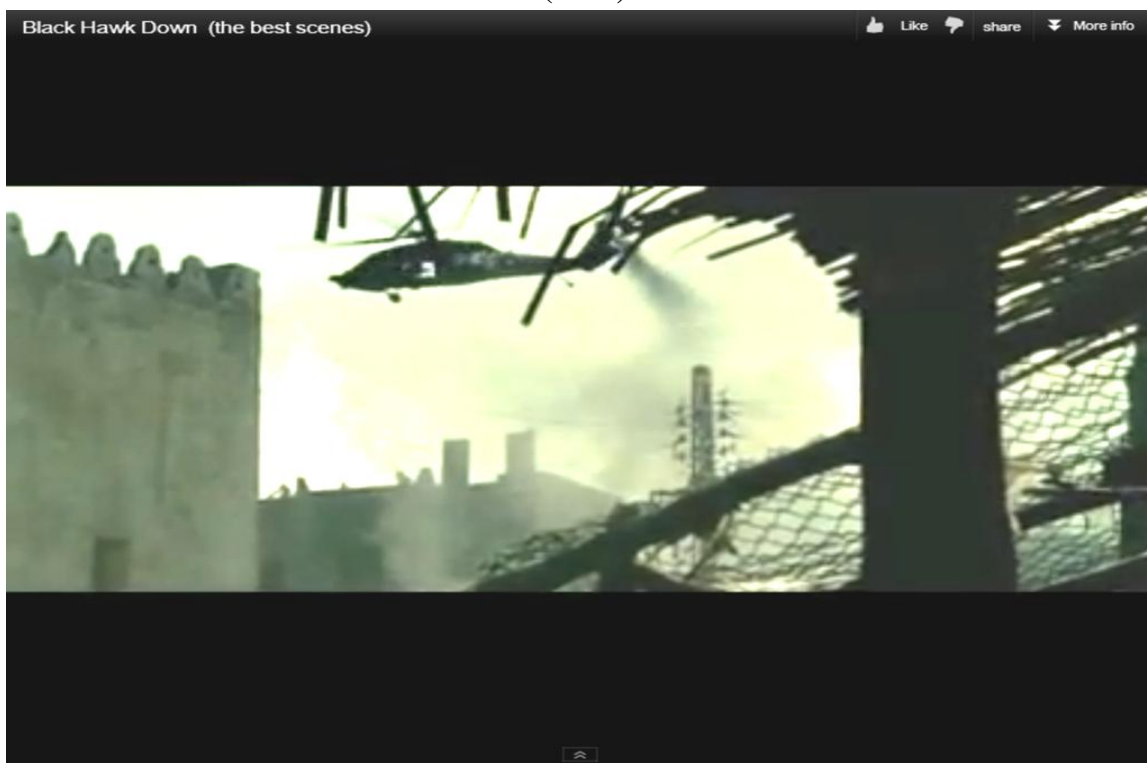
(Mark Lamia, Treyarch Head of Studios)

Scene from the video game Call of Duty Black Ops, Level Victor Charlie/Vietnam



(YouTube (2012(b)))

Scene from the film Black Hawk Down (2001)



(YouTube (2012(c)))

Russian Roulette scene in Call of Duty Black Ops



Russian Roulette scene in the film Deer Hunter (1978)



Call of Duty Black Ops owes much to Hollywood's historical representations of America at war and its associated representations of aspirational masculinity. Although the game Call of Duty Black Ops has an original plot and story line – albeit one that reflects contemporary cinematic output - that the developers have co-opted from cinematic output is clear in the images used – see images above – game audiences are invited to engage with familiar urban warzones of the type depicted in films such as *Black Hawk Down*, and even witness helicopter crash scenes wherein heroic soldiers on humanitarian missions become immersed in urban warfare. In Call of Duty Black Ops gamers are required to use their agency to survive and escape a helicopter crash scene much as the heroes of *Black Hawk Down* were required to. Call of Duty Black Ops tells, through its protagonists and supporting characters, a story about America and Americans 'at war' that erases any notions of 'Vietnam syndrome' (Straw, 2008: 132) – although through the Russian roulette scene, illustrated above, it maintains the image of the brave, sometimes necessarily ruthless and unfaltering loyalty of its troops to their comrades and to their country. It depicts American soldiers and the American government, spearheaded by a powerful, masculine and morally certain President Carter. President Carter projects himself, his agent Mason and thereby The United States of America onto the world stage and against their enemies in the most forceful manner. Call of Duty Black Ops, synonymous with the development of Hollywood cinema, represents – through the masculine protagonist – an ideology of America as it wants to be seen at home and abroad. It affirms what the American public 'wants to know' which is '... that the world is filled with enemies located beyond US borders and that those who cannot be morally rehabilitated (such as Fascists and al Qaeda members) can be killed' (Weber, 2006: 29). These enemies are depicted in the game by, amongst others, Steiner a Nazi scientist who sixty years after the end of the Second World War is yet to be rehabilitated. By portraying individual soldiers (Mason and his comrades) as brave, powerful and loyal to president and country, this time supported by an equally powerful and loyal president, it reminds viewers/gamers of the America 'we wish we'd never been' - the America that badly let down its Vietnam veterans (Weber, 2006: 29). And the game-plot also adheres to contemporary American cinematic output (particularly cinematic representations of America at war) by keeping away from the 'eye for an eye' revenge narratives of the 1980s and presenting an image of America, and the American military, as 'who we really are (humanitarians)' (Weber, 2006: 55).

Weber (2006) tells us that between the Vietnam War and the War on Terror much of the political justification for American military intervention by the US beyond its own borders has been justified by its moral purpose - the 1992-95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and intervention in Somalia in 1993 for example – and this has been reflected in films such as *Behind Enemy Lines* and *Black Hawk Down* (discussed in Chapter 5.1). And ‘In the face of America’s failure to sustain humanitarianism in the war of terror, [these] films lead us to consider whether it might be less risky to base US morality on ourselves and ourselves alone’ and to admit that American military intervention is for American interests – not the interests of the ‘feminised’ other which may not, or does not, want American help (Weber, 2006: 91). In *Call of Duty Black Ops America*, and *Americans*, are portrayed as both humanitarian and as self-interested vigilantes. The historical, hyper-masculine enemies of America: Cuba and Castro, The Nazis, The Russians and the Communists are working together – outside US borders - to attack America and Americans on their own territory; a threat of genocide to the American people that must be stopped and which justifies military intervention abroad to bring about the emasculation, or death, of the enemy for humanitarian reasons. And, furthermore, that moral justification is not wrapped up in narratives of a masculine US ‘saving a feminized other’ - Mason, whose character has much in common with the frontiersmen at the heart of the founding myths of America, is sent out, embodying America, into a hostile foreign frontier to save the United States and the **American** way of life.

5.4.1) Explicit Plot of Call of Duty Black Ops: A Soldier’s Story

I thought HALO has a good story line but Black Ops is amazing because the new Black Ops plays with your mind. Literally you’re a person who’s a Vietnam cold war [soldier] ‘...’ and you’re a Black Op, you’re a Black Operative and you get secret weapons and you literally go on undercover missions to stop a war coming out because in the cold war they were afraid of WW3 because of Russia’s power and America ‘cos they were ‘.....’ of each other and you’re doing everything undercover, and after a while it plays with your mind because you’re getting interrogated to begin with and all these numbers appear and you don’t know what these numbers mean, and you escape a prison and there’s this guy called Victor..... and you think he’s dead after you

escape the prison but he comes back and it turns out Victor Reznov is actually in your mind, and it turns out you're actually Victor Reznov.....'.

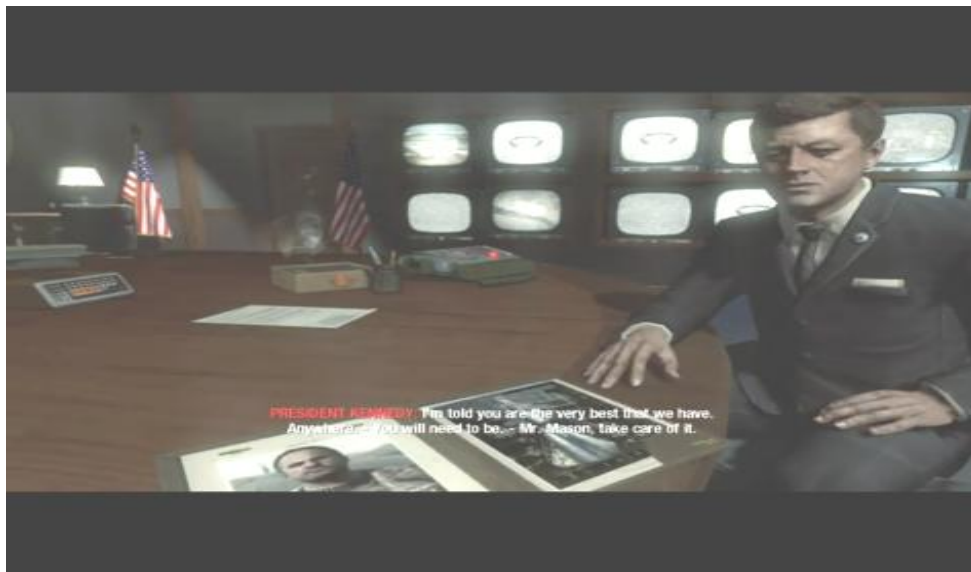
(B1, 2011)

The explicit plot line of C.O.D. centres upon the interrogation of the main protagonist in the story, Captain Mason, a soldier in the US military. The interrogators, who are unknown to Mason at the beginning of the plot, but are later revealed to be military colleagues of Mason working on behalf of the US government, are attempting to extract information including some numbers and the location of a broadcast station. Information which they need to avoid a global catastrophe and are convinced that Mason has knowledge of. The story line advances by following the exploits of Mason, prior to his interrogation, in his role as a soldier. Mason is forced to recall, in part due to the questioning of his interrogators and in part due to involuntary flashbacks, a series of military missions he was involved in over the previous six to seven years. Mason's series of missions take him initially to Cuba, where as part of the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 he was under orders to raid Fidel Castro's compound and assassinate him. The Cuban episode ends when the mission fails and Mason is taken prisoner by Castro – who it is revealed is working alongside the Russians (caricatured by the sociopathic Dragovich) – and removed to a Gulag where he is kept prisoner for four years.

In the Gulag Mason meets a character named Reznov (voiced by Gary Oldman a BAFTA award winning British actor). Reznov, is an embittered Russian ex soldier with a grudge against those who are responsible for Mason's continued imprisonment and torture. He tells Mason all about Dragovich, and his second in command Kratvechenko, and their plan to use the help of an ex Nazi chemist called Steiner in order to develop the biological weapon 'Nova' and use it against the Americans. Reznov's bitterness stems from his earlier betrayal by Dragovich, and, with the help of Mason he decides to lead an uprising in the Gulag. As a result of the uprising Mason escapes but has to leave Reznov behind. One month after Mason's escape from the gulag Mason, now in the hands of the CIA, is summoned to the pentagon where he is approached by President Kennedy. Kennedy gives Mason the order to assassinate Dragovich who he has reason to believe is the leader of a communist plan which threatens America and the American way of life.



Here JFK' words indicate that he is driven and characterised by the moral certainty expected of an American leader in a contemporary narrative about America at war. He demonstrates moral certainty: no hesitation and direct action – The America 'who we think we are' (Weber, 2006: 10)

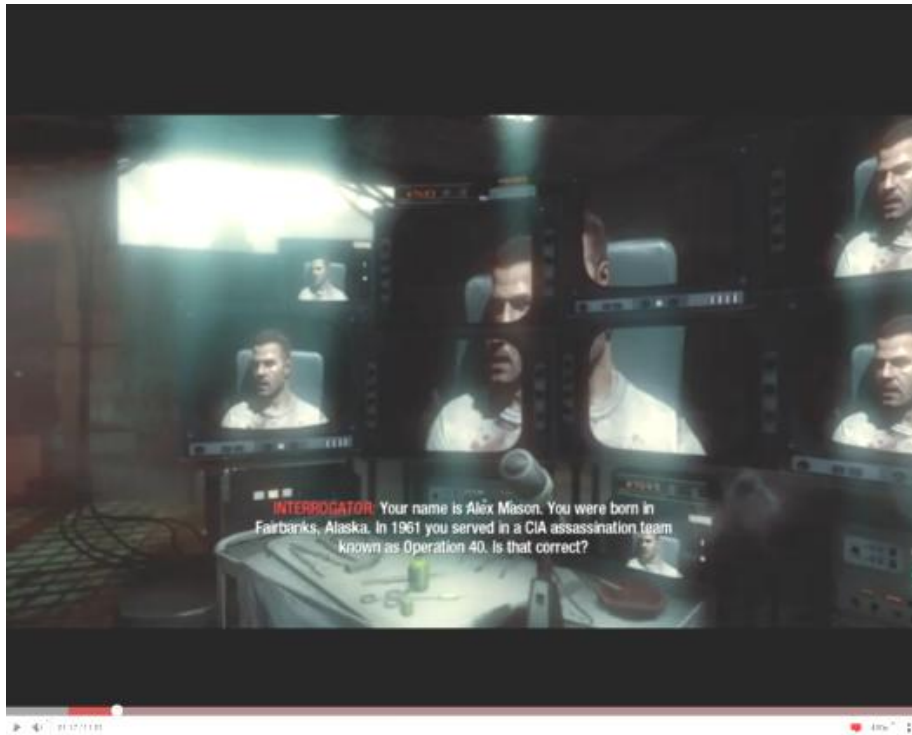


Once again, reflecting contemporary cinematic narratives of bold and assertive America at war, and American masculinity. JFK sends Mason out 'into the frontier' reflecting positive representations of American masculinity soldiers are supported by a masculine and assertive government projecting itself on to the world stage supporting its soldiers and citizens.

Consequently Mason is sent off on a series of frontier missions from Russia to Vietnam to Laos in order to achieve certain strategic objectives, such as disrupting the space programme and carrying out reconnaissance missions - all based in areas where intelligence asserts Dragovich and his men are going to be, so Mason can also carry out the president's orders for assassination and the destruction/emasculatation of the wrong sort of masculinity – ‘embodied’ by the morally bankrupt hyper-masculine enemies of America. In a later scene – a level called Revelation - Mason begins to recover some memories of his time in the gulag. It turns out that Steiner – the Nazi scientist – implanted some numbers into Mason’s mind, numbers which at a particular time Mason and a number of other sleeper agents could use to deploy ‘Nova’ against the American population. Mason remembers the numbers and the location of the broadcast station (a ship called the Rusalka stationed in Cuba) which initiates a final mission to hunt Dragovich down and sabotage his plans. The story concludes when Mason hunts down Dragovich on board the Rusalka, and the US army destroys the vessel. Thus satisfying Mason’s assassination mission, as ordered by President Kennedy, and ending the threat to America and the American way of life.

5.4.2) Implicit Plot of Call of Duty Black Ops: Masculinity Lost and Found

Call of Duty Black Ops starts with a piece of film that the gamer cannot control. Mason, the protagonist, is being interrogated. He is seated, and we assume bound, in a chair whilst facing questioning from faceless and as yet unknown interrogators. Mason appears powerless, not only because he is bound, but also because of being subject to the ‘gaze’ and the superior knowledge of the interrogators. Mason’s seating position denotes subjection. He is being looked down at. His interrogators are in a room overlooking him and the screens he faces are positioned so that he has to look up to see them (see screen grab below). Furthermore Mason’s first words are all questions: ‘Who am I..? Where’s Reznov?.. Who the hell are you?.. Conversely his interrogators know many details about Mason and his life which they tell him in order to establish their superiority whilst gazing down upon their ‘prey’. Mason is disempowered physically, symbolically and with respect to knowledge.



This image shows Mason under initial interrogation. He is emasculated, bound in a chair with no information available to him regarding his location or identity. The interrogators (with faces hidden by the light in the top left corner) gaze down upon their 'prey'

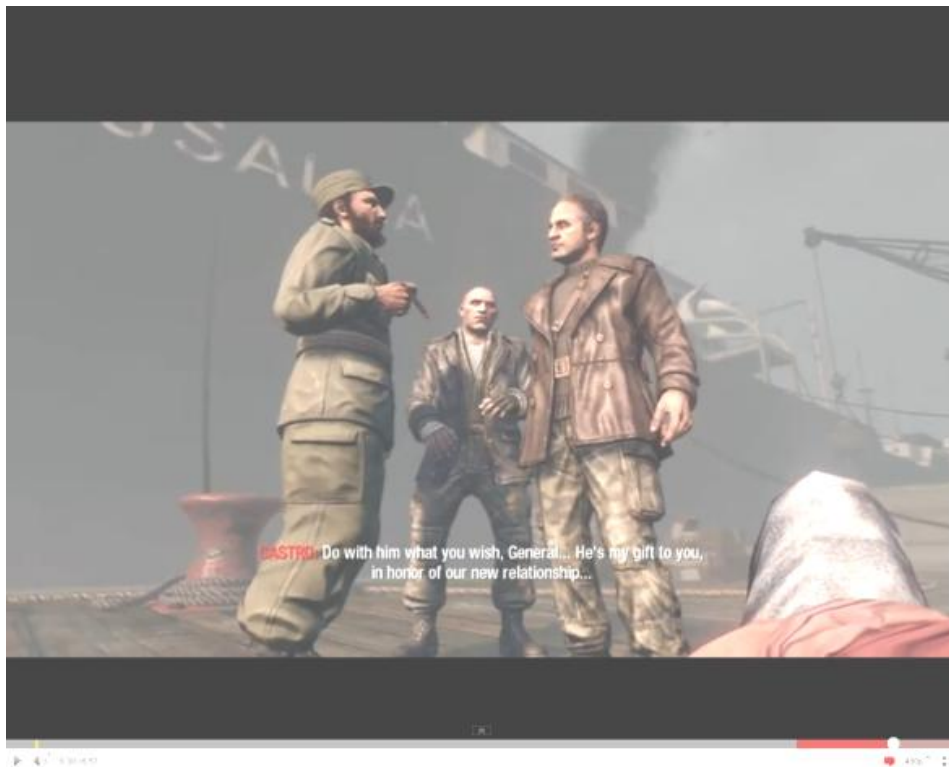
Mason's defiant attitude under interrogation is significant. When questioning begins Mason's response is to say 'Fuck you' followed by 'Kiss my Ass'. This is our first indication of Mason's masculinity. He is clearly not a man used to being pushed around. The spectator/gamer is left in no doubt that despite the temporary emasculation of Mason he is clearly a familiar, aspirational and idealised heroic figure, a masculine figure, and the protagonist with whom they are expected to identify. Mason is a soldier and an untamed masculine figure. A true representation of 'heroic masculinity' as he 'blends together two seemingly competing models: one emphasizing respectability, organized achievement, and civic virtues, and the other emphasizing rebellion, untamed potency, and self-reliance' (Holt & Thompson, 2004: 4).

'Taboo language in [these] stories functions in many ways: it gives verisimilitude to direct speech; it adds emphasis to the points the narrator wants to foreground; but most importantly it performs hegemonic

masculinity. Swearing and taboo language have historically been used by men in the company of other men as a sign of their toughness and of their manhood'

(Coates, 2008: 46)

The game begins when Mason goes on a mission to Cuba (Operation 40) where he has been sent to assassinate Castro. Despite having initial control over the character, towards the end of the mission the game mechanics take control and force Mason to sacrifice himself to save his colleagues' lives, as a result of which he is captured by the enemy. He is then shown (once again under the control of the game) emasculated and subject to the downward gaze of his enemy.



After being captured by Castro's men, Mason looks up as his captors gaze down whilst deciding his fate.

Mason and America, represented through the masculine protagonist, are at this point suffering and at the mercy of its (traditional) hyper-masculine enemy – one that the unfaltering and certain morality of America demands to be emasculated and feminised through direct action.

Mason (above) is seen lying helplessly on the ground as his hyper-masculine captors – symbolised by military uniforms and regalia, the cigar in the hand of Castro, the bald, squat thuggish man in the centre and the leather jacket of the man (Dragovich) on the right - each of them in a stance that projects masculinity: confident, assertive, in control and dominant. In absolute contrast Mason’s position denotes something far more sinister. Surrounded by men with his knees in the air he resembles a man who has been the victim of gang rape – like the male victim of rape in the popular and powerful film *Scum* (1979) - in cinematic narratives a most emasculating of experiences.



The victim of gang rape in *Scum* (1979) lying on his back with his knees bent while the feet of the rapists are visible around him

In the narratives of both *Ransom* and *Call of Duty Black Ops* the captors are perceived by the protagonists as culturally and racially inferior. In the case of ‘*Ransom*’ it was working class people who were the captors/kidnappers of Mullen’s son, and it was a black policeman and a woman who obstructed Mullen’s masculine impulse to act autonomously. In *Call of*

Duty Black Ops it is a Cuban and a Russian (Castro and Dragovich) who are responsible for the capture and imprisonment of Mason (and by association America) – both figures representative of countries, doctrines and moralities presented by American propaganda as oppressive and inferior to the Americans and their doctrine of freedom. Implicit to the narrative of the game is that a hyper-masculine soldier like Mason being captured at all would be embarrassing and humiliating; however to be being captured by people of such a low order as Dragovich and Castro is an experience which absolutely must, at all costs, be avenged so Mason can recover his masculinity. Paralleling this, implicit to the narrative of the game, we know that a hyper-masculine nation like America being emasculated would be humiliating; however to be emasculated by Castro and the Russians is a situation that must be reversed. So, as the game begins its narrative portrays the protagonist, and by association America, in a most emasculated condition, and it is a drive to recover that lost masculinity (masquerading as a moral directive) which impels the protagonist and propels the story line towards its conclusion.

As well as emphasising how Castro and Dragovich's 'gaze' descended upon Mason, and its consequences for his performance of masculinity and its representation within the game, it is important not to forget the 'gaze' of the interrogators. In the initial interrogation scene it was clear that in that particular moment the 'gaze' was upon Mason - however in the level 'U.S.D.D.' it becomes clear that Mason has been subject to that gaze for some time. An interrogator informs Mason that he has been under long term surveillance 'we were watching you the whole time... to see if we could trust you'. Mason's position of trust, indicated by the context of his first mission, has receded to the point where he has to be watched and assessed by his superiors. To retrieve his manhood Mason has two imperatives, like Tom Mullen in 'Ransom', he has to re-establish his superiority over the lower orders that held him (or in Mullen's case his son) captive, and he also has to remove the 'gaze' of the authorities. As the game progresses, we witness Mason involved in a variety of missions which are central to the explicit plot (outlined above) but which also enable Mason to confront those responsible for his emasculation and provide the opportunities to reassert his dominance and 'gaze' over them.

When Mason disrupts the Russian space programme (level: Executive Order), to carry out reconnaissance in Laos (level: S.O.G.) or retrieves a defector (level: The Defector), he explicitly fulfils his military directives and he implicitly recovers his (and America's) autonomy and masculinity and brings the narrative to a satisfactory conclusion. Mason's opportunity for final revenge comes in the level 'Payback'. Having prevented the biological weapons attack, Mason chokes and drowns Dragovich whilst shouting 'you had to fuck with my mind'. The death of Dragovich is the final action scene involving Mason in the original Call of Duty Black Ops game. He is once again the hyper-masculine man. He, and therefore America, have overcome the emasculating experiences of capture, torture and brainwashing and are able to impose their 'gaze' upon the enemy – now confirmed as inferior - and remove the emasculating gaze of interrogators and enemies alike.

5.5) Beyond Film Theory: Agency and the Performance of Masculinity

Video game developers are using familiar cinematic techniques in terms of advertising, plots, narratives and characters in order to attract and engage the core male video game consumer. However, unlike Baudrillard's (1996) passive, non - interpretative 'victims' of the electronic entertainment industry video gamers actively seek and gain immersion into their pursuit. Video gaming, unlike watching television or films, is an interactive pursuit - video gamers interpret *and influence* 'the screen'. The remainder of this chapter will concern itself with that interactivity – specifically how video gamers *perform* aspirational masculinities through which they actively achieve immersion into games, the screen and the lifeworld.

Video games are appealing and immersive for the active, interpretative and interactive (lone) video gamer because they allow gamers to utilise, enjoy *and perform* their 'autonomous imaginative hedonism' (Campbell, 1987) - a cultural artefact that allows immersion into imaginary worlds. Modern video games begin with a short piece of film (such as where Mason is bound, seated and being interrogated). At this point, and other points where the mechanics of the game are in control, the gamer is synonymous with the film viewer. The gamer is encouraged to actively interpret events on screen, suspend disbelief and become immersed in the narrative. And, as for an audience member watching a film, the spectator is encouraged to identify with the protagonist in the context of a narrative

so that the events on a screen will become meaningful. For the video gamer identification with the protagonist (Mason) in *Call of Duty*, or the protagonists in *LA Noire*, *The Saints Row* franchise or the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise is immediate due to an apprenticeship served through exposure to familiar and aspirational representations of masculinity in Hollywood cinema. However, unlike a film viewer when the cut-scene ends the gamer has agency - as Carr (2002: 177) recognised in an analysis of Lara Croft (star of film and video game franchise *Tomb Raider* 'identification [with the avatar] is explicit, we drive, direct and occupy her'. When a video game becomes interactive the gamer has (some) power to determine events and actions on screen. The path through the game's narrative is not (entirely) pre-set as it is in a film. The protagonist/gamer is constantly under threat and there is no guarantee that they will survive and the onus is on the gamer (not the director) to ensure that he/she does. The overt significance of the gamer's agency in terms of advancing the narrative is clear. If a gamer wants to advance through a game-plot then they have to take control of the protagonist in order to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. It is up to the gamer to ensure the safety of the protagonist, protect them, and recover them from emasculating experiences.

However, for a video gamer, immersion and engagement does not end with explicit identification with the protagonist and utilising the inherent agency of video games and video gaming to progress through or become immersed in a game – or to, as argued by Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003) act out particular roles, when playing a video game, although the gamer is explicitly identifying with the protagonist, through their familiarity with representations of aspirational masculinity, and using agency to protect them by directing onscreen events, they are also performing their own interpretation of an ideal masculinity socialised through a cinematic apprenticeship (and to a lesser extent books and television) which they see reflected on the screen embodied by the protagonists. Ellis (1982) argued that cinema spectators' identification with onscreen characters involves dreaming and fantasy, and also narcissistic identification. The situation is more complex than male viewers explicitly identifying with male characters and female characters and female viewers explicitly identifying with female characters – 'identification involves both recognition of self in the image on the screen, a narcissistic identification, and the identification of self with the various positions that are involved in the fictional narrative.... Identification is therefore multiple and fractured, a sense of seeing the constituent parts of the spectator's own psyche paraded before her or him'

(Ellis, 1982: 43), ‘narcissism and narcissistic identification both involve fantasies of power, omnipotence and control’ (Neale, 1993: 11). Similarly, through a cinematic apprenticeship, video gamers recognise not only the protagonists on screen, but they also narcissistically identify with them and thereby see and recognise themselves on the screen. And, through the agency inherent to video gaming they are able to not only engage with narcissist fantasies (as does a film viewer) but they are also able to *perform* their fantasised ‘ideal’ masculinities - “phantasies of the ‘more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego’” (Neale, 1993: 12) – ones that, without interaction and control of the screen remain in the ‘autonomous hedonistic imagination’.

Advertisers of Call of Duty Black Ops understand these fantasies of autonomy and power, expressing it through their online advertising strategy ‘There’s a Soldier in All of Us’ (YouTube, 2010 (a)) – illustrated in the two images below.





An advert designed to appeal to, judging by the suits, middle management employees by depicting them free from the emasculating constraints of working life. And to those lower down the workplace hierarchy by offering their middle management ‘oppressors’ as potential victims on the battle field – especially those familiar with the first person shooter genre wherein the action (and the enemies) are seen through the eyes of the protagonist:



(YouTube, 2010(c))

The game thereby offers the opportunity to do what is not only unattainable but also unacceptable, at work, and in everyday life, but something they would ideally like to do - i.e. stand up to their oppressors and be the true all powerful, free, autonomous and hyper-masculine man that is 'in all of us'.

When the medium through which identification with a heroic character occurs is a film there remains a distance between the spectator and the subject/protagonist which is overcome through a suspension of disbelief - although narcissistically identifying with the protagonist, immersed in the action the spectator remains a spectator. Also, when engaging with a film an experienced and knowledgeable viewer will be able to determine early on in the narrative, if not before it starts, the likely outcome of the plot – a consequence of, according to Horkheimer and Adorno (1997), the culture industry's mass production of generic, and ultimately unchallenging, cultural output. Therefore the spectator is expected to, and able to, relax and confidently predict the narrative, providing a sense of calm omnipotence. In a film with a hyper-masculine narrative the spectator will be assured that the protagonist, and therefore their ideal self, might have to experience emasculating episodes, however, without any input from the viewer the narrative will surely reconstruct the character within representations familiar to the viewer, and within the framework of aspirational masculinity. And, furthermore, should the film take an unlikely turn and lead to the death of a protagonist in the film (Lieutenant Colonel Austin Travis in *Executive Decision*, Apollo Creed in *Rocky IV*, Goose in *Top Gun* and Casey in *Scream* serve as examples) the viewer may be disappointed but need not be concerned. The power is not theirs to change the events just to enjoy (or not enjoy) the ride whilst the director of the film is charged with the responsibility of seeing the narrative through to the end.

However, when the medium through which identification with a heroic character happens is a video game - where the power to control events is (partly) theirs not the director's - when a gamer's character (the protagonist in the narrative) dies, or suffers emasculation it is because the gamer lacks the knowledge and skills to perform consequently the gamer suffers temporary emasculation reflected on and through the screen. When the gamer's on screen ideal self dies, as the fantasised ideal ego is killed (or emasculated) on screen, in order to regain their ideal selves, act out their narcissistic fantasies and restore their powerful ideal ego

the gamer must return, and keep returning to the game, in order to direct events towards a satisfactory conclusion. Narcissistic identification, combined with the agency inherent to video games, creates a situation where gamers are 'compelled', a compulsion founded in gamers' interpretation of socialised representations of masculinity not technological determinism, to keep returning to the screen in order to protect their ideal selves. When an onscreen protagonist is emasculated or killed in the game the gamer's ideal self – or perfect ideal ego - is killed or emasculated and, due to socialised hegemonic understandings of masculinity: assertion, aggression and machismo, the gamer must, to protect that ideal ego, return and keep returning (perhaps to the point of obsession or addiction) to the game in order to regain and revitalise their ideal self.

Of course every video game where there is a possibility of death has, built into its mechanics, the chance to 'respawn' (a generic term for the rebirth of a gaming character after death on screen) thereby mitigating some of the risk of careless play or poor play by a noob (someone new to video gaming or a particular game or genre). However these opportunities are taken with a tangible degree of regret and disappointment – gamers who lose a life on screen lose not only the suspension of disbelief as the game is interrupted, but also lose control of their ideal self as their masculinity, on screen and off, is challenged. In the game it is the responsibility of the gamer, not the film director or writer, to see the narrative through to the end; not only to protect the character, but also to protect their own self image and ideal ego. Direct power over the unfolding of events, rather than a calm and somewhat detached omnipotence, adds an extra layer of meaning to the narrative and to the events on the screen with increased significance given to what are essentially blobs of colour being moved around the screen through the interaction and practices of the gamer. The video gamer, unlike the film spectator, has the task of protection and maintenance: protection and maintenance of graphic, social and cultural representations of masculinity, protection and maintenance of the protagonist with whom he is culturally bound to identify with and protection and maintenance of their own suspension of disbelief and on screen representation of ideal self.

Holt and Thompson (2004) argued that prior to breadwinner masculinity becoming the masculine ideal there was, or there was perceived to be, a more satisfying mode of masculinity:

‘... variously termed authentic masculinity by Kimmel, personal freedom by Schouten and Mc Alexander, and rugged individualism by Belk and Costa – that has retained plenty of currency in American culture. As possibilities to achieve breadwinner masculinity at work have shrunk, men have invested more and more of their identity work into consumption, where they have more degrees of freedom to shroud themselves in the symbolic cloaks of autonomy. Men use the plasticity of consumer identity construction to forge atavistic masculine identities based upon an imagined self-reliant, premodern men who lived outside the confines of cities, families, and work bureaucracies’.

(Holt & Thompson, 2004: 426)

Men, confined by social expectations and requirements, indulge in ‘compensatory consumption’ in order to prove their manhood, exemplified through amongst other things, riding a Harley, wild game hunting and auto-racing - compensatory consumption allows men to draw upon the American ideology of heroic masculinity and ‘continually craft themselves as American heroes on a scale that is attainable in everyday life’ (Holt and Thompson, 2004: 426).

Video games also enable gamers to draw upon the American ideology of heroic masculinity, craft themselves as heroes (and anti-heroes) and perform elements of masculinity inculcated from cultural output (but grounded in social reality) – specifically the contents and techniques of film, graphics and texts that depict authentic, rugged individualism. Whilst everyday life provides opportunities for some masculine traits to be expressed, whether that is at school, in the work place, in sports, either as a participant or as an observer, or in relationships, domestic or otherwise, there are clearly some elements of (authentic) socialised masculinity which cannot be expressed – even though they have been invested with a great deal of cultural currency. Through video games certain performances of inculcated, aspirational but not always socially acceptable masculinity are possible that are unavailable in everyday life. ‘Masculine’ video games, with culturally familiar narratives, facilitate more than explicitly engaging with a cinematic protagonist, or the agency of driving, directing and

‘occupying’ an onscreen character. When the video gamer interacts with a game and uses their agency to ‘forge[s] the digital image’ (Walkerdine, 2007) video gamers are experiencing ‘agency and ownership of virtual entities’ (Gregersen & Grodal, 2009: 67) and they are – through the screen - experiencing, owning, forging, driving, directing, occupying and *performing* elements of idealised and authentic socialised masculinities that are aspirational but inaccessible to them in everyday life.

What is particularly significant about video gaming is that by operating in a virtual world gamers can enact performances of authentic masculinity which are not only impossible to achieve in everyday life - even accounting for the possibilities offered by compensatory consumption – but are also unacceptable in everyday life. In the game gamers can enact, not only watch or direct, heroic performances: they can craft themselves as and thereby become men of action, men who go on missions into ‘the unknown’, men who are unencumbered by domestic life: cowboys, soldiers or racing drivers. And equally gamers can craft themselves as, not only watch or direct anti-heroic performances: gangsters, getaway drivers or drug dealers. And once the gamer ‘becomes’ the heroic or anti-heroic figure there are possibilities to perform in ways entirely unacceptable and inaccessible in everyday life. As a criminal in Grand Theft Auto gamers can deliberately commit a crime ‘in front of’ a police car thereby inducing a car chase - unnecessary for progression through the game but great fun for the gamers who taunt and mock those who stand in the way of authentic masculinity – ‘come on you bastards!’ (Phil – research participant: see Chapter 6). And even when the gamer is reflected on screen as a soldier or policeman there is little to stop them (and many have great fun doing so) shooting innocents, running over pedestrians or acting as a bloodthirsty killer when one shot will eliminate the enemy (as we will see James - research participant – doing in Chapter 6.5).

We live in a social world where ideals of aspirational masculinity, grounded in social history and social change, are interpreted and inculcated through media representations, ‘autonomously imagined’, but not allowed expression in everyday life. So understanding how video games facilitate performances of certain forms of masculinity adds to an understanding of their popularity amongst the core male demographic, and why they are so engaging (or even addictive) for lone gamers – and career gamers. Contemporary video

games are engaging on many levels. These include the powerful mechanics of reinforcement, and the familiar narratives and techniques from film, graphic and text. And video games are popular and engaging (even often quoted by gamers, experts, professionals and the media as being addictive) because operating in the virtual world they allow gamers to perform ideal, socialised, imagined and unattainable (authentic) masculinities unencumbered by the emasculating restrictions of contemporary society. Video games help us to understand contemporary masculinity in a highly mediated world - not just as it is depicted on screen, but also how it is performed. A performance of gamers' own ideal masculine selves on the screen, but also, as we will now see in Chapter 6, an embodied performance 'off the screen' characterised by 'extravagant' micro-practises on the controller, forceful vocalisations, often sexually orientated swearing and aggressive and assertive physical movements beyond those necessary for successful advancement through the ludic structure of a game. This embodied performance is reflected on the screen and in Chapter 6 we will see that it is not only crucial for achieving, and maintaining, the suspension of disbelief central to immersion and engagement with the screen but it is also vital for engaging with communities of gamers for those who wish to progress their gaming 'careers'.

Chapter 6: From Agent to Team Mate – Embodiment, Performance and Skill Development ⁴³

Emerging from the work of Husserl (1859-1938) modern phenomenology has reiterated the importance of the body in understanding and experiencing the world. Husserl's transcendent phenomenology encourages 'scientists' investigating elements of a lifeworld to uncover and describe the fundamental characteristics of a phenomenon by bracketing off theirs, and society's, pre-suppositions and existing beliefs about that phenomena in order to arrive at a depiction of its essential elements. In this way a phenomenologist will be able to uncover the structures underlying the phenomenon without influence from socially constructed meaning, and thereby discover the features of a phenomenon and the subjective meaning of it as an embodied experience for the participant under investigation (Collinson, 2009: 281). 'The resulting phenomenological description attempts to explain the basic features of an experience through the use of juxtaposed examples, not an empirical generalization' (Kerry, Armour, 2000, 4). However hermeneutic philosophers, such as Heidegger (1889 – 1976), challenge the 'scientist's' ability to absolutely bracket off pre-suppositions and existing individual and social understandings of phenomena, and encourage an interpretative rather than a descriptive phenomenological approach. Hermeneutic philosophers argue that a phenomenological approach to understanding the social world would best be served by the scientist interpreting the meanings contained in text, actions or representations, rather than 'just' describing them. This interpretive approach was at the heart of Merleau Ponty's phenomenological approach which argued that one's body is the point at which all experience takes place and that we experience the social world corporeally, and through the body we inculcate meaning and develop a subjective understanding of a lifeworld.

Taylor (2006) discussed embodiment in the world of video games and video gaming by examining the ways in which gamers construct avatars that share (or deviate from) their own physical attributes. Walkerdine (2007), Crawford (2012), Mayra (2008) and Dovey &

⁴³ Within this chapter and in Chapters 5 & 7 images are presented in order to depict the lifeworld of video games and video gaming as experienced by the gamer, or the participant researcher. They are included for two reasons: 1) They are included for the non-game game playing sociologist (or other reader) who has no experience of playing video games and therefore they are intended to assist a contextual understanding of the descriptions and analyses presented through text.

2) Throughout this thesis the multisensory nature of video gaming has been emphasised, therefore illustrations have been included in order to add some of the colour and vibrancy of the pursuit to the thesis. The illustrations are non intended as additional data – they are for illustrative purposes only.

Kennedy (2006) have all recognised the importance of the body in fashioning the digital image and therefore its significance for experiencing and understanding the world of video games and video gaming – for the gamer and the researcher. Thornham (2011: 18) documented, in her analysis of social gaming within households, that gaming is a ‘performed, lived and embodied experience...’ wherein gamers ‘... reflect, negotiate and produce gendered power relations, performing in ways that embed gaming technology into the social power dynamics of the household’. This research will support Walkerdine (2007, 21), Crawford (2012), Mayra (2008) and Dovey & Kennedy (2006) affirmations of the centrality of the body in video gaming and corroborate Thornham’s (2011) assertion that video gaming is an embodied, performed and lived experience. It will also contribute to phenomenological analyses of video gaming by exploring embodied performances⁴⁴ of masculinity amongst a community of video gamers. The central argument that will be made here is that an embodied performance of masculinity (verbal and physical) is central to developing and maintaining suspension of disbelief, engagement with and immersion into the ‘masculine’ video games members of this community favour. And, for a lone gamer, that suspension of disbelief, engagement and immersion into video games, and therefore a rewarding gaming experience, is dependent upon developing a skill set that facilitates ‘involuntary’ or ‘*instinctual*’ physical practices and verbal articulations. Furthermore it will be argued that situationally specific embodied performances of masculinity (physical and verbal) are vital for forging and maintaining gaming relationships for those who wish to advance their gaming ‘careers’ by entering the world of social gaming. Skilfully performing the micro-practices on the controller that ‘forge the digital image’ and confidently enacting embodied (physical and linguistic) performances of masculinity facilitate and maintain social integration, and are therefore vital for advancing the ‘career’ of a video gamer.

6.1) Developing a Phenomenological Analysis of Video Games and Video Gaming

This chapter will document the embodied performances of a community of video gamers at play and consider how the body is used to experience, inculcate meaning and develop a subjective understanding of the video game lifeworld. Whilst Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003:

⁴⁴ Inspired by Thornham (2012: 102), whose study of the active gaming body included analyses of moments of game-play, and wrote ‘The extracts quoted below are moments from recordings of game play where the gamer physically and viscerally *acts* or ‘narrates’ in the social setting, either in terms of physical movement or ‘involuntary’ exclamation’ - within this study an embodied performance, presented in two case studies (Chapter 6.2 and 6.3), shall include gesture, physical movements and ‘involuntary’ or ‘*instinctual*’ verbal articulations.

200) argued that ‘games are audienceless’, Crawford and Rutter (2007) recognized four forms of performativity in relation to video games and video gaming – ‘performances to self, performance to others in-game, performance to others present out-of-game, and video game-related performances away from the game’ (Crawford, 2011: 79). This chapter will focus upon performances to self – as seen in the following case studies - and on performances to others in-game – as seen in the embodied performances amongst a community of video gamers in Chapter 6.8 – and contribute to the literature on video game audiences by arguing that once immersed in the game video gamers’ performances become intuitive – but only once an appropriate degree of skill and immersion has been achieved. The community herein is comprised of a group of shop-floor colleagues (four of whom are named – but anonymised - in the case studies that follow: Tom, James, Phil and Dan) who play alone, and play together, sometimes all together and sometimes in small groups, whilst having a drink, socialising and winding down after work. This group of gamers is a male, and masculine, community of gamers with their masculinity determined – as will be exemplified in Chapter 6.8 - by the language the group uses in relation to their shared working life (primarily descriptions of female bosses and colleagues) and their domestic relationships (girlfriends and wives), their embodied practices, including language, which are displayed when playing games, alone and in company, and by the language and practices they use to depict, insult and denigrate their opposition when relaxing together watching football on the television and when competing against each other ‘in the game’.

Access to this group of ‘lads’ was made possible consequent to an interview⁴⁵ with ‘Tom’ – see below. After a brief interview wherein we discussed his gaming practices and preferences I asked Tom if he had any friends who he thought might be prepared to chat to me about the same or similar topics. Instead of this Tom suggested – on the acceptance of his friends – that I join him and his friends during one of their regular gaming sessions. Several days later I was invited by Tom to join this group of lads - initially for one gaming session. However this became a semi-regular event over a period of three months in early 2011. As a non-gamer I was initially concerned that I would find it difficult to engage with the group, however I found that consequent to prior research – particularly interviews with industry professionals which ‘the lads’ were interested in hearing about (and also my

⁴⁵ See introduction

childhood history of gaming through which we could discuss the development of video games over the previous thirty years) integration was a simple process of sharing knowledge and mutual interests in a comfortable and familiar environment for the participants.

To begin my active involvement with the group involved chatting with ‘the lads’ regarding my research and what I hoped to gain from my involvement with the group – i.e. a better understanding and knowledge of the content of the games this particular group of gamers favoured and their gaming practices, such as the amount of time they spent gaming and how it fitted into their family and social lives. Then in order to understand the relationship between the individual and social practices of video gamers and the games they play, and thereby develop an understanding of how meaning is created, understood and disseminated in the video gaming life-world, I observed and analysed the content of the games themselves as they were played whilst simultaneously talking to video gamers in ‘real gaming time’ and also interviewing them away from the game. As I initially thought that the activities and practices involved in video gaming stemmed from what is on the screen, my goal was to collect data concerning the on-screen events and personal accounts of how video gamers create subjective meaning from engagement with them. In this way I hoped that I could discover how, and why, the content of video games encourage the practices necessary for engagement into the video gaming life-world. To this end I spent many hours watching games being played and thereby learning much about the life-world of video gaming and its inhabitants. However, in the process I realised that as well as watching what was going on screen, I also spent a considerable amount of time watching the gamers at play - but not just the process of button pressing I had expected to witness that is universal to all console based video games. I also noticed evidence of embodiment beyond that necessary for successful game play, which amongst other actions which will be detailed later on, included gamers sitting on the edges of their seats and jumping out of their chairs, or tensed up and holding their breath before relaxing back into their chairs before starting all over again.

The embodied practices of these gamers ‘in the game’ playing alone – but under observation - will be presented and evaluated in Chapter 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4. Chapters 6.5 and 6.6 will be a study of the embodied skill, and skill development process necessary to experience the video game lifeworld presented through an auto-phenomenological research process that involved playing, becoming immersed into and enjoying the action games favoured by members of this gaming community (and other male gamers central to this

thesis). Chapter 6.7 will present and analyse significant social displays of masculine embodiment, physical and verbal, amongst this community of gamers during one group gaming session demonstrating how this gaming community integrates and is maintained through equivalent performances of masculinity in and out of the game.

Developing this phenomenological account involved a period of participant observation with the community of gamers before interviewing individual gamers from the group during gaming sessions in order to learn more about the content of the games they favour and develop personal accounts of life in the video game lifeworld. Simultaneously close observations and written recordings were made of these video gamers at play. Particular attention was paid to embodied practices, including the corporeal actions necessary for effective game play - essentially button pressing – but also those physical *and verbal* actions and reactions that are superfluous to the actual process of advancing a character through a video game and its narrative, or successfully driving a car around a race track. Interviews with the gamers focussed on likes, dislikes, motivations for consumption choices and gaming routines – individual and social. And in order to learn more about gaming practices gamers were asked about the instrumental micro-practices necessary to advance through the games they were playing: ‘How do you speed up?’, ‘How did you make that telescopic gun sight? Or ‘What effects does repeatedly pressing that (A) button have on the game?’ for example. They were asked about the rules and techniques they followed in order to progress successfully such as ‘What is the best way of keeping on the track when going around corners?’ or ‘How do you make sure you get close enough to the enemy without drawing enemy fire?’ for example. And, furthermore, the gamers under observation were questioned about the physical, visual and auditory cues in the game and how they impacted on their immersion and involvement in the game: ‘How do you respond when feel the controller vibrating?’, ‘How easy is it to hear/focus upon the auditory clues within a game (e.g. the breathing of an enemy)?’ and ‘How attentive are you to the visual and auditory clues such as others’ movements and sounds?’

Alongside interviews, that accompanied content analysis, non-participant observation allowed the gamers the opportunity to immerse themselves into game play – and allow the researcher the opportunity to observe an immersed gamer and analyse ‘real-time’ gaming,

and gamer action. Through observations of the gaming community playing different games an overall picture of how video gamers embody their ‘craft’ was developed. When immersed into game-play some form of overt, and instrumentally unnecessary, embodied practice – actions beyond the micro-practices on the controller necessary to exert agency over events on the screen- universally became evident. Even playing simple puzzle games, gamers would move to the edge of their seat, grip the controller tight and press buttons with unnecessary aggression - particularly when they made an unforced error, felt as if the game was not responding to their commands or that the game mechanics had made or forced an error. However, as one would expect, the most physically expressive actions were those of gamers playing the more action packed games favoured by male/masculine gamers – first person shooters (FPS) like Call of Duty, driving games like Need for Speed or action adventure games like God of War or Assassins Creed. Some of the most typical and repeated actions were:

- Excessive and aggressive use of the buttons on the controller
- Vocalising movements: jumps = wheeeee!!! Etc
- Leaning from side to side and back and forth in unison with the gamers character
- Leaning forwards
- Changing breathing patterns
- Jumping up off the seat
- Hunching up and crouching down
- Facial expressions of surprise, shock, anger, humour, puzzlement or other emotions
- Crouching or jumping in unison with the character
- Throwing/hitting/shaking the controller
- Pausing the game and pacing the room before returning to it
- Shouting at themselves, their character, other characters, the game mechanics as a whole
- Verbal rebukes and insults directed towards other characters (mostly enemies) in the game such as: ‘you bastard!’, ‘where the fuck did you come from?’, ‘you are going to die!’ or ‘come back here you bastard!’.
- Verbal rebukes towards team mates such as ‘What the fuck are you doing – you’re supposed to be on my side!’

- Verbally expressions directed towards the game and its mechanics such as: ‘what the fuck do I have to do now?’, ‘stupid game!’ ‘Nooooo don’t do that!’

In order to develop a more accurate picture of embodiment, *and its context*, gamers were observed for embodied action and the onscreen context in which it took place and notes were made for future interpretation with the help of the gamer. Extracts from two of these gaming sessions are presented as case studies (Chapter 6.2 & 6.3). On reflection the methodology used in order to capture and understand embodiment in this research project could be greatly enhanced. For the researcher, shifting attention from gamer to screen and back again and simultaneously taking notes meant missing some of the context in which actions took place, therefore making it more difficult to interpret specific actions and events with the gamer. In order to overcome this methodological weakness lessons can be learned from Thornham (2011), and Walkerdine (2006) who set up video cameras in order to record the gaming activities of their research subjects. Cameras could be set up in order to simultaneously (with two video cameras) video, and later review, gamers’ performances and the onscreen action. However, despite the potential for improved methodology this element of the research project contributes towards understanding the embodied and performative elements of video gaming: specifically in terms of the performance of masculinity.

6.2) Case Study 1 – Game: Need for Speed Hot Pursuit

Tom played Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit, a car racing game wherein the gamer can choose from a variety of tracks and cars and whether to play as an illegal road car racer or a policeman charged with stopping the racers. The description below is supported by screen grabs that depict how the gamer (and observer) sees their performance reflected on the screen. They are taken from a YouTube walkthrough (YouTube, 2010(e)) of a race on the same track Tom used for his race - the images are representative of Tom’s game-play they were not captured during these observations.

The analysis of this gaming session commences with a description of Tom setting up and preparing for a gaming session which is presented in a narrative form inspired by Dant's (2005: 108-113) description of the physical and embodied actions undertaken by a technician in the process of undoing the nuts from the from wheel of a car. It continues with an examination of embodiment during one of Tom's races taken during this gaming session which lasted approximately half an hour in total.

'In choosing a tool technicians did not measure the nut to be worked on and rarely looked at the size markings on a socket or spanner. Their embodied knowledge of the task in hand enabled them to choose the appropriate type of socket, extension, lever or power driver and the one they needed usually 'withdrew' from those around it.'

(Dant, 2005: 87)

The controller was 'ready to hand' proximally and 'authentically' - it was identified through 'circumspection' which means 'looking around' and 'looking in to' (Heidegger, 1962: 99). 'Circumspection is a bodily capacity to orient the material form of the body – including its brain – to other material entities that may be partly achieved through a movement of the whole body and even the hands rather than some specific action of the eyes or the organ of sight' (Dant, 2005: 88). Tom reached down to the plug socket next to the chair he was sitting on, removed two batteries from the charger then replaced those in the charger with another set that were lying next to the socket on the floor. He then recovered the wireless controller from the lower shelf of the coffee table in front of him (still without getting out of his chair) and placed the fully charged batteries into the reverse of the controller. When this was done Tom flipped the controller over and pressed (for a second or so) the central X button thereby turning on both the controller and the console.



On the screen there were a series of images depicting the Xbox motif. After a few seconds the screen was filled with an image of various avatars. Tom used the left joystick, flicking it casually with his left thumb, to highlight his own avatar and used the A button (see picture above) to select it, resulting in a screen looking similar to the one below. Tom then used the left joy stick, again with his left thumb, until it highlighted an image of 'Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit' in his game library (see picture below) and, again used the thumb on his right hand to press the A button to select that option.

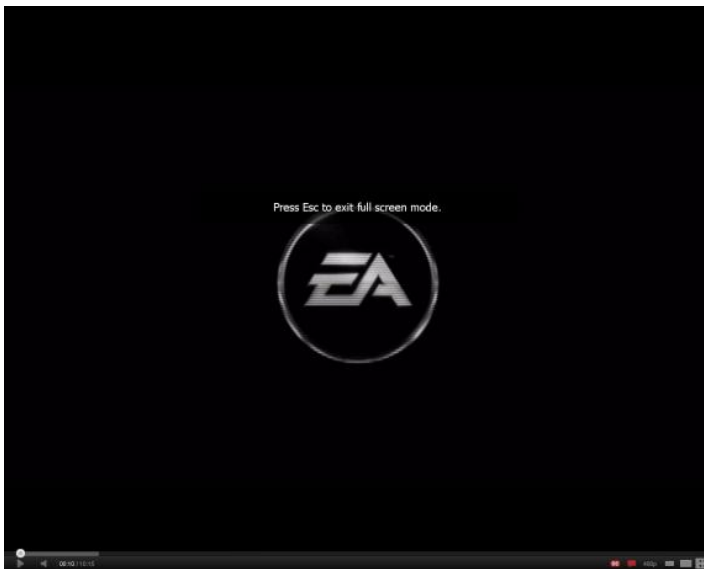


Use left joystick to switch between player, game library, video library and other available options

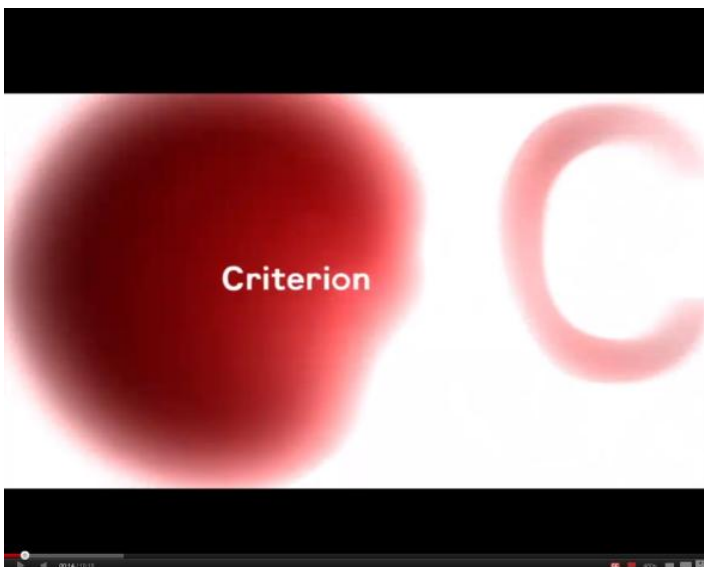
At this point the screen displayed the game's opening sequences



A warning and advisory notice stating that this is just a game and that in ‘real life’ the laws of the road should always be obeyed.



EA Sports: American game developer with overall responsibility for ‘Need for Speed’



Criterion Games:
Division of EA Sports –
developers of ‘Need for
Speed’



Opening screen for 'Need for Speed' depicting the excitement (and gist) of the game, showing a long straight road and lights from a police car in the distance.

Throughout this process, as the screen jumped into life and action packed sounds were emitted from the game Tom remained slumped in his chair casually and repeatedly pressing the A button on the controller (without looking) that he held loosely in his right hand, accustomed to the delay between firing up the console and the game beginning. The process of pressing the A button also had the effect of skipping past:



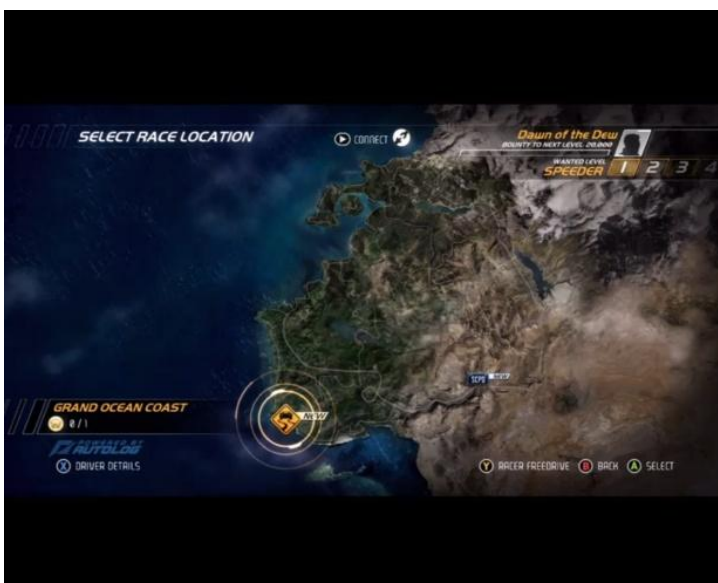
The opportunity to adjust settings

And:



A video introducing the game with background (storyline) information and game-play options

After all the preliminaries the screen was then filled with the image of a map offering a variety of race options:



Tom straightened out his body, leaned towards the screen as he began to take an interest in the game and its options. Tom considered the specific game he wanted to play - and whether he wanted to take on the role of a civilian (illegal) racer or a policeman charged with the task of forcing the racers to stop. The option to be a racer was taken - 'let's try this one'. Next Tom chose a car from the options provided onscreen – **illustrated below**.



6.2.1) The Race

One more casual click of the A button to select the car of choice and the game was ready to begin. The cars lined themselves up on the track with wheels smoking and music blaring:



The race about to begin!

Tom became increasingly animated with determined and assertive bodily movement. He sat up on the edge of his seat, took the controller into two hands, stretched his fingers, positioned the controller and gripped it with determination. His hands, fingers and thumbs moved into position, without looking at where they should go, and a few buttons were pressed, seemingly at random, in order to ensure (by touch alone) that the controller and his hands were positioned for optimum game play.

Like the bodily familiarity in the use of the kettle depicted by Dant (2005: 1) where ‘... the body’s familiarity with the kettle means that the hand is oriented to its handle before it gets close, [and] the hand is open enough to easily move into a grip...’ Tom’s hand and fingers instinctively and intuitively grasped the controller with a ‘material interaction’ that exuded familiarity.

‘Ok now I’ll show you how it’s really done!’ Tom said and stretched his neck and pressed the right trigger button on the controller for acceleration.



Right Trigger (2)
Accelerate

Still perched on the edge of his seat with eyes wide open and a look of intense concentration Tom began to manoeuvre his car through the crowd (of cars) ahead. Tom proceeded to swerve and bump his way through the opposition, shouting ‘get out of the fucking way’, or ‘move you bastard’ or ‘oh fuck off’ to those more (computer controlled) obstinate drivers ahead of him or those that moved into his way impeding his progress. In a matter of just a few seconds the once casual gamer seated on his chair loosely gripping the controller had

become a verbally aggressive video-gamer, captivated by the game, denigrating the opposition with sexualised language, and displaying tension in his hands as he gripped the controller and pressed the accelerator button (2). Strong pressure being applied was evident from Tom's arm movements that involved tensing of muscles and an upward bending of the arms, and through an aggressive and determined facial expression - a process that illustrates immersion and the use of determined/aggressive micro-practices which can not affect the outcome of the game.

Tom moved through the opposition from his starting sixth place into second place muttering and shouting to obstinate drivers – illustrated below.



He edged further towards the edge of his seat, leaning his body and head so his face was closer to the action, continuing to press with unnecessary aggression on the controller whilst moving the controller like a steering wheel and leaning his body to the left and to the right in

tune with the car on the screen and the intentionality of his movements on the controller. When the car in first place came into view, muttering ‘come on come on’ and ‘nearly got you’, Tom went to overtake the second placed car on a corner, and nearly got to his feet – ‘now I’ve got you, you bastard!’

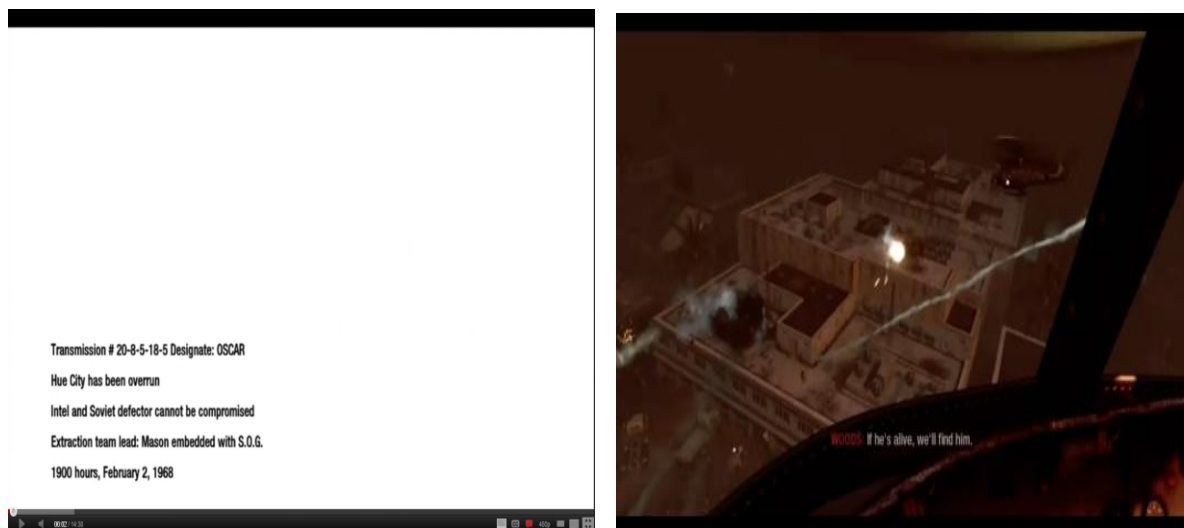


At this point there was a cry of ‘Nooooooooo!’ followed by laughter. Tom had driven into a wall on the corner thereby spoiling any chances of winning the race. The second placed car move into an insurmountable lead and Tom slumped back into his chair with the controller held casually (in two hands) and his body relaxed whilst he completed the race. Even though first place was unachievable there were still some in game financial rewards for completion, incremental to the final position in the race. However achieving them was, for Tom, an instrumental, not immersive practice and one for which the suspension of disbelief was not sought. Consequently Tom’s (macro) embodied masculine performance ended. As the finishing line was crossed, the controller was dropped at his side. Tom slumped back into his chair with an exclamation of ‘fucking stupid game’, a short but heartfelt laugh, and after a brief pause ‘fuck it one more go!’ The controller was retrieved and the process started again with a press of the A button and a return to the options screen.

6.3) Case Study 2 – Game: Call of Duty Black Ops

James played Call of Duty Black Ops. In setting up the console in readiness to play James displayed an equal degree of familiarity, in terms of material interaction, as did Tom (above). This case study, like the previous one, is supported by screen grabs taken from a YouTube walkthrough (YouTube, 2010(c)). As the game is linear, i.e. the gamer necessarily travels a predetermined path, James and the creator of the walkthrough would have faced equivalent enemies and obstacles along the way.

James sat on the edge of his seat as level 6 – The Defector - of Call of Duty Black Ops loaded. After an information screen (part of the game’s narrative) faded away the action sequences began:



When the cut-scenes (cinematic episodes between levels in a video game that place characters in situations, progress the narrative and facilitate a new period of play) came to an end James straightened himself out, took a firm grip of the controller, placed his hands, fingers and thumbs in position ready for action.



During a lengthy gun fight (illustrated above) there were two occasions when James was taken by, and expressed surprise - 'where the fuck did you come from?' and 'Oi fuck off!'

His opponents were 'dispatched' with a display of on-screen violence accompanied by aggressive body movements, facial expressions and verbal articulations.

One opponent too close to shoot was punched to death 'so you want a fight do you...die you bastard'. Then with the enemy lying dead before him James shot him repeatedly machine gun 'ha ha this is fun!'

Whilst the second enemy was shot, with a machine gun, James's hands moved as if he was firing a gun - 'Yeah don't fuck with me bitch!'



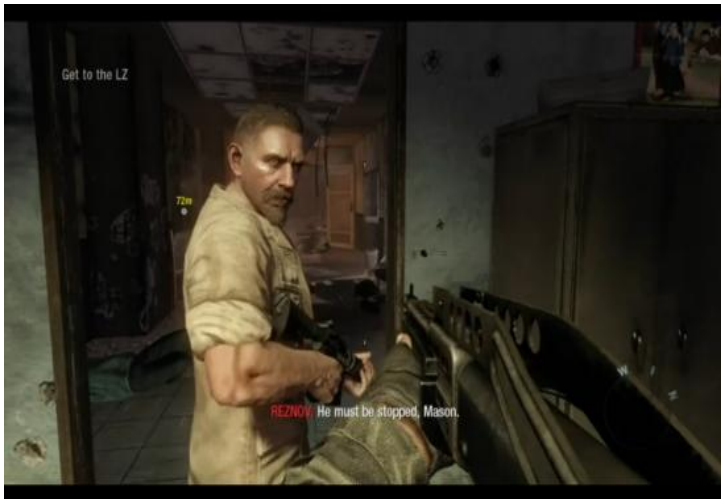
After this on and off screen exertion James found a place to hide and pretended to pant – mocking the extent of his own physical involvement and simulating his on-screen character while he reloaded his weapon (press X) and recovered his health.



After a few minutes of advancing through the game taking tactical positions and eliminating enemies the writing (sub-titles) on screen indicated that an objective had been completed and a cut scene began which, it became apparent from the dialogue between the characters would be a lengthy one. James responded by flopping back into his chair - ‘pew’ - lighting up a cigarette, stretching his fingers holding the controller loosely in one hand and then the other.



When the cut scene ended and the game resumed one character’s rebuke to James’s character ‘What took you so long Mason’ was responded to by James with ‘Oh shut the fuck up!’



Then James responded to an instruction that 'Steiner must be stopped' with 'Well shut the fuck up and get on with it then!' before sitting up straight, taking the controller firmly and focussing once more on the game.



As the next phase of the game began James said 'what the fuck am I supposed to with this' as he looked at the screen with bemusement. James had been given charge of a new weapon (see right hand of the picture).



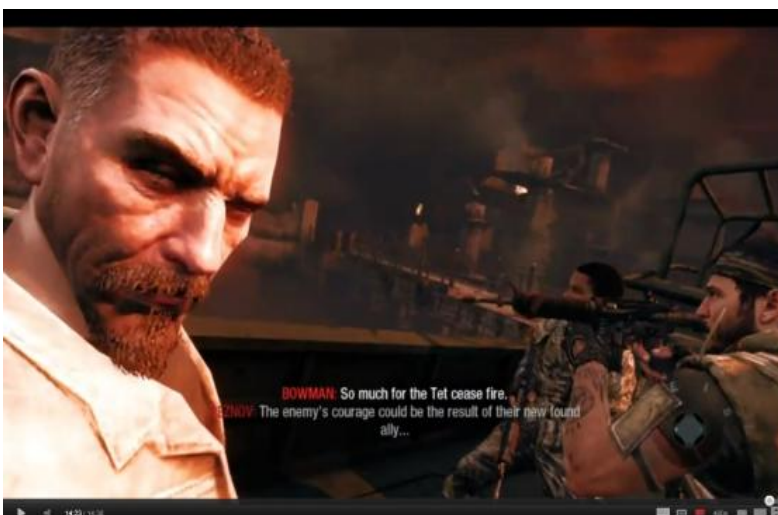
James began to use his new weapon using the controller without the skills, confidence and dexterity I had previously witnessed – uttering 'Oh shit I shouldn't have pressed that' as he looked down at the controller to determine how to proceed. Then as he looked up again he exclaimed 'Nooooo sorry'. I looked at the screen and having little or no control over his new weapon James had killed some of his own (computerised) teammates. After apologising to them James leant back in his chair – he reversed his body as his character hurriedly reversed out of the way of enemy fire and out of range of an enemy grenade – 'Whooooaaahhh.'



A lengthy gun battle, during which James's character died twice was accompanied by aggressive button pressing and hand shaking (simulating machine gun fire) before relaxing as he/his character recovered behind a wall.



The level concluded after a lengthy gun fight that induced more shouting, swearing of a sexually derogatory nature - leaning and peering as had been evident throughout the game. A final 'Yesss' and a small movement of the arms and controller upwards and forwards in unison with the onscreen character's movements were the final actions as the character jumped into a boat and left the scene.



James relaxed back into his chair. The final cut scene had commenced, indicating the end of the level. He casually pressed the necessary buttons to ensure game progress was saved, switched off the controller and console before discarding the controller next to him and relighting his cigarette

6.4) Analysis and Interpretation of Embodiment in the Pursuit of Video Gaming

After observation finished, notes and descriptions of the gamers' actions, practices, movements and language - and the circumstances under which they took place - were reviewed with the research participants.

When talking about embodiment, beyond micro-practices on the controller, during moments of relaxation - either between races, after gunfights or during cut scenes - gamers recognised and clearly remembered the actions they had taken, and were able to interpret their significance in terms of gaming practices. James recognised that he tends to 'take a break' between moments of exertion by flopping back into his chair, stretching his fingers, relaxing his grip on the controller and lighting a cigarette. Tom recognised his impatience with the game mechanics and his habit of unnecessarily tapping the A (action) button in order to skip cut scenes - even when he knows that this has no effect on advancing the game - expressing that when he knows the story he just wants to get on with it. Similarly both participants were aware that when they either crash or die they respond vocally through laughing throwing insults and swearing at the game or their opponent. They each put this down to frustration. For Tom frustration comes from making a 'stupid mistake', or 'being beaten'. For James frustration comes from having 'messed up' - lacking or not using the skills he has developed and knows he has - and having to repeat a level, or part of a level, after having invested a degree of time and effort - especially when playing a game at which he thinks of himself as proficient.

When gamers were asked about their micro-movements, in terms of skilful coordination of controller and on-screen character, and their ability to anticipate and respond to others and the game itself (the development of a 'specific eye' for gaming) in relation to specific episodes of game-play - for example 'on that corner how did you know how, and when, to apply the right amount of brake in order to get around at high speed? Or 'how did you change your steering technique to control the car on the corner when it was in turbo boost from when it was in 'normal' speed? or 'there you coordinated running, changing weapons and loading weapons at the same time - what order do you do things in and how did you learn the best

way to do it? ‘You crashed the boat last time you tried to attack the soldiers on the shore – but the time after that you succeeded, what did you do differently?’ - they knew, and could tell me, how to carry out certain necessary actions (i.e. which button to press to apply the brakes, or to load the gun, steer the boat for example) but whilst in game-play actions were, for these experienced gamers, intuitive - ‘I didn’t really think about it, it’s just a lot of practice I suppose’ (Tom) or ‘I just found myself getting better and now I’ve got the hang of it just kind of happens’ (James). They had achieved an ‘expert’ level of skill (the subject of skill development will be returned to in Chapter 6.5 and 6.6) where the individual, ‘[consequent to a] vast repertoire of situational discriminations... know[s] how to perform the appropriate action without calculating and comparing alternatives... the expert is simply not following any rules!’ (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2005: 787-788).

When questioned about embodiment, including language, within game-play when under observation and during moments of unobserved lone gaming, although actions were retrospectively recognised as movements that they certainly make and had seen in others – especially the leaning movements associated with cornering in racing games and the aggressive language and button pressing in FPS games - unlike Dant’s (2005: 108-113) technician who had time to stop and reflect upon his actions (repetitive actions with a single intentionality where the suspension of disbelief is not a factor) towards an inanimate object, when gamers had been fully immersed in the process of gaming the embodiment that was pointed out to them, in the context it had taken place, was explained as ‘well that just happens when you get into the game’ (Tom). In immersive play these embodied elements of gaming, like the micro-practices on the controller, were intuitive not calculated, a situation that meant gamers were unable to help understand, analyse and interpret their actions. As Grodal (2003) argued, gamers interrupt interpretative strategies and react ‘instinctually’ to the video game. These hidden and intuitive/instinctual elements of video gaming and how to interpret them will be returned to in Chapter 6.5.

Although some elements of embodiment were hidden and intuitive, those that were evident and available for interpretation, from forceful micro-practices to shouting and swearing, to aggressive and assertive body movements comprised a distinctly masculine performance. And this performance was integral to achieving and maintaining the suspension of disbelief necessary for engagement with and immersion into the masculine video games favoured by

these (and other) male gamers. In Chapter 5.6 we saw how audiences, though narcissistic identification see their ideal selves on the screen (Elias, 1982) and act out their narcissistic fantasies therein. Gamers' narcissistic identification with the screen and characters is evidenced by the language they used to describe onscreen events. Gamers do not talk about having to get Captain Mason to act in a particular way, or make the soldier get in safe position, or express regret for smashing *the* car – video gamers refer to onscreen characters in the first person: 'I needed to jump over that barrel', 'I got frustrated, I didn't realise I had to crouch and crawl under that tank', 'I just crashed my car!'. Gamers respond to, and actively facilitate, their narcissistic identification with the onscreen protagonist⁴⁶ with an embodied performance that includes micro-movements on the controller and an embodied performance (physical and verbal). Their embodied masculine performances begin as deliberate and become intuitive - from micro to macro practices - and along with narcissistic identification allow gamers to craft themselves as the masculine protagonist, or the driver, or the soldier and thereby gain and maintain the suspension of disbelief necessary for immersive and engaging game-play. Immersive and engaging game-play that allows gamers to live out the acceptable, and unacceptable, socialised aspirational heroic and anti-heroic masculinities that otherwise – even accounting for the possibilities made available through compensatory consumption - remain in the realm of autonomous imaginative hedonism.

Evidence that embodied micro-practices *and embodied performances* are important for achieving the suspension of disbelief, and thereby immersion in and engagement with video games, was reinforced at the times when gamers did not, and chose not to, exhibit embodiment – beyond the micro-practices necessary on the controller. When gamers were not seeking immersion, or the 'suspension of disbelief' – when they were not identifying with the protagonist just moving him around the screen - and were simply carrying out the instrumental practices required to exert agency over the screen, such as when demonstrating game content or how to advance a character (or car) through a narrative, or when Tom had crashed his car and was instrumentally finishing the race in order to collect in-game rewards, body language was relaxed, gamers held the controller casually without exerting unnecessary pressure and language was calm, quiet and free of expletives⁴⁷. And, furthermore, when gamers lacked the skills to become immersed and thereby achieve the 'suspension of

⁴⁶ In this work the protagonist can be a character, car, footballer or any other item over which the video gamer operates agency.

⁴⁷ In the many YouTube Walkthroughs of video wherein gamers instrumentally demonstrate and describe game content as a teaching tool for others their instrumental language corresponds with non-immersed gamers in this study.

disbelief' such as when James was unable to use the new weapon his language – 'Oh shit I shouldn't have pressed that' - and focus - he looked down to the controller to determine how to proceed - reflected an instrumental, rather than an immersed performance. When gamers wanted to get into the action, and when gamers were in the action their body language initially deliberately, and then intuitively, took on an assertive, even aggressive style: leaning forward towards the screen, muscles tensed, shouting and swearing at teammates and enemies and rarely, if ever, laughing or showing overt signs of enjoyment. At these moments gamers were entranced, fully immersed into the game, and engaged with their lifeworld, having achieved the suspension of disbelief through narcissistic identification, agency, micro-practices and an embodied performance.

The embodied performance of masculinity facilitates immersion, engagement and the suspension of disbelief. Without an embodied performance of masculinity advancing through the games' ludic or reward structure becomes instrumental and ultimately unsatisfying and unrewarding. Gamers put in a masculine performance, deliberately and then intuitively/instinctively, in order to accomplish a satisfying, engaging experience and for that performance to be reflected on the screen – but only when narcissistic identification and the 'suspension of disbelief' is being sought or being maintained. When gamers are not performing, either when immersion is not being attempted during instrumental moments of game-play, if gaming practices cannot be 'instinctual' such as when gamers lack the skills for immersion, or when the mechanics of the game are in charge (during cut-scenes) body language is relaxed, physical actions became instrumental, the protagonists became useless idiots – *a 'they' not an 'I'* - the game becomes a 'fucking stupid thing' and the whole pursuit becomes laughable - the antithesis of the immersed performative gamer.

6.5) Embodiment and Skill Development: Background and Rationale

For this masculine community of gamers video gaming becomes meaningful, immersive and engaging through the body – micro practices on the controller and a physical performance link the gamer to the screen and the lifeworld. Observation and interviews only allow a researcher access to a limited second hand perspective of embodiment, and its significance in the pursuit of video gaming. Gamers are unable to express their motivations

behind intuitive body movements. A great many of the micro-practices that video gamers undertake in order to engage with a game are difficult to determine (because of the small movements and the speed they are enacted) and therefore analyse and interpret through observational research. And, with experienced gamers having developed a ‘haptic’ relationship with the controller – knowing, for example, where the A, B, X or Y button are and being able to find and use them instinctively -many of their micro-practices are intuitive and invisible from observation and analysis. Often in video games clues are given to a gamer physically, for example controllers rumble/vibrate to make the gamer physically aware of dangers. And gamers will respond to cues (visual/physical and auditory) with small indiscernible movements on and off the controller. With so much of the embodied experience of video gaming being instinctive, intuitive and hidden from view it is impossible to achieve a comprehensive understanding of embodiment in the pursuit of video gaming through observation and interview alone.

Schütz’s (2002) phenomenological approach focuses upon collective action. According to Schütz (2002), when carrying out phenomenological research it is the role of the observer to keep step with every stage of the act and identify him/herself as part of a common ‘we’ and thereby gain an understanding of the actor’s mind and what goes on within it in order to develop and understand the intentionality at the heart of bodily movement and consequent to that bodily movement. And, by observing a single action (or series of actions) the observer tries to understand how he/she (the observer) would act and feel for a similar situation (Schütz, 2002: 34). However the interpretation made by the observer, according to Schütz (2002), is not obtained through bracketing off pre-conceptions, as in the work of Heidegger, but is improved with contextual knowledge of the participant and the situation: if an observer can relate to the action and the context of it then they can (theoretically) understand both the practices and the person. In the interpretation of signs the observer will come across two components: the objective meaning of the sign and its subjective meaning as it is contextualised in the mind of the sign user – consequently in order to interpret actions, their meanings and intentionality ‘the interpreter puts himself in the place of the other person and imagines that he himself is selecting and using the signs’ in order to ascertain and understand ‘the because motive’ (Schütz, 2002: 33-35, 38).

Schütz (2002) exemplified his phenomenological approach through an analysis of a woodcutter cutting wood, a simple action into which an imaginative leap by the researcher is eminently possible – even if the researcher has not personally cut wood it is likely that they will have some associated cultural references or experiences of a similar sort of physical activity. Further, the act of cutting wood is easily observable as it does not involve micro-movements and will, in all likelihood, involve a repetitive movement with the same or similar ‘because motive’ every time it is carried out – either by a professional woodcutter, amateur handyman or participant researcher. However this is not the case when observing video gamers. Gamers enact multiple and difficult to observe micro-movements (as depicted above). And even when these movements are repetitive and observable the ‘because motive’ may be different each time. In a game a gamer may press the appropriate button to crouch, shoot or run multiple times. However each time it will be in different circumstances and with a different intentionality: crouching to avoid attack or gain a tactical advantage, shoot to kill or shoot to destroy, run to survive or run to launch an attack for example.

‘As Grupetta ... notes, phenomenology in general has sometimes been criticised because the vast majority of phenomenological researchers do not participate themselves in the process they study, but rely on second hand accounts’ (Allen-Collinson, 2009: 290). Therefore considering the difficulties involved in discerning multiple ‘because motives’, in order to become familiar with embodiment in video gaming and in order to, as recommended by Schütz (2002), gain contextual knowledge of the participant and the situation to achieve inter-subjective understanding - a process carried out in order to ‘fuse author, researcher and researched’ (Allen-Collinson, 2009: 290) - an auto-phenomenological research project was embarked upon. The original intention was to play, and document experiences of playing, Xbox games alone and in the company of members of the gaming community under analysis here (focussing on those games, or those of the same genres, played by research participants). The goals were to take a phenomenological attitude in order to reduce the distance between researcher and researched in order to better interpret embodiment within the lifeworld, as recommended by Allen-Collinson (2009: 287, 289), and to develop and present rich descriptions and analyses of the researcher’s experiences.

The auto-phenomenological research began with a copy of Call of Duty Black Ops, an Xbox 360, Tom for company and an afternoon to play and document. However, from the outset it became apparent that I did not have the essential skills to play the game and was

therefore unable to proceed with my research as anticipated. With little, and very often no control over the protagonist progression through the game was a slow and torturous affair, especially for an increasingly impatient Tom, who after initially laughing at my incompetence then expressed exasperation – ‘what the fuck are you doing!’, ‘go that way you twat’, ‘he’s fucking shooting you move for fucks sake!’. Gamers lacking essential skills for video gaming were discussed in Chapter 3 concerning a cultural history of boys playing video games and learning a particular skill set whereas girls, without that history, often found complex controllers a barrier to entry into the video game lifeworld. It was also central to an interview (below) with the father of a teenage boy whose son was, and remains, an enthusiastic video gamer. Carl (the teenage boy) particularly enjoys first person shooter (FPS) games on the Xbox 360, his recent favourites have been FallOut, Gears of War and (of course) the Call of Duty franchise. He regularly plays video games on his own, but he has a preference for social gaming either with friends in the same physical location, or online with friends and strangers through the Xbox Live facility. Robert, the father, has concerns about the amount of time Carl spends playing video games compounded by fears about video game addiction and the potential for harm caused playing violent video games for extended periods of time. Therefore in order to a) show an interest in his son’s pastimes and to forge a bond with him and b) both casually and effectively supervise Carl’s interests, influences and behaviour, Robert occasionally play FPS games with his son. This is not a particularly enjoyable experience for Robert or Carl, Robert finds the games frustrating because ‘I just can’t compete... I just cannot cope with him; he appears from nowhere and shoots me when I am fumbling about trying to do something else. He makes fun of me because I am just so rubbish’. And Carl finds it frustrating because Robert cannot compete and create a rewarding, challenging gaming experience.

An essential element of playing video games (and, for a researcher, interpreting embodiment) requires more than a cognitive understanding of the games, the rules and the micro-practices necessary for game-play and a willingness to exert agency over the screen and forge the digital image. It requires a skill set that allows the gamer to engage with a video game, but also as we will see in Chapter 6.8 (and Chapter 7) to advance a gaming career into competitive and cooperative social play. Therefore in order to make it possible to interpret embodiment through a contextual experience of participant and situation the auto-phenomenological research project was extended into a documented process of skill

development. The research data is written (Chapter 6.6) in the narrative style of Dant (2000, 2005) and thereby consistent with the case studies above. The data collection methods used, and its presentation, were inspired by Wacquant (2004) whose phenomenological research project, written in the first person, saw him enrol in a boxing gym (The Woodlawn Boys Club). Wacquant kept an ethnographic diary which documented the everyday realities, physical and social, of life at the gym – a process that lasted for three and a half years and which detailed his progress from ‘the perfect novice’ to a respected member of the gym and a competitor in a Golden Gloves boxing tournament (Wacquant, 2004: 3). This ethnographic research process differs from Wacquant’s in several ways and for several reasons. Wacquant presented the everyday realities, physical and social, of life at the gym; this project focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the physical requirements and developments with the social realities limited to game-play advice and instruction from Tom. Wacquant (2004) spent three and a half years compiling his research, during which he spent long hours in residence at the gym aiming for, and achieving, authenticity through total immersion into the lifeworld. This process which was carried out over a four week period aiming for time periods of approximately two hours a day – but dependent upon the free time and goodwill of a member (Tom) of this gaming community - was undertaken in order to ‘reduce the distance’ between researcher and researched in order to better understand, analyse and interpret the video gaming lifeworld. There was no drive, or desire for total authenticity or to ‘go native’. Video games (such as those from the Call of Duty franchise, most other FPS and many adventure games) can be played on varying degrees of difficulty. The requirement was to reach a level of ‘proficiency’⁴⁸ (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2005) on the easiest difficulty levels available (for example ‘recruit’ in Call of Duty Black Ops) allowing for immersion into games, experience of skill development and embodiment and therefore a contextual understanding of participant and situation.

⁴⁸ ‘Proficiency’ for (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005) is when the goals of the sportsman, chess-player, musician, or in this case video gamer, become obvious but achieving them still requires careful consideration. Reaching the level of ‘expertise’ was beyond the requirements of this project but it is one that an ambitious lone or ‘career gamer’ might strive for in order to improve the gaming experience or successfully integrate into a competitive, or cooperative team.

6.6) The Skill Development Process

In the process of developing and documenting the skills necessary for game-play I was accompanied and ‘trained’ (initially) by Tom, a member of the group of colleagues discussed above. It soon became clear that the group’s masculine approach to gaming would become characteristic of the social learning process – ‘training’ did not involve nurturing, it focussed upon depreciating humour, cajoling and ‘encouragement’ through sexualised language of denigration. A research diary of the process documenting the games that were played and the skill development process was kept – this section of the chapter includes a narrative summary of this process highlighting the key events, developments and interpretations made along the way. The report is framed within a phenomenology of skill development in sport presented by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2005).

My first attempt at playing Call of Duty Black Ops was, to use gamers’ slang, an ‘epic fail’. Every skill, including making my character walk in a straight line, or avoid obstacles, was a problem to overcome. Like a sporting ‘novice’ I knew the game features and its requirements out of context, and I knew the rules for determining and directing actions but was unable to marry them to the task at hand (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2005: 782). For example I knew, theoretically, which button I had to press to effect a character’s movement or operation in the game (either learned through prior interviews, Tom’s ‘tutoring’, through the manual or through on-screen instruction) and I knew I had to do it quickly enough to ‘kill or be killed’. But to do it I had to take my eyes off the screen in order to locate the necessary button on the controller - at which time the game progressed ‘without me’ and I either died, became completely disorientated or died soon after. As well as being highly frustrating, I was also aware that the experience was far from enjoyable – actually embarrassing in front of an enthusiastic and skilled gamer who could not contain his laughter and sarcastic comments⁴⁹. My verbal responses to the game were certainly aggressive and of a derogatory sexual nature, however unlike the experienced gamers I had observed they were not directed towards opponents but towards myself (not my character). My lack of skills, in terms of the micro-

⁴⁹ This was an early indication of the need for embodied skills to integrate and protect masculinity within a social gaming environment or to advance a video game career – to be discussed in Chapter 6.8 - and that training into situationally specific performances is a pre-requisite of successful integration into a social gaming community – a subject that will be returned to in Chapter 7.

practices that connect the gamer with the screen and the protagonist prevented me from achieving the ‘suspension of disbelief’ – all actions were instrumental.

Tom recognised that *one* of my problems was a lack of familiarity with the controller and consequently an inability to quickly and effectively find the buttons and joysticks necessary for successful play – although this was focalised as ‘you’re rubbish’ or ‘you haven’t got a clue have you’. Tom did eventually decide to help (as well as mock) and suggested trying ‘a game for noobs – noobs and useless twats’ - Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit instead. This is a less demanding game and one that is forgiving of the inexperienced gamer. Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit was useful for developing skills and a haptic relationship with the controller as it requires coordination of several buttons (image below) which have to be applied within a limited time frame in order to play effectively – i.e. not to crash (too much), to be competitive and become immersed in the game.



Right trigger (2) – accelerate
Left trigger (1) – apply brakes

A – apply nitrous oxide

D pad up (7) – apply turbo boost

Whilst playing Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit improved ‘material interaction’ was evidenced by a better knowledge the controller’s lay out and mastering a degree of control over it, which had a positive influence on success – instrumental success not immersion. Also some ‘contexts’ and ‘maxims’ associated with the sporting status of ‘advanced beginner’ (Dreyfus, Dreyfus, 2005, 783) were becoming familiar, although not yet immediately apparent in real gaming time. For example: when Tom would call out to me ‘You’re barely moving, what the fuck are you scared of – turbo boost UP UP UP’, for example, I knew after a moment’s thought this meant ‘you need to press up on the Dpad (direction pad 7)’ however I was still not able to comply without taking my eyes of the screen, often crashing into the side of the

track due to lack of steering, braking or timing skills when driving at high speed. My skills, although improving, had not reached the level of ‘competence’ or ‘proficiency’ let alone at an intuitive level of ‘expertise’ (Dreyfus, Dreyfus, 2005: 783, 786, 787). On reflection there were times when I became immersed in the game, outwardly manifested - and pointed out to me by Tom – as moving the controller as if it was a real steering wheel (totally unnecessary for the game itself), frequently vocalising my movements with (hushed) ‘come on(s)’ and due to aches in my hand I knew that I had been applying unnecessary excessive pressure to the controller’s right trigger (2) in order to urge my car to go faster than the game mechanics actually allow.

On returning to Call of Duty Black Ops I was hoping to apply the skills developed playing Need for Speed. I began the game from the start again thereby providing an opportunity to reiterate skills and drills and also allow for reflection and documentation of any real or perceived skill development. However my confidence was misplaced. I consistently continued to fail at the simplest of tasks and was incapable of getting successfully involved in the on-screen action. I remained a ‘novice’ (Dreyfus, Dreyfus, 2005: 782) the few skills I had remained applicable only out of context with the game itself. I felt detached from the game and from the gamers I had observed who made the process appear so simple. A degree of learning and information processing was at work - from observation and tutoring I had learned what to do and how (cognitively) to do it – I had to follow the leader of my patrol by following directions on screen whilst killing the enemy and advancing towards the next checkpoint – facilitated by:

- Move character – Use left joystick (5)
- Aim weapon – Use left trigger (1)
- Fire weapon – Use right trigger (2)

See images below: in the top image the command ‘follow’ can be seen in yellow indicating the leader of the patrol and in the lower image ;’checkpoint reached’ can be seen indicating that the game has completed one element of the game and, should they now die, will not have to return to the beginning of the game – only to this point.



however I was incapable of transferring my thoughts into action through the controller and therefore on to the screen. In particular I finding controlling the direction in which my character (I was far from the point of a suspension of disbelief and ‘seeing’ myself in the game) looked and therefore walked, ran, aimed or shot. Despite my lack of ability, because I was playing the game on its easiest level (recruit) the game was very forgiving and I did manage to grind my way - dying many times – through the first two levels of the game. I became aware of the controller vibrating periodically which I assumed meant that danger was near, and I also became aware of options for picking up weapons (Hold Y), reloading guns

(Press B) and running (Manoeuvre whilst pressing down left joystick 5) although effecting these controls still required looking away from the screen and at the controller.

I began to play Call of Duty Black Ops again and found that I was able to do so with considerably less difficulty than before, however I was still clumsy, having considerable difficulty looking in the direction I wished to and unable to smoothly move about the environment. I completed one more level – dying several times on the way - using gung ho tactics, or no tactics at all. On the next level I became extremely frustrated with the game and wanted to give up for the evening. Tom suggested that if I wanted a break and to develop the skills necessary to ‘get into’ Call of Duty Black Ops specifically then I should hone my skills on an easier game to play from the first person shooter (FPS) genre, and recommended a game called Bulletstorm. Bulletstorm has essentially the same controls than Call of Duty Black Ops – however it is far more forgiving as the (computer controlled) enemy is less proficient at finding the gamer’s character giving more time for making decisions and selecting appropriate buttons. Despite this disorientation was still a regular occurrence. Tom kept laughing at me as I attempted to gain control over my character – specifically the direction he looked at – commenting ‘fuck me, you look pissed mate!’ I explained my problems coordinating the character’s sight ‘I know that I just have to move the right joy stick (6) in the right direction but I just can’t get used to it – it feels weird’. He took the controller from me, proved his own skills, and my lack of them, by moving swiftly and competently around the environment killing at will and without apparent effort - ‘there’s fuck all wrong with it, it’s just you’re shit! Anyway I’m off to bed’. Humour had clearly turned to frustration as the pleasures of being a video game audience⁵⁰ clearly necessitate some degree of skill on the part of the gamer.

After our conversation and giving it some thought, the following day Tom recommended that I try enabling the ‘look inversion’ option in Call of Duty so I exited the game I was playing and he directed me through the process – see images below, on the left a screen on which the gamer scrolls down to select options, on the right the gamer selects the appropriate option to change their character’s responses to the control pad.

⁵⁰ For a full discussion of video gamers as audience see Crawford (2012, 32-46)



Having done this there was an immediate improvement. I was able to move, with considered thought and effort, in the direction I wanted to move, see the dangers and rewards I was aiming for, use the other skills I had acquired with more ease and fluidity and generally start to appreciate the game – from mechanics to graphics to game play.

After gaining sufficient skills to advance through the game for my benefit, and for Tom's, I began to play alone. Progress was smoother and I was increasingly more able, and willing, to take note of events, people and instructions going on around me, where my comrades and enemies were, what direction I was supposed to travel, guns lying around on the floor and other game features. I had begun to feel connected to my character on screen. In terms of skill development, now able to carry out the basic tasks of movement, sight and direction (along with other skills) I involved myself more in the on screen action (the gun fights essentially) moving into tactical positions, searching for weapons, selecting specific enemies to attack instead of using gung ho tactics. Certain 'maxims' were becoming apparent and I had the ability to apply them to the game, although also in line with the 'advanced beginner' stage of sporting skill development (Dreyfus & Dreyfus: 2005, 783), I felt detached and analytical – not intuitive. As well as a conscious decision to extend my skills, I was also able to take notice of and react to warnings built into the game mechanics – for example when the controller vibrated/rumbled I would look around for threats and try to respond to them.

I cannot say that I had developed 'the specific eye' for the game and neither was my game playing intuitive – I still regularly needed to take my eyes off the screen to locate the desired buttons for game play - however by this point I was aware that a great deal of the frustration I had

previously felt when playing this game was dissipating and I was able to achieve some enjoyment and immersion. I was ‘getting a feel’ for the game and an insight into the physical skills necessary for immersion, and therefore reducing the gap between myself and my research participants.

Although my game-play was affected by a lack of an intuitive relationship with the controller, I was confidently using my new skills and elevated level of material interaction and swiftly completed two more levels. So I confidently began level 10 ‘Crash Site’. However I was faced with a fresh challenge – directed by onscreen instructions I had to pilot a boat (following the boat ahead) – see image below on the left - using the left joystick whilst also targeting the enemy using the right joystick and firing a machine gun with the right trigger – illustrated in the images below.



After several attempts I managed to work through my frustration and master the skills and coordination necessary to pilot the boat, aim and fire my weapon effectively and then finish level 10. I had pins and needles in my hands and sore thumbs from grasping the controller and operating the joysticks. I had, without realising emulated the aggressive embodiment exhibited by those gamers I had previously observed. My immersion into the game overrode any intentions to stop, analyse and interpret. When I had time to reflect I felt like I had earned the break offered by the cut-scenes and the narrative break at the end of the level. And I realised that I knew where the B, X and Y buttons were without looking at the controller, which I discovered when I needed to crouch down (B), change (Y) and reload (X) my weapon. I had reached a level of 'proficiency' where (for the first time) the goals I needed to achieve were obvious – although the actions necessary to achieve them required a considered decision making process (Dreyfus, 2005: 786). I still needed to take my eyes off the screen momentarily to check and place my fingers on the correct buttons – however in my mind's eye I thought I knew where they were and I was often right. Pleased with this I progressed to the end of the level I was playing, saved the game and quit.

I completed the campaign mode component (offline single player story) of Call of Duty Black Ops. The time it took me to progress through the final levels was considerably less than when I began this process. My immersion in the game was considerably more intense than when I had started. I was becoming so immersed in the game that I was not reflecting upon my practices. When I began my lack of skill made the gaming process a much more instrumental stop start affair which, as well as being frustrating, also gave me the opportunity – like Dant's (2005) reflexive technician - to reflect upon my practices and progress. However at in this point in my development I did not. I did the things I needed to do to progress, and I did them in real time. Although my skill levels were still poor in comparison to my research participants (evidenced by the fact that I was only capable of moderately successful gaming on the easiest level available) I had achieved a familiarity and level of material interaction that reduced the gap between myself and the research participants and allowed me to better analyse observations and observational data.

6.7) Analysis and Interpretation of the Skill Development Process

Skills are not immediately transferable from one game to another i.e. achieving competence in Need for Speed does not immediately lead to competence in Call of Duty. However achieving material familiarity with the controller, through playing games with different requirements, is a crucial part of a skill development process that facilitates engagement with the video game lifeworld. An experienced gamer – one who has played games of different genres – develops a ‘haptic’ relationship with the controller which allows them to pick up and learn, quickly and effectively, the skills necessary for a new game. Switching to a different game requires developing and adapting the skills an experienced gamer already has to a new situation. When the game requires certain actions of the gamer, the use of a particular buttons or joysticks, or if onscreen instructions are to press the A-Button, or hold the Y-Button an experienced gamer ‘instinctively’ knows where to find them on the controller (without looking away from the screen) thereby increasing their chances of success, avoiding frustration and maintaining, or regaining, their suspension of disbelief. The experienced gamer does not start from scratch any more than an experienced footballer learning to cope with changes to regulations - such as the controversial light weight ball used in the South Africa World Cup in 2010. The skills are there, they just have to be developed and redirected. And for an experienced gamer, with a haptic relationship with the controller, this is a far easier process than the task faced by a gamer picking up a controller for the first time.

The essential embodied practices of video gaming, those required to advance through a video game, epitomize the requirements of ‘The Sensuous Sporting Body’ (Allen-Collinson, 2007, 117). Experienced video gamers skilfully coordinate their movements and utilise a particular sense of timing. A specific eye for the game allows experienced gamers to anticipate the movements of their team mates and opponents – which is especially evident in the team sport simulation games such as FIFA 2011 as we will see in Chapter 6.8. Gamers develop a ‘haptic relationship’ with the gaming environment, facilitated through the controller which acts as a conduit between the gamers’ physical and onscreen performance. In the video game lifeworld the gaming body is synonymous with the sporting body that ‘develops not only a cognitive understanding of training and performance but also an embedded corporeal, ‘fleshy’ knowledge and memory, developed, refined and sedimented over time via habitual, everyday training practices’ (Allen-Collinson, 2009: 285).

6.8) Embodied Practices Amongst a Masculine Gaming Community

An analysis of the embodied practices of video gamers reveals how the video gamer engages and experiences the video game lifeworld through the body. Skilful micro-practices on the controller connect individual gamers with the screen and (along with narcissistic identification) gamers use them to craft themselves as the protagonist, experience and develop a subjective understanding of the lifeworld. For the gamer with 'career ambitions' skilful micro-practices are also essential for engagement with, and integration into, gaming communities. Whether these are online communities of video gamers playing Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) - such as those to be examined in Chapter 7, or whether it is a community of gamers who play together, cooperatively or competitively, in the same physical location – such as the one under study in this phenomenological analysis.

When playing video games together this community of video gamers favoured sports simulation games - FIFA 2011 and Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 10 were particular favourites. When the group chose to play FIFA 2011 against each other, individually or in teams of two, each gamer exhibited a degree of material interaction, or a 'haptic relationship' with the controller that allowed them to play, and thereby engage effectively with the game, the video game lifeworld, and their gaming community. They each skilfully coordinated their micro-practices in order to time their actions with onscreen events and their in game intentionalities. And each exhibited a 'specific eye' for the game that allowed them to anticipate the movements of their team mates and opponents. Consequently, through their skilful micro-practices they could direct onscreen events, craft themselves as the onscreen protagonist and thereby interact with the screen, their community and meaningfully engage with the video game lifeworld in a social environment. They had, through practice, achieved an level of skill development that allowed them to not only direct events, and gain immersion, as a lone gamer but to also develop their gaming 'careers' and survive as a social gamer.

Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003) argue that games and gaming are never removed from 'ordinary life' and everyday social practices – video gaming impacts upon social lives and

our social lives impact upon our video gaming practices. Analysis of this community of video gamers supports this assertion and builds upon it by emphasising how performances of masculinity from ‘outside the game;’ are brought to and enacted in the game. In the phenomenological analyses of gamers (Chapter 6.2 & 6.3) we saw how significant embodied practices beyond the micro-practices necessary for instrumental game play, characterised by performances of masculinity, are for video gamers engaging with their lifeworld through the screen. And, furthermore, the skill development process (above), directed by Tom, was characterised by an equivalent masculine approach and performance. For this community of gamers a culture and performance of masculinity is a distinctive feature of their video gaming practices. Individually and socially masculinity is at the heart of the video game lifeworld for this community of gamers - evidenced not only by interactions between gamers and the game, but also by interactions between the different members of this community of gamers when they played cooperatively and competitively with and against each other. When playing cooperatively, and competitively amongst themselves interaction and engagement amongst this community was characterised by overt embodied performances of masculinity – the community bonded, and the lifeworld was experienced and made socially engaging and meaningful through the body (physically and verbally).

On one occasion, a Sunday morning following a night shift, as the group gathered to socialise and play, cups of tea were made, beers were opened, vodka and cokes were poured, cigarettes were rolled and smoked and as this was being done the group began to talk – sharing overtly sexualised language and humour. Conversation turned to the recently finished shift at work and particular venom was directed at a female manager who was condemned for expecting an unreasonable amount of work to be done, lacking people skills, lack of sympathy for the workers problems and situations at work and at home, and for her particularly inflexible management style. Ultimately the manager was universally denigrated amongst the group at a ‘(fucking) bitch’. After letting off some steam the room went quiet as the Xbox was ‘fired up’, drinks were drunk and cigarettes were rolled and smoked. After a few seconds one of the group commented – ‘Yeah – I’d still fuck her though!’ This comment received much laughter, some agreements and several signs and noises of disgust.

‘[And yet] the available research evidence *implicitly* reveals that gender and humour are closely related in ways that often transcend class

boundaries. It demonstrates repeatedly that men invest in highly masculine and sexist joking practices whether they work in a factory or office’.

(Collinson, 1992: 104)

It is significant in terms of expression of masculinity that the word ‘fuck’ was used to express fantasised intentions toward this manager. In a group of men ‘I would fuck her’ is, of course, a much more pejorative term than ‘I would like to sleep with her’ or ‘I fancy her’ or any other similar term. To ‘fuck’ in this context implied the power to control (with the male body) a physically weaker but – in the workplace – a superior woman. The conversation proceeded with a discussion about which female colleagues had looked good that night and who the guys would like to ‘fuck’, who they wouldn’t go near and who they would ‘fuck if they had to’ – at no point did any of the group express any intentions or language that indicated deeper feelings towards any of their female colleagues. In just a few minutes the manager and other female colleagues had been either ignored, depicted as loathsome, as sex objects or as both.

‘Whitehead (1976) shows how, in a rural setting the pub is used to reinforce the cult of masculinity: women are used to maintain solidarity and ambivalent rivalry between men: jokes were used to stereotype women as contemptible and as sex objects to be controlled: ... She suggests that these are a normal feature of heterosexual men in groups’

(Brake, 1985: 179)

On this day women were not discussed again until, after insisting on another game – after losing a previous two - one gamer asked another ‘isn’t it time you got home to the missus?’ which received the reply ‘fuck her she can wait!’.

‘Masculinity is important and as such, swearing, sexist talk, a banding together against women, unite the individual into the collectivity of the work group and the company of men. They gloss over the contradictions of male chauvinism, and laugh off the unease that men feel about their need for the love and support of women’.

(Brake, 1985: 180)

Amongst this group of gamers a particular construction of masculinity, as expressed through language that denigrates the other, was not confined to conversations about absent colleagues, wives and girlfriends. The group had a Sunday morning ritual which involved watching the early morning repeat on Match of The Day - a football highlights programme featuring the English premier league – whilst having a drink before a video gaming session. Members of the group had different team affiliations, and as well as expressing their allegiance to one team or another, members of the group also expressed their animosity for rival clubs through sexually orientated swearing and language that expressed a particular construction and performance of masculinity (one that echoed individual gaming performances documented in the case studies above and the ‘training’ process under the tuition of Tom) – a performance of masculinity defined by bourgeois respectability (King, 1997(b)). Rival teams, their players and fans (even those who were part of the gaming group) were frequently denounced as ‘cheating wankers’ and ‘dirty bastards’.

‘According to the bourgeois notion of respectability, the normal was the sexually controlled male who was the master of his passions. On the other hand, the abnormal referred to both those individuals who indulged in licentious sexual practices and to those very practices themselves’

(King, 1997(b): 580)

The same language of denigration that accompanied Match of The Day (above), expressing a particular construction of masculinity was directed towards their ‘in-game’ opposition when this group of gamers played FIFA 2011 together - even though the group were all friends and colleagues voluntarily spending their leisure time together. As is the case amongst football fans (King, 1997(b)), a regular feature of verbal interaction between this group of video gamers was focussed upon accusations of the opponents illegitimacy, and therefore an implication of their mothers’ sexual deviancy, and accusations of the gamers’ own sexual

deviance . On that Sunday morning (above), and on other occasions, calling an opponent “you lucky bastard” was commonplace, as was an accusation of sexual deviancy – ‘you (fucking) wanker’ – especially when an opponent committed a foul or managed a particularly sneaky or skilful move that left ‘the swearer’ looking and feeling foolish, incompetent and performatively emasculated. Equally, when a player committed a foul – according to the game but not according to the gamer – and the opponent’s player fell to the ground the fallen player, and by association the opposing gamer, received accusations of homosexuality or unmanly weakness and sexual deviance - ‘get up you fucking poof!’, ‘come of you big girl!’. Through their sexually orientated derogatory language (focussed upon women and their opponents) during game-play the group as a whole were bonding as a masculine collective through expressing and maintaining their solidarity against women, and small teams of gamers were bonding temporarily, as do football fans, by ‘distinguish[ing] themselves as properly manly from their [sexually] deviant opponents’ (King, 1997(b): 586).

There were many examples, on this day and others, when extravagant verbal and physical embodiment was displayed amongst the group – exemplified during a best of three FIFA contest between two evenly matched teams featuring on one side Tom and James (see case studies below) and on the other side Phil and Dan. In the final game of the contest (which at this point was a 1-1 draw) there were three goals, ending in a 2-1 win for Tom and James. Each goal was celebrated by the goal scorer jumping, from the edge of their chair, out of their chair raising their arms above their heads and cheering ‘get in there!’ (Tom) – ‘fucking come on!’ (Phil) – ‘get fucking in there!’ (James). Fists were pumped. Middle fingers were raised in the faces of opponents. After scoring what was likely to be the winning goal, after shouting ‘get fucking in there!’ James celebrated by simulating a tendency amongst football players to pull their shirts over their heads and run around. When the final whistle was blown James turned to his opponents and chanted ‘You’re shit and you know you are, you’re shit and you know you are.....’

6.9) An Enduring Culture of Masculinity and The Continuing Exclusion of Women From Competitive, Organised Social Play

This chapter has emphasised that a culture of masculinity dominates video gaming practices amongst this particular community of video gamers. The sample used for this particular piece of research was small – the community of gamers was comprised of eight participants. However this chapter and the observations and findings within is one element of a process of participatory fieldwork involving observation and interviews with many male gamers of different ages and from different networks of friends and gaming communities. The validity of the findings herein is affirmed, particularly in terms of gaming choices, embodied practices (physical and verbal), and interaction between gamers by these findings being synonymous with those derived elsewhere. Therefore, although no attempt is being made to generalise the findings herein across all gamers and all gaming communities, masculinity, and the performance of masculinity (physically, linguistically or both) appears to be common to social video gaming practices and social relations amongst the ‘core’ male gaming population⁵¹.

The masculinity that characterises social practices and social relations within this community of gamers (and others in the lifeworld) reflects a culture of masculinity that has historically pervaded the video game lifeworld⁵², and continues to do so from the aggressive micro-processes on the controller through which the video game lifeworld becomes meaningful, to the embodied aspects of individual and social gaming (discussed above), the content of video games discussed in Chapter 5 right through to the political economy that drives the video game industry discussed in Chapter 4. The world of video games and video gaming is, and always has been dominated by men and a culture of masculinity. And video gaming is, and always has been a male dominated, and masculine pursuit. And, furthermore,

⁵¹ Performances of masculinity are situationally specific and therefore may vary across different games and communities. Call of Duty Black Ops Online for example features masculine performances synonymous with the gamers in this study – swearing, aggression and misogyny. Whilst Eve Online – See Chapter 7 – features masculine performances that are more nuanced – the language and performance therein is of a hierarchical military nature. However embodied masculine performances (physical and verbal) - causing the exclusion of women - are characteristic of immersion into social video games and social video gaming communities.

⁵² As depicted in Chapter 4.

the culture of masculinity that dominates the world of video games and video gaming, as expressed through aggressive physical performances and the language of denigration and misogyny that characterises this particular community of video gamers is representative of a culture of masculinity that has historically, and continues to, exclude women from competitive organised social play and contest.

Throughout the history of organised social play and contest, as we have seen in Chapter 3, women have been excluded due to typifications and representations of men as inherently competitive and women as naturally suited to nurturing and cooperation. And despite organised play and contest having evolved and developed into the world of competitive video gaming, like football and many other sports, it is still dominated by that culture of masculinity characterised by historical representations and typifications of men and women. The vast majority of the employees in the video game industry are male and contribute to the exclusion of women from the world of competitive video gaming through the development of output geared towards a masculine audience. Of the fourteen members of the ‘Video Games Committee for the British Academy of Film and Television Arts’ only two are female (2012) – echoing the male dominance of bureaucracies overseeing organized sport. The dominant output of the video game industry is geared towards a male audience - see Chapter 5. Taking console games, more specifically Xbox360 games as an example, in 2012 of the top sixteen best selling games of all time only one ‘Kinect Adventures’ stood apart from the rest (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, Gears of War, Gears of War 2, Halo: Reach, Grand Theft Auto IV, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Fable II, Call of Duty: World at War, Halo 3: ODST, Gears of War 3, Mass Effect 2, Forza Motorsport 3, Halo Wars) as the only non first person shooter or action adventure game. Within all these games gamers are encouraged to engage with hyper-masculine characters and there are expectations and requirements for participation and performance that fall within traditional conceptions of masculinity and that reflect those found in the historical evolution of competitive play: instrumentality, competitiveness and aggression.

Although girls and women are now entering the world of video games and video gaming in great numbers, and being encouraged to do so by the video game industry, their modes of participation are very much in line with the modes of participation of Ancient Greek women in athletics, and British women in organised sport from the late 1800s and early 1900s – as

discussed in Chapter 3. A predominately male work force is knowingly producing action games for boys and men, and nurturing games for girls and women. Thereby encouraging female participation, but, a non-competitive participation focussed upon enacting feminine characteristics such as communication, nurturing and cooperation. And furthermore, like women's increased participation in competitive sport, in many circles the movement of women into competitive video gaming has not been received passively by the male dominated, masculine, world of competitive video gamers – for the same reasons as Whitson (1990: 24-27) theorised regarding resistance to women entering the sporting environment (See Chapter 3) – the erosion of male advantage, the loss of sport as a site of male companionship and protection of a 'safe' masculine environment characterised by, often misogynist, banter that accompanies male bonding. Often within 'masculine gaming', on and offline, the interaction and performance - as we have seen above - reproduces masculine hegemony. There is a locker room mentality in the world of video gaming. Inter-gamer interaction is often an aggressive discourse of insults towards, and belittling of, opponents. Women are often abused using highly sexualised misogynist language, told, and made to feel as if they have no right to be playing the games and to be part of that lifeworld. To the point where many female gamers, if they are not put off by that masculine and misogynist climate, use a male avatar to represent their identity, and choose not to reveal their gender online and where those that do are often subjected to attitudes and abuse that have been determined to be 'sexual abuse' (Fletcher, 2012).

The tone and extent of abuse that female gamers receive is documented on a website - <http://fatuglyorslutty.com> - a place where female gamers share their experiences and reclaim some power back from the abusers by revealing the extent of their extreme interactions, seek support from other gamers and also laugh at misogynist attitudes, actions and opinions. And one female online gamer Jenny Haniver has begun to document her own experiences of misogyny and machismo in the world of video gaming on her personal blog www.notinthekitchenanymore.com. The extract below, taken from <http://fatuglyorslutty.com>, was posted by a female gamer (or a gamer who chooses to use a female avatar) after a male opponent lost to her, and her team, in a multi-player match. Below that is a screen grab taken from www.notinthekitchenanymore.com:

“YOUR GAMERTAG SPEAKS VOLUMES

Posted on April 5, 2011

This winner, *ItS P5YCH0*, didn't feel much like one after losing an *INTENSE* game of *Avatar Paintball*. I received these first five messages after winning a multiplayer match. (Remember to read from the bottom-up in each image!)



(fatuglyorslutt, 2011)



(Haniver, J. (2012))

In conclusion: analysing embodiment within video gaming from micro-processes to skill development to embodied performance is not only a phenomenological field in its own right, it is also crucial for a comprehensive sociological analysis of video gaming. Walkerdine (2006: 520) argued that ‘... many games are the site for the production of contemporary masculinity because they both demand and appear to ensure performances of heroism, killing, winning, competition and action, combined with technological skill and rationality’. Here we have seen that video games are also a site for embodied performances of masculinity; performances that transform an instrumental gaming activity into an immersive, engaging, rewarding and lived experience. And performances that also integrate and maintain video gaming communities. Video gamers engage with their lifeworld through the body. Through the body video gamers carry out the instrumental micro-practices necessary to engage with video games. Through the body video games and the video game lifeworld are experienced and become meaningful. When playing ‘masculine games’ on their own, gamers display embodied performances of masculinity – though physically less pronounced than when in a group – characterised by language, aggressive micro practices on the controller and aggressive and assertive actions. These embodied performances of masculinity are central to achieving and maintaining the suspension of disbelief that allows immersion into video gaming and the video game lifeworld. Gamers are able to use their agency to instrumentally direct events on screen – but achieving immersion and engagement requires an embodied performance, and for that performance to be reflected on the screen. The protagonist, in Call of Duty, the car in Need for Speed or the Assassin in Assassin’s Creed becomes the virtual ‘embodiment’ of an embodied physical performance. Gamers see themselves on the screen (through narcissistic identification) and their skilful and physical performances are reflected in the protagonist as they craft themselves as heroes or anti-heroes and act out those unavailable, and often unacceptable, performances of ‘authentic masculinity’ - discussed in Chapter 5.

Masculine video gaming communities unite through performances of masculinity. Outside of game-play humour, swearing, misogyny and verbalised ownership of respectable masculinity opposing accusations of sexual deviance against opponents connect enduring masculine collectives on the shop floor, in sports teams and amongst sports fans. And, when ‘in the game’ amongst their gaming community gamers enact comparable individual and

social performances of masculinity, though extravagant displays of embodiment characterised by chanting, jeering and mocking their friends which temporarily unite small teams and entire collectives. When playing together as a group gaming communities carry out equivalent masculine performances to those central to masculine communities and to the exclusion of women 'out of the game': aggressive body language and sexual language of denigration directed at the other, full extravagant embodied practices, when they are 'in the game'. Through their performances gamers become immersed in game-play - in a 'sporting' struggle to maintain their 'real' and their 'virtual' masculinities and thereby their position and respect in the community.

So video gaming is an embodied activity. Video gamers engage with their lifeworld through the body. But achieving the embodiment necessary for immersive game-play, or to be in a position where the extravagant embodiment displayed by social gamers can be enacted, requires skills and skill development. A lone gamer wishing to immerse themselves into their pursuit must be able to cope with the physical requirements of the game. Enacting those performances of 'authentic' masculinity only accessible through video games – as discussed in Chapter 5 – requires not only the cultural capital necessary for interpretation of, and immersion into, traditional visual media, adverts, television and films for example, and a willingness to exert the agency necessary to direct a protagonist around a virtual environment - it also requires material interaction, a 'haptic' relationship with the controller and the development of skills. Just as 'the skill of the technicians lies in identifying how to work with the available artefacts...' (Dant, 2005: 109) so the skill of the video gamer relies upon identifying how to work with the available gaming equipment. Walkerdine (2007: 21) asserted that that 'the body forges the digital image through affectively expressed sensation'. If it is to do so then the gamer needs to acquire an appropriate skill set. Grodal (2003) argued that gamers interrupt interpretative strategies and react 'instinctually' to the video game – which they do - however in order to do so a gamer must first acquire a level of skills that allow them to. In order for any cognitive understanding of video gaming to be of any value to the gamer (a non contextual understanding of the tasks required to move a character or car around a virtual environment, or of the game's requirement for the collection of rewards for example), or for the ideologies expressed within video games to be interpreted, transmitted and engaging requires interaction with the medium through physical skills and gaming aptitude. In order to follow a game's narrative a gamer requires the skills to progress from

one cut-scene to the next to find how the story line unfolds. For a gamer to gain in-game achievements, or the satisfaction of completing a game, they must be able to progress from one save-point to the next. And a gamer with ‘career ambitions’ requires an appropriate skill set. A gamer who fails, through incompetence or ineptitude, to be an effective team player will soon feel the verbal wrath of their team mates and face expulsion from the group – a situation that for ambitious career’ gamers will encourage, or compel, prolonged immersion into a game, or games, in order to develop the skills necessary for social play. And, as we will see in Chapter 7, an ambitious gamer who wishes to become immersed in the densest of communities and experience the ecstasy of the crowd, totemic gaming performances and the collective effervescence born of success in a MMORPG must build up the necessary physical skills, and develop the knowledge and language skills necessary for integration and performance as one part of a unified enduring gaming community.

Chapter 7: The Career of an Online Video Gamer: Training, Teamwork, Competitive Play

This chapter will utilise insights and theories from the sociology of organised sport in order to understand how the social practices and performances of lone and social video gamers encourage and develop social cohesion, teamwork, friendships and enduring communities. Cooperative and competitive video gaming communities that its members are keen to be and stay part of, and spend many hours of their leisure time establishing, developing and inhabiting. This will involve investigating the practices central to lone video gaming and social video gaming and examining where, when and how individual video gaming skills and performances are brought into, and made meaningful, in a social, cooperative and competitive team environment. With reference to Wacquant (2003), Chamblis (1989) and King (2011a), studies of boxers, swimmers and cricketers respectively, the ‘career’ of a competitive online video gamer from initial skill development, through the repetition of skills and drills in a non competitive environment, followed by movement into the competitive arena will be illustrated and analysed. It will be shown, referring to training and skill development processes and practices in a number of games, culminating in an analysis of a period of competitive play in the MMORPG *Eve Online* wherein the skills, drills and social practices discussed thereto combine in successful, effective and cohesive competitive team play, that the careers of boxers, swimmers, cricket players and online video gamers involve reiterating individual and then social training drills before, when prepared and ready to do so, taking their skills and pitting them against others in the competitive arena.

Taking the game *Eve Online* as an example, this chapter will also reveal how enduring online gaming teams/corporations bond through developing the capacity for, and subsequently achieving ‘totemic performances’. Data from interviews and questionnaires carried out with experienced long-term players of *EVE Online*, and a period of participant observation in the game as a member of the corporation *Flowing Penguins* will be discussed and analysed. It will be shown that individual skills are not sufficient to create an effective coordinated or cohesive team. Effective teams in massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs) are dependent upon unity and a common purpose. And unity and a common purpose is developed through the reiterated gaming practices of the group, not through emotional connections, friendships or bonding external to the game. Reiterated

social training practices facilitate ‘model’ performances that the team/corporation/guild adopts as a totemic ideal. These totemic performances become established in the collective memory of the team and bond the individuals involved as a social collective. And, furthermore, totemic performances and collective memories facilitate enduring gaming communities by encouraging the team to work together in the pursuit of repeating the gratifying ‘effervescence’ born of unity and synergy which is manifested as successful team play. Through the social practices that train video gamers into the acquisition of individual skills and facilitate organised competitive play video gamers learn much more than ‘just’ how to play better and play together. Video gamers, through reiterated social training practices, develop bodily coordination, synergy and consequently the capacity for, and desire for further group rituals and performances - performances that bond a geographically disparate group of gamers into a cohesive unit and a meaningful and valued social collective. Friendships often precede and inspire video gamers to select a particular game to play, or join a particular team/corporation once a game selection has been made. And, once reiterated social practices have facilitated cohesion ‘in the game’, friendships can and do develop. But friendships are not a necessary precursor of, or integral to, performance or an effective, united, enduring, warm and inviting gaming community.

Access to the Eve Online universe came consequent to a chance conversation. I had been keen throughout my research to access the world of MMORPGs and gain an understanding of the practices to be found therein. However, as a ‘noob’, this was difficult to achieve. Without being part of a guild, team or corporation lone gaming was the only option for entry into these games – a situation which by definition impedes access into, and thereby an understanding of, the social gaming practices central to and integral to MMORPG gaming. And, furthermore, even if gaining access to, and maintaining an association with, an enduring community of MMORPG gamers was possible – some of these teams openly advertise for new recruits – maintaining overt participant observation would have required me to have sufficient skills and experience to ‘keep up’ with them whilst in game in order to experience the lifeworld as they did. My chance encounter with Jusforkix gave me the break I needed. When I told Jusforkix that I was researching video games and video gamers his immediate response was a very enthusiastic ‘research me!’. Consequently I interviewed him over the phone about the game, his gaming practices and those of his corporation ‘Flowing Penguins’. Towards the end of the phone call I asked if Jusforkix would show me around the game if we met up. ‘Better than that’ he replied – and he arranged to send me a link to an extended free

trial offer. I joined the game the next day, carried out some initial skills and drills – outlined below – and once I had developed the necessary skills to survive began a period of participant observation, guided by Jusforkix, which lasted the duration of three free 21 day trials.

For the duration of these three free 21 day trials I participated in the game on a daily basis. I talked to ‘teammates’, accessed the corporations forum and observed activity to determine the times of day when there was most group/team activity – which proved to be after 7pm when the gamers had finished work and returned home. When I logged on I would see who was also online and engage in a conversation with anyone who was willing to do so. Field notes were made during verbal discussions with gamers, for text based conversations the researcher made use of an in-game facility that records and saves all conversations between gamers. The corporation members were aware of my presence in the team and my participant observation was overt, carried out with the consent of the team having been sought and gained by Jusforkix. However, whilst all team members were accepting of my presence in the game, not all were enthusiastic about talking to me. Therefore when there was no one ‘around’ to chat I would (overtly) listen in to their conversations – in-game and out-of-game, and carry out participant observation (as best as my limited skills would allow) in game play taking screen grabs as often as game-play allowed (these original screen grabs are used for illustrative purposes below) for future analysis and description – see below. On the occasions when I would log on to the game and there were no members of the corporation available to chat and there was no game play to participate in I would investigate the game-world alone. As I did so I discovered many opportunities to chat about the game with other gamers – EVE University (see below) offered opportunities for skill development and conversation, Eve blogs and forums allowed me to gain insights into the game, its gamers and their individual and social practices, as a ‘noob’ I also has the opportunity – at all times – to engage in game-related discussions with experienced gamers through the ‘chat box’ facility – a facility that also allowed me to see, and later analyse, conversations between other noobs and experienced gamers. These opportunities, along with three hours worth of interviews⁵³ with a gamer who had spent several years playing Eve Online including setting up and organising (as a Chief Executive Officer), were valuable for data collection and they also gave the opportunity to triangulate the finding from participant observation thereby adding to the validity and generalisability of the findings and analyses found below.

⁵³ This interview also provided valuable data related to the division and specialisation of labour in MMORPGs – see Chapter 3.4

7.1) Lone gaming and Organised Play

Although online social gaming has ‘become a significant cultural phenomenon’ (Crawford, 2011, 3) many gamers with different levels of skill and aptitude, and from different demographics still choose lone gaming as their gaming pursuit of choice. Although the term lone gamer is widely used it is, however, inaccurate as the practices of lone gamers inevitably have meaning in a social context. Lone gaming is, as we have seen, an embodied activity that requires the development of a particular skill set, a ‘haptic’ relationship with a console and controller, familiarity with a physical environment, a virtual environment and an awareness of sensory triggers – visual, audio etc. It is also a socially meaningful practice that connects members of a lifeworld. Lone gaming is significant beyond the moment of game play. As we have seen it facilitates contemporary performance of masculinity. It is also a facilitator of social ties through the presentation and performance of self to a community of gamers - a fact that is true for gamers at all stages of the video gaming ‘career’ and of all different skill levels and levels of commitment to the game and to gaming – from core to casual.

For many gamers lone gaming facilitates escapism from the pressures of professional, personal or family life. Older gamers might game in order to ‘switch off’ after long, and often pressurised, days at work - or perhaps to experience a degree of excitement after a long, and mundane, working day⁵⁴. Young gamers, especially teenagers, are often aware of and feel lacking in power when in the home environment. Younger siblings are unable to choose what to watch on the television or what music to listen to in the family rooms. They are also unable, because of parental rules, to escape to bedrooms to be alone for extended periods of time. Lone gaming practiced in the company of those others is a means of asserting difference and a degree of autonomy – difference and autonomy that is only recognisable and meaningful in a social environment. Online bloggers, such as Marco Dimaano (www.thelonegamer.net), **are** self styled lone gamers. But they openly write about their gaming activities, interests and opinions on the internet. Therefore their lone gaming practices are socially significant for the development of their identity and for contributing to, and participating in, an online lifeworld and community. And, furthermore, when a lone gamer wants advice on what games to buy, or needs help to understand or advance in a game a common practice is to turn to an online community of gamers who post opinions, advice,

⁵⁴ Organised play or contest as ‘Refreshment for the soul’ (Ellias & Dunning, 1986: 72)

tips and walkthroughs on sites such as YouTube and Facebook. As Crawford (2012: 80) points out '... social interactions and performances relating to video gaming do not necessarily have to be face-to-face. Video gamers may exchange tips, gaming solutions or cheats, game add-on or modifications ('mods'), for example via the Internet, which they have produced themselves, all demonstrating (*performing*) their video game playing or programming abilities to others'.

Lone gamers utilise their skill set in order to enact practices through which they develop their social selves and contribute to communities within the video game lifeworld. Seemingly isolated activities are made socially meaningful through the reiterated social practices of the enthusiastic video gamer. However for people who play alone and therefore do not pit their skills against a competitive other, their pursuit is not, in the sporting sense, competitive. But neither are they indulging in 'spontaneous play' (Guttman, 1978: 9). The rules of the game are determined and confined within the parameters set by developers, programmers, publishers and censors amongst others – that create what Huizinga (1950) called play's 'magic circle'. Even in sandbox games - open world games such as EVE Online, World of Warcraft, The Saints Row series, the Grand Theft Auto franchise and many others - where the gamer is allowed and encouraged to 'wander freely' around a virtual environment encountering other gamers and challenges at their own discretion - there are necessarily certain pre-programmed parameters and rules of engagement. Lone gaming is the gaming equivalent of non-competitive sporting practices such as the ones enacted by those members of the boxing gym attended by Wacquant (2003) who limited themselves to fitness training, bag work and sparring and chose not to pit themselves competitively against another boxer in the ring. Or swimmers, who take to the pool to swim, play and practice without wanting to join or compete with the elite and highly competitive swimmers, as observed and studied by Chambliss (1989). There are not any human competitors; just the gamer, their skills, equipment, a game and its rule bound content. They might be determined to improve or progress but what is significant is that they are only interested in challenging the medium and themselves. Advancing through narratives, achieving personal bests, endurance, rewards, achievements and completion are key, not the triumph of winning or the despondency of losing. Winning and losing against the medium is unlike winning and losing in a competitive arena. There is no league/hierarchy/opponent within which you are

necessarily placed, and against whom you will be compared. Lone sports men and women and lone gamers try to do well in the game. But within the realm of 'organised play' there are no social repercussions from defeat or failure - unlike the athlete, or social gamer, who risks damage to their private and public sense of self, or position in their community and gaming hierarchy should they try and fail in the competitive environment.

In recent years, especially since the emergence of the Xbox 360 (first released in 2005) and the PlayStation 3 (first released in 2006), video game enthusiasts have had the opportunity to pursue a video gaming 'career' beyond the restrictions of lone gaming, and limited social gaming amongst small groups of friends gathered together in the same physical location sharing a console(s) and a screen(s). This is not to say that the realm of 'organised play' is not accessed by, or accessible to, those who play competitively online. Very often keen social/team video gamers, depending on their mood, the availability of opponents or team mates online, or the genre of game they choose to play at a particular time will opt for the lone gaming option. Online gamers are just as likely to indulge in the sort of escapism or individual challenge favoured by many lone gamers. But now anyone who chooses to do so, and of course had access to the necessary equipment and internet capability, can play/game against any number of friends, or strangers, from around the world either competitively, cooperatively or both. For those who do so the skill development process and practices carried out by lone gamers (discussed in Chapter 6) remain part of the gaming ritual, however they are undertaken with a double purpose. The first is to facilitate an enjoyable period of non-competitive 'organised play'. The second is to develop sufficient skills and knowledge in order to pursue a fulfilling and meaningful competitive social gaming experience.

Of the gym members observed by Wacquant (2003) not all progressed their boxing 'careers' into the competitive arena – they varied in their degree of commitment to and immersion into the lifeworld. Some stuck to floor work and bag work. Others performed these activities and then progressed into sparring. Some did floor work, bag work, sparring and also full contact competitive boxing - Wacquant himself progressed from floor work to bag work to sparring before taking those skills into the competitive boxing ring (an established 'Golden Gloves' tournament). Of the swimmers observed by Chambliss (1989: 6) 'Some want gold medals, some want to make the Team, some want to exercise, or have fun with friends....' and those who wanted medals, or to be part of the team, had to transfer reiterated practice sessions to the competitive/sporting arena. Modern day cricketers practice

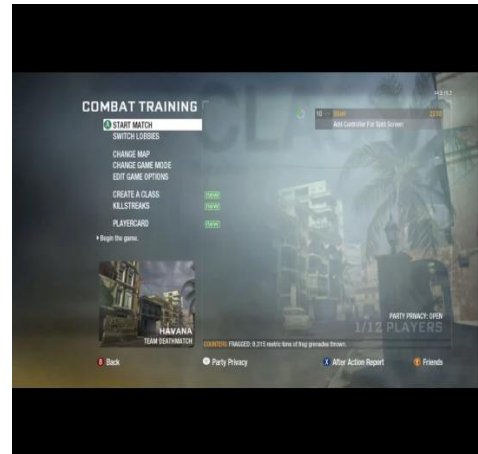
in the nets for many hours reiterating their drills in order to develop the skills necessary to perform, and hopefully excel, in the competitive environment (King, 2011(a)). Some video gamers choose to remain lone gamers, others want to compete in tournaments and matches with small groups of friends and peers, some want to become immersed in online competitive/cooperative games and gaming environments whilst others want to become professional and win or compete in global championships. Video gamers, boxers, swimmers and cricketers spend many hours honing their individual skills through infinite repetition for the purpose of advancing their ‘careers’ and taking their skills into a competitive, or sporting, environment.

7.2) The Training Ground: Call of Duty

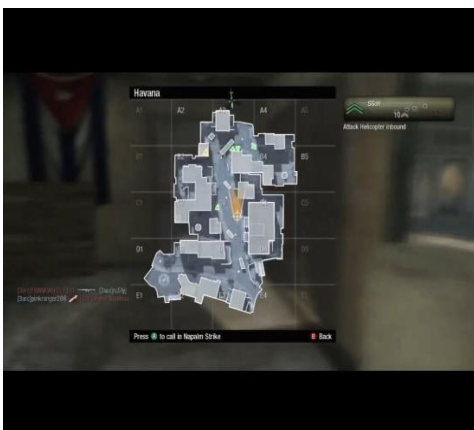
Very often a video game will comprise of single player and online multiplayer gaming content and capabilities. For the lone gamer, as we have seen, play and pleasure are deliberately confined to single player mode (often called campaign mode). However campaign mode is also useful for the gamer with competitive online ambitions – although perhaps not their primary focus. Campaign mode is used as a training tool and a safe environment in which to prepare for competitive play: much like the sparring ring or the nets in boxing and cricket respectively. Campaign mode in, for example, the Call of Duty franchise, allows a gamer the opportunity to practice many of the skills and drills necessary for a successful competitive gaming experience: familiarity with game-play, experience at skills related to movement (walking, running, jumping and crouching for example), key knowledge of the weapons available (how to pick them up, load them, swap them, use them and understand their capabilities). It also allows gamers to work out how to operate items of equipment such as boats, helicopters and motor bikes in a safe environment - a training process covered in detail within Chapter 6. In the Call of Duty franchise as well as having campaign mode as a training tool, the ambitious gamer can also train for competitive social play by using a facility called ‘Combat Training’ which is an offline simulation of online competitive play. It is specifically designed for trying out different maps and terrains, or training in the use of weapons and tactics which will be required for successful and enjoyable competitive play. In Combat Training gamers play with computer generated team mates and against computer generated opponents, it is a training tool for gamers who are keen, but unprepared, for real life opponents and competitive social play – **illustrated in the images below.** .



Combat Training mode is selected and the mission objectives are issued 'ELIMINATE ENEMY PLAYERS 22'



The gamer learns to recognise and work alongside team mates (indicated by green lettering – on the left) and deal with enemy players (indicated by red lettering – on the right)

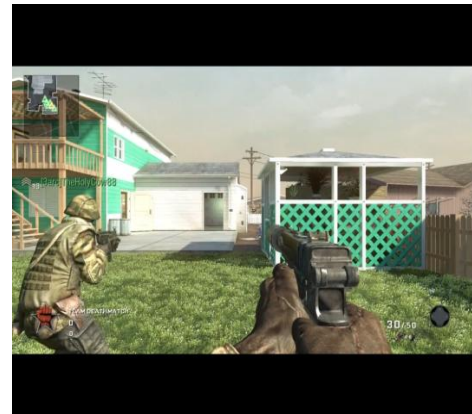


Map reading and weapons training in a safe environment.





Trying out and practicing on different maps and terrains.



And in addition to Campaign Mode, and Combat Training, Call of Duty on the Xbox has a facility called My Theatre which can be used by the ambitious career gamer to upload video clips from their matches and use them to review games, check tactics, eliminate mistakes and perfect, as far as possible through further practice, the skills necessary to enjoy a successful, competitive physical contest – a feature synonymous with the video replays that are used extensively in sports training, such as in cricket (King, 2011a).

7.3) The Training Ground: EVE Online

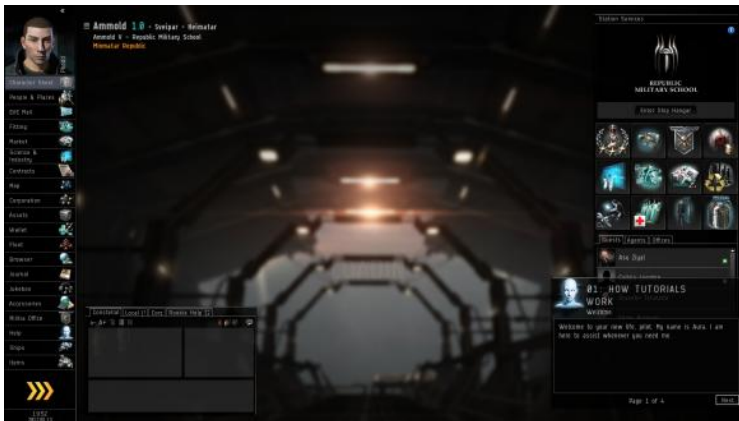
In EVE Online – a Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) - new comers to the game begin by creating a character represented as an avatar



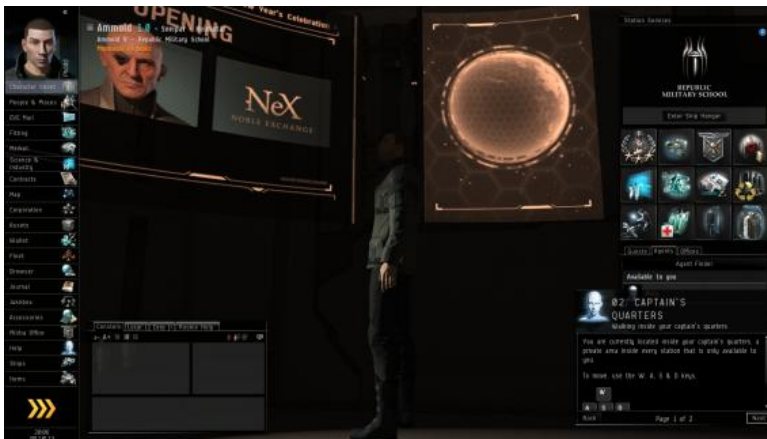
Creating (my) character: Phudd

and then they are provided (by the game) with 5000 ISKs (the ISK is EVE's in game currency called the Interstellar Kredit). Then the noob carries out basic skills training beginning with simply walking around the captain's quarters and then advancing through increasingly complex and profitable tasks as directed by a non-human (computer

programmed) agent – the process basic skills training as seen through the eyes of the gamer is illustrated below.



The nonhuman agent – the onboard computer – introduces itself: ‘Welcome to your new life. My name is Aura. I will always be here’.



A tutorial begins (bottom right corner) directing the character to try walking around the captain's quarters.



The training continues with the first stage of the pilot certificate course



A simple flying exercise and the gamer's first glimpse of 'space'.



The end of the first mission is greeted with congratulations and a financial (ISK) reward.



Training resumes with basic combat skills.



Locking on to the enemy - White Square in the distance.



Combat mission complete – back to dock.



Pilot certificate training continues with more complicated missions involving direct orders, adding bookmarks and learning to seek out arrive and dock at specific destinations.



One final mission before pilot certificate is granted.



Basic training over – now moving on to career specialisation training.

Once this early training has been completed the player can opt to continue their training by accepting further missions off a selection of computer generated agents at their disposal. These they can enjoy whilst also developing more complex skills and earning ISK that can be used to purchase and access skills, ships and equipment. These skills, ships and equipment allow the player to venture further in to ‘space’ in order to carry out more interesting, complex and, profitable – but also potentially more deadly - missions in ‘lowsec’⁵⁵. And, if further training is required, or desired, EVE Online also has a designated training area called ‘EVE University’ where upcoming classes and events are advertised⁵⁶. These events are run by experienced graduates and instructors, and offer career training for noobs in the core elements of the game and a place to practice those skills in a non-competitive environment.

⁵⁵ Low-Sec is low security space where the gamer risks ‘damage’ and ‘death’ as other more experienced gamers may choose to attack them – both for fun and profit.

⁵⁶ ‘The Eve University regularly holds classes for new players, and this week is no exception’ (Eve University, 2012).

Through these opportunities for training the EVE Online enthusiast has the opportunity to indulge in an effervescent regime of re-iterated skills and drills directed towards instilling confidence and thereby achieving immersion and an enjoyable and a rewarding social gaming experience.

So, in Call of Duty and in EVE online, two significantly different games in terms of genre, content, game play and platform, gamers improve their skills with a view to social competitive or cooperative play by trying out movements, skills and terrains with and against computerised operatives in safe but still challenging environments. Skills, movements and techniques are enacted and perfected through reiterated 'solo' practice and play. And in both games there are in game areas (Campaign Mode and Eve University) where intensification in training and skill development is encouraged without the fear of public humiliation. Situations, skills and actions in campaign modes can be tried time and again at a range of difficulties: in Call of Duty Black Ops campaign mode levels start at the easiest level 'recruit' and intensify as the gamer progresses through 'regular', 'hardened' and 'veteran'. In EVE Online computer generated training missions become increasingly difficult – initial training runs from level 1 to level 5 then further missions become considerably more complex thereafter. Once these training regimes have been carried out then the ambitious gamer can take their skills into the social gaming arena.

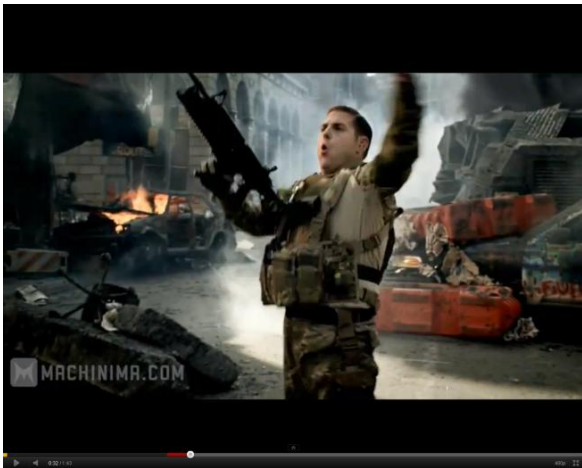
7.4) Online Training Guides for Team and Competitive Play

Many gamers are introduced to the value of team work, team bonding and social cohesion for enjoyable and successful competitive team play/contest through watching official and unofficial videos of collaborative or competitive play. In this process YouTube clips are of primary importance. The screen grabs below are taken from a YouTube video (2011(b)), which is an official trailer/advert for the video game Call of Duty Modern Warfare 3. The advert illustrates the graphic content of the game and alludes to the fun and excitement that can be derived from it. It also shows the viewer/potential consumer how to get the most out of the game by emphasising the importance of listening to, and emulating, peers and more experienced gamers - and passing on their new found knowledge - in order to participate in

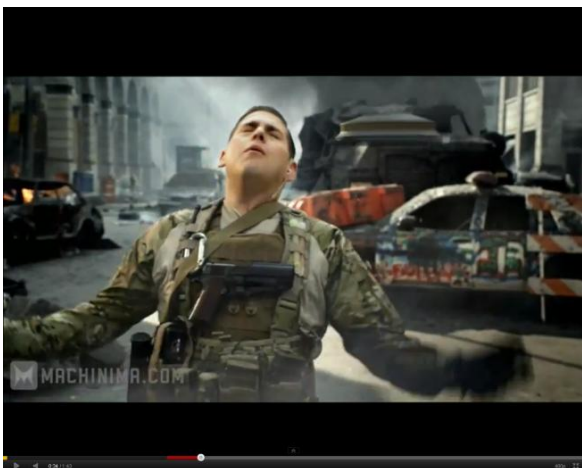
and develop effective teamwork and a rewarding social gaming experience – the advert is illustrated below in the style of a story board.



Despite being told by the veteran soldier to watch and learn the noob decides to go off fighting with all guns blazing.



For a while the noob experiences the joy of unrestrained game play



The ecstasy does not last for long as the noob's vulnerability in attack leads to an early death



The noob eventually learns from his 'teacher' the benefits of tactical, controlled and cooperative play and becomes a recognised soldier.



Soon after, another noob joins the game. This time the 'new soldier' takes responsibility for their training.

Other videos relating to the Call of Duty franchise, YouTube (2011(c)) for example, focus on giving tips to noobs, but also those more experienced in the online multiplayer element of games. These videos feature a pre-recorded segment of game-play posted by an experienced gamer, in which the gamer in charge demonstrates their own skills while viewers are encouraged to listen to the accompanying dialogue in order to improve their own game play. YouTube (2011(c)) offers advice such as focus on team work, learn the maps (arenas within a game) before you and your team face battle with other teams online, develop a team strategy and communicate it between yourselves to improve your chances of success. YouTube, (2010(d)) recommends that inexperienced gamers get to know the maps and terrain to be found in competitive/combatative gaming by visiting the locations alone. The gamers who post these videos are experienced gamers emphasising the value of practice, repetition, research and communication to achieve the cohesion essential for accomplishing successful competitive team play.

Some online videos are not developed specifically for training purposes, but can serve the same purpose. YouTube (2006) features a segment of play from the extraordinarily popular MMORPG World of Warcraft (WoW). The clip begins with the characters from a World of Warcraft guild (team) standing in a circle. The individual gamers have all chosen to move their characters into a circle reminiscent of the huddles seen amongst sports teams discussing tactics, although this is entirely unnecessary for WoW as conversations are facilitated through headsets not physical proximity. Tactics are discussed, the mission is planned but the mission is a failure as one of the participants ignores the team's request for, and the game's requirement for teamwork. This Youtube (2006) video has been viewed (in April 2012) more than twenty eight million times. Of course many people (including myself) have watched it numerous times. It is entertaining for many reasons, not least (from an outsider's perspective) because you get to see people who are taking a fantasy game incredibly seriously with the use of dubious and pseudo-tactics and pseudo-statistics that point to a remarkable willing suspension of disbelief. But it is commonplace for gamers in a MMORPG to congregate and formulate tactics prior to a mission like this in order to encourage team work and synergy - as we will see when a specific event in EVE Online is examined later in this chapter. Everything going wrong with the mission (see images - presented as a story board - below) consequent to the gung ho actions of one gamer makes this makes it an effective and well used teaching tool for World of Warcraft (and other MMORPGs), one that is recommended viewing for noobs encouraged by experienced gamers. Videos like this one, and the ones above related to the Call of Duty franchise above, emphasise to noobs, and inexperienced gamers, that no amount of individual training and skill development (or gung-ho enthusiasm) will create a successful and rewarding multiplayer experience. They illustrate the need for team work, trust and cohesive play in what are very much team contests/sports.



The scene begins with the team in a circle discussing tactics. The game is being taken very seriously. The head of the guild is even requesting predicted likelihood of survival statistics from a team mate



One team mate 'Leeroy Jenkins' breaks rank and heads into the battle leaving a confused team behind.



The rest of the team follow Leeroy Jenkins into battle with the guild leader urging them to 'stick to the plan'.



The attack ends badly with all members of the team dead. The guild members condemn Leeroy Jenkins for being an idiot.

7.5) Peer Led Training Regimes, Team Play and Social Cohesion

Durkheim (1976) emphasised the importance of coordinated bodily action in the creation of communities and social solidarity.

Individual minds cannot come into contact and communicate with each other except by coming out of themselves; but they cannot do this except by movements. So it is the homogeneity of these movements that gives the group consciousness of itself and consequently makes it exist. When this homogeneity is once established and these movements have once taken a stereotyped form, they serve to symbolize the corresponding representations. But they symbolize them only because they have aided in forming them.

(Durkheim 1976: 230-1)

Durkheim's emphasis on coordinated bodily action in the creation of social solidarity has been reinforced through the work of Collins (2004: 76) who asserted that 'rhythmic synchronization is correlated with solidarity' (Collins 2004: 76). And, in sport, King & de Rond's (2011b: 567) analysis of team work amongst rowers - specifically the 153rd

Cambridge and Oxford Boat Race on 7 April 2007- stressed that success as a team requires cohesion and a sense of togetherness, and the ‘shared rhythm [which] seems to be critical to all joint performances’; a rhythm that is determined by practices central to the activity itself.

Wacquant (2004: 67) recognised that boxers were encouraged to practice and repeat ritualistic practices and patterns of behaviour, floor work, bag work and shadow boxing working on their fitness levels and developing individual skills through ‘infinite repetition’. He identified how repetition, an ideal to aim for and an overriding ethos bonded the disparate group of gym members. Everyone who entered the gym was expected to strive for the totemic pugilistic ideal and ethos of the trainer Dee Dee. The effects of which were bigger than the individual boxer and his personal ambitions. By training together in the pursuit of an ideal – or by having a totem around which to dance - boxers at Dee Dee’s gym became part of a cohesive and united team with a common goal and unified practices focused on achieving that goal. ‘The individual virtuosity of the boxer at any particular point is a collective product; it is learned through interaction with and instruction by others’ (King & de Rond, 2011b: 579).

Success in EVE Online requires synergy, cohesion and a rhythm; and the quest for the essential coordinated action, or team work, for achieving this begins very early on in the social gaming experience and it is learned through interaction with and instruction by others. We have seen how a lone gamer can train by reiterating generic computer programmed practice regimes. But because EVE Online is usually, although not exclusively, a game in which gamers play as part of an established and enduring corporation⁵⁷, against other similarly established corporations, after a period of generic computerised training instruction is provided by one or more team mates. In this way the noob begins to learn early, but slowly, not only the key skills and rules central to the game, but also the way that that a particular corporation operates, communicates and performs as a unit, in terms of practicalities, such as the equipment they use (often TeamSpeak⁵⁸ or Ventrillo⁵⁹), and how that team arranges gaming sessions, organises and distributes roles, but also in terms of

⁵⁷ In Eve Online teams of gamers are called corporations - by the game and by the gamers.

⁵⁸ TeamSpeak is VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) widely used by gamers on the same team to communicate whilst playing a multiplayer game.

⁵⁹ Ventrillo is VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) widely used by gamers on the same team to communicate whilst playing a multiplayer game.

effective and accepted interactions and gaming practices i.e. when and where there is banter or serious communication and how that is expressed, the terms that specific group uses for various in-game structures and actions, what the team enjoys (and doesn't enjoy), how they respond to a range of situations and thereby the ethos of that particular team - as different teams can and do interpret the game and thereby operate very differently in striving to achieve their particular objectives. Generic training instructs noobs in the basic skills necessary for elementary game-play. When training is coordinated by an experienced team player, the experienced team member also initiates a noob into the specific in-game language of their corporation which is essential for facilitating the homogenous actions (on the keyboard) necessary for those actions to be reflected on the screen as synergised teamwork, coordinated performance and successful team play – and therefore, as Durkheim asserts ‘... the group[‘s] consciousness of itself’(Durkheim 1976: 230-1). As we will see in the upcoming analysis of the Eve Online event (Chapter 7.5) the language corporations use is often game and team-specific, therefore achieving coordinated bodily action, and successful team play, requires socialisation into the specific language and terminology of the team.

Through the peer led training process an experienced gamer begins to trust the noob - initially that they can obey basic instructions orders and that they will therefore be able to coordinate their movements with others when immersed in competitive team play. Simultaneously the new gamer learns to trust themselves - that they can apply their newly acquired skills when required to do so. They learn to trust their teammates' leadership. And they begin to recognise and value the merits of coordinated language and action for enjoyment and success in the game. These are the early stages in the development of team work and social cohesion and participation in these reiterated social practices is essential for lasting inclusion in a corporation. A noob who is unwilling to cooperate in these social training practices will not be trusted or welcome in competitive play – even if they have followed the generic skills training process outlined earlier. Once a team's trust in a noob's ability, and willingness, to coordinate 'bodily' movements has been established then the new gamer will, by invitation, advance through the early career of an Eve Online gamer by taking part in progressively more immersive and complex competitive 'missions' initially with their instructor(s), then with a small fleet and eventually with a larger corporation.



Basic **reiterated** training begins with reiterated practice regimes directed by a team mate:

Orders from team mate:

- 'Fly to Arzad'
- 'Warp to Vard'
- 'Jump in to Vard'
- 'Dock at top station'
- 'Dock at 2nd station'
- 'Pick up cargo'
- 'Buy skill...'
- 'Buy ammo'
- 'Trade with me'
- 'Fit this weapon to your ship'
- 'Remove that booster from your ship'



A noob is then trained (fast tracked), in the some of the complexities of the game and the ethos of their new corporation by running missions with one (or several) team mates.



In the middle of a fire fight. Learning and practicing flying, aiming, shooting and other skills through instruction from a team mate



Running away (instructed to do so by a teammate) and managing to survive. I demonstrate my ability to operate my ship under orders, develop trust in my teammate and instil trust in my instructor.



An invitation to join Flowing Penguins that offered the opportunity for team play - after initial peer led skills.



Getting myself and my ship kitted out with weapons, defensive shields, jets and ammunition, funded Flowing Penguins.

Most starter corporations will fund noobs. 'We want you to be useful - it's an investment!'

But only if you are prepared to join in and cooperate in training rituals and missions.



Once part of a team or corporation the noob then has the opportunity to communicate with other members and become immersed in team play.



New team mates become useful to the team through training exercises and running missions. Bounty from missions is shared with team mates thereby repaying early investment.

EVE Online ‘rewards team work’ (Jusforkix, 2012). To this end most players join a ‘corporation’ in which team-mates work together in order to satisfy a collective ethos and individual ambitions for a rewarding gaming experience. Flowing Penguins is an EVE Online corporation (team) in which the most experienced and competent gamers operate, and alternate, as fleet commanders running missions supported by a squadron under their command. For a sports team to be successful players have to be selected not only for their individual skills but also for their abilities to complement each other, gel together and work as a cohesive team (King & de Rond, 2011b). Of great importance to Flowing Penguins is the idea that everybody helps everybody out when and where necessary. The corporation’s ideal is to see itself as, and operate as, a team of individuals working as one – where the weaknesses and strengths of team mates are balanced out in favour of the team, rather than individual performance and success.

Flowing Penguins operate deep in enemy territory, the ‘deepest of any corporation’ (Jusforkix, 2012). They aim to play tactically and thoughtfully. Their ethos determines that missions should be well organised and with a plan of action pre-determined. Everyone should be aware of, and be striving for, the same goal. Everyone on the team should know their role and be prepared to carry it out – as we will see in the upcoming analysis of the event in Chapter 7.5, roles and tactics are discussed and formulated before competitive episodes take place. Flowing Penguins, and their self proclaimed ‘ethos’, can be compared to Arsenal Football Club who has an ‘ethos’ of playing beautiful football. Like Flowing Penguins, when things are not going well for Arsenal they, as a collective, still strive to fulfil their totemic ‘ethos’. Having an ethos, and a team integrated around it, unites both Arsenal and Flowing Penguins by creating a unified social gaming collective directed towards an achievable ideal

performance. Members of both Arsenal and Flowing Penguins understand and respect their responsibilities to adhere to the unwritten rules of the team and value the benefits, in terms of performance and pleasure, which it will bring.

Skill development and tuition from team mates prepare a gamer for the competitive environment. They instil the requirement for team work, cohesion, trust and synergy for successful competitive play. However multiplayer video gaming is an arena where collective and cohesive performance is essential but remarkably hard to achieve. If it is to be achieved then a mutual focus of attention - a totemic performance for which to strive (King & de Rond, 2011b) - needs to be established. Developing a totemic performance in EVE Online requires training and playing together as a team/association again and again in the perpetual pursuit of fulfilling the team ethos. In EVE online an essential element of the work involved in developing a cohesive performance is, as we have seen, participation in reiterated training regimes. But it is in competitive play, when reiterated training practices facilitate synergy and success that the noob becomes aware of the ability to accomplish, and the importance of achieving, totemic performances. The significance of totemic performances and their role in educating, training, inspiring and uniting a team of gamers is evident in the wealth of videos of game play that Eve Online fans⁶⁰ post to YouTube and circulate amongst teammates⁶¹.

7.6) YouTube Videos: Totemic Performance, Potlatch and Social Cohesion

In Eve Online – an MMORPG in which gamers explore and battle for status, wealth, property and survival in an online science fiction setting - totemic performances wherein the corporation featuring in the video have had a highly successful campaign are regularly posted on YouTube. They are posted by an established team member and then brought to the attention of the corporation by the in game email client or message system. These videos in no overt way try to extol the virtues of the game, improve the game or express the skills, character or individual merits of the video creators. New, or potential, members to a

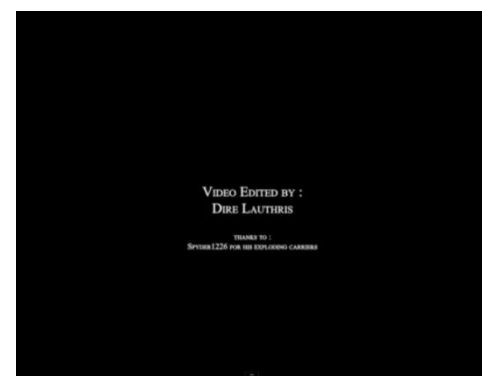
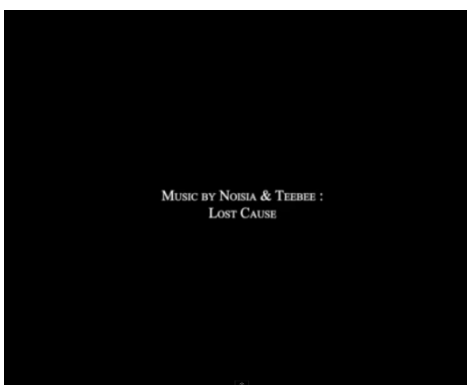
⁶⁰ A consideration of the difference between a video game consumer and a video game fan will be found in the introduction to Chapter 8.

⁶¹ When I was being introduced to Eve Online, with a view to joining a particular corporation, I was immediately, and this is common practice amongst this and other corporations, sent links, via email, to a videos of the corporation's totemic performances – videos of missions characterised by tactics, coordination, synergy and a consequent successful and rewarding competitive performance.

corporation are invited to view those videos in order to give them an idea of what they can expect. And through them the noob learns not only some of the basic elements of game play but, more significantly, which side they are on, who their enemies are and that the team need to work together to effectively fight and destroy the enemy whilst also protecting their team and their teammates. One intrinsic, if implicit, purpose and effect of these videos is team integration. They unite the corporation by inducing collective pride and by emphasising, through exemplification, the level of performance and style of performance members of that corporation should, and need to, aim for in order to not only be successful but to also have an enjoyable team experience involving ecstatic moments of game-play.

Sometimes Eve Online (and other game) videos are posted by a corporation member which feature campaigns, or missions, where their corporation has been unsuccessful although the effect of them, and the intended effect of them, is the same – to unite and bond the community. Showing what can happen when another team (known to be or explicitly depicted to be the enemy) is better organised, better equipped and better synergised than your own has the effect of inspiring the losing corporation to ‘do better’ which in effect means training harder and working better as a team in order to achieve collective objectives through the synergy and cohesion necessary for totemic performances. As well as the ability for an Eve Online player to view and unite around videos posted by members of their own corporation, it is also possible to watch those posted by members of rival corporations. Whilst these videos unite the opposing corporation through a demonstration of effective totemic performances they also unite the corporation the viewer is a member of against a common enemy.

The exchange of these videos is not within the capitalist paradigm - ‘... what they exchange is not exclusively goods and wealth, real and personal property, and things of economic value’ (Mauss, 1950: 3). The videos are gifts, willingly constructed, freely given and exchanged amongst the Eve Online lifeworld. Some of these ‘gifts’ have developed beyond recordings of ‘totemic performances’ into science fiction mini-films with introductions, rolling credits, sound tracks, voice-overs and story lines ‘... a veritably dazzling spate of ritual and artistic creativity’ (Graeber, 2008: 191). The images below, read from left to right, depict the story ‘The Day of Darkness’ when one corporation was attacked and destroyed by another – the video is non-instrumental in terms of game play, it is a gift freely given to the community.



‘Essentially usurious and extravagant, it is above all a struggle amongst nobles to determine their position to determine their position in a hierarchy to the ultimate benefit, if they are successful, of their own clans. This agonistic type of prestation we propose to call the ‘potlatch’ (Mauss, 1950: 4-5).

These fan videos are a theatrical potlatch wherein a corporation member, through the wilful sacrifice of time, money, skill and effort shows off the merits and wealth of their tribe in an endless contest of usurpation. The gifts to the gaming community are agonistic in that they induce a social bond within their founding corporation, and oblige a reciprocal gift from the 'enemy'.

'Finally, although the prestations and counter prestations take place under a voluntary guise they are in essence strictly obligatory, and their sanction is private or open warfare'.

(Mauss, 1950: 3)

This open warfare is desirable to the Eve Online fan community and culture. The reciprocal videos cannot simply be of equal quality than those they have received. No corporation in Eve Online wants to simply cancel out their 'debt' to the enemy, because 'to bring back an exact equivalent would be to suggest that one no longer wishes to have anything to do with the neighbour' – and cancelling out a debt is a means to end not prolong a relationship (Graeber, 2011: 105). And the agonistic/confrontational relationships between corporations are critical to Eve Online, enjoyment of it, and the communities that are of such significance not only to the game but to the gamers themselves. It is through usurpation/potlatch that the game continues 'in an endless circle of gifts in which no one ever handed over the precise value of the object last received' (Graeber, 2011: 105).

The use of agonistic videos by opposing teams/corporations is perceived by the opposition as showing off or as picking a fight (which they essentially are). But the videos developed and posted on YouTube have an effect greater than that of bonding individual corporations against each other. Through inspiring effective team performances, on all sides in a multi team competitive environment of simulated open warfare, they become a perpetuating factor in the lifeworld as a whole through ongoing expressions of one-upmanship. They also, as a side effect, evangelise about the game with economic benefits for CCP, the game developer and publisher. Anyone with an interest in the game will look on-line in order to assess it, something that is common amongst video game consumers, and if it is something that interests them they will then either buy into the game or, as a test, take advantage of a free

trial⁶². Should they chose to become a ‘noob’ they are likely, having seen the videos, to seek a corporation to join and thereby begin the computer and peer led career training.

7.7) Totemic Performance and Social Cohesion

Experiencing a totemic performance through successfully coordinated ‘bodily’ movement integrates the noob further into the team by establishing them as part of a collective memory.

‘These collective memories become sacred and compelling for the individual because they are intimately associated with the social relations between the individuals in the group’

(King, 2001: 582)

As well as integrating a noob, experiencing a collective totemic performance also refreshes the corporation’s existing collective memories and maintains and strengthens the bonds through which the team endures as a collective. It inspires the team to achieve future performances characterised by coordinated ‘bodily’ movement and the consequent community awareness, ‘collective effervescence’ (Durkheim, 1976) and social cohesion. Compelling collective memories of totemic performances, and associated ‘collective effervescence’, inspire team members to return to the game, and the community, time and time again with the potential for long term immersion into (or perhaps even addiction to) these dense communities and fulfilling social environments. The question of how social collectives are created, constructed and endure is of utmost sociological importance – whether that is in the field military cohesion (King, 2006), sporting achievement (King & de Rond, 2011b) or in the world of online MMORPGs. And, despite massive social change, and modern social collectives operating within virtual environments, we are still indebted to Durkheim’s (1976) recognition of the power of reiterated rituals and bodily coordination for group formation and social cohesion for our understanding of social cohesion in the virtual world – albeit that bodily coordination is visually experienced on the screen as avatars and

⁶² Free monthly trials are common amongst MMORPGs as a way for testing out a new game. Once a trial is over an enthusiastic noob must ‘buy in’ or lose any progress they have made.

space ships, and bodily coordination itself takes the form of synergised skilful manipulation of the keyboard/controller by geographically disparate gamers.

So, when playing EVE Online in a competitive social context, individual practice and reiterated group performances of rituals: operations, language, actions, plans, research and training all combine to facilitate teamwork and the possibility and opportunity for absolute synergy – a rhythm – where the zone is entered and an idealised performance can be obtained. ‘Rhythm may be innate to the individual but it does not, ironically, seem to come naturally to groups; it is a social achievement requiring a shared understanding of what participants are trying to achieve’ (King & de Rond, 2011b). In cooperative and competitive social video gaming for a corporation/team/guild to be successful they must find and achieve a rhythm. They must find that rhythm through coordinated bodily action and practices perfected through reiterated training, and then aim to replicate it every time they are in a competitive event. It may not be possible to achieve every time – indeed like any sport it is highly unlikely - but it is essential to have it as an idealised performance, a totem for which to aim. Veteran team members have experienced this synergy and recognise its significance in a successful gaming experience. They also explicitly and implicitly imbue its importance, and the very real possibility of it becoming a reality, to new comers to their corporation. A shared understanding of what the team is trying to achieve is a focus for the training and competitive practices of the team – a totemic reference point around which the worshippers can dance. When it does it happen it leads to collective effervescence as the idealised coordination, ritualistic movements and social practices are played out in real time, successful and rewarding game-play.

7.8) THE EVENT: An EVE Online Mission - Planning, Preparation, Combat and Teamwork

This event, which concludes with a competitive team experience exemplifies how training and competitive play culminate in a synergised social performance. It also illustrates how a team/corporation prepares for and organises a competitive team gaming experience. It shows how a team, in which roles become specialised and a hierarchy has become established, is willing to give and take orders - even if it means sacrificing themselves - in order to adhere to the team’s ethos and strive for collaborative success. It exemplifies how

reiterated practice is necessary for recognising, understanding and responding to situationally specific language. It shows how collective memories of totemic performances are referred to by team members to motivate and inspire future performances. It illustrates how individual losses are compensated for by the team so that no individual suffers for sacrifices made for the greater good. And it reveals how reiterated social practices create trust and coordination which facilitate enjoyable team gaming experiences, long term success, enduring team spirit and social cohesion.

Each corporation in Eve Online has the opportunity to set up a forum for its exclusive use through which the team as a whole can be managed – information such as this is disseminated amongst the community from those experienced gamers to the noobs – see image below.



Phudd: ‘How do you organise events?’

Eric Deloitte: ‘Through forum posts, the message of the day like at this chat window and by the leaders of the corporations speaking to each other’
(Conversations take place through a text box – visible in the bottom left of the screen)

Flowing Penguins – and other corporations – organise game elements such as logistics, disciplinary issues and missions initially through the forum and then by text chat or live chat through headsets. Flowing Penguins arranged, through EvE forum, to meet at 7pm on ‘TeamSpeak’ and move their ships to a safe location in the Metropolis Region, in which they are based, so that when time came for the event to begin they could disembark from the same, or a neighbouring, space station and begin a coordinated mission. The plan was to seek out an enemy team⁶³ and engage them in PvP (Player versus Player) combat. Whilst waiting for the team to congregate at the allotted time and place several gamers (who have not given

⁶³ Flowing Penguins are from the Minmatar race and engaged in battle with, amongst others, the Amarr.

permission for me to use their names)⁶⁴ arrived early (including the fleet commander) and chatted with one another through 'TeamSpeak'. Conversations were friendly and non-game related, consisting mostly of general chit-chat and banter regarding wives, girlfriends, partners, children and work. The fleet commander announced when the allotted meeting time had arrived and conversation immediately turned to the game and anticipating the evening's events. Through experience, and research in to the other corporation's past activities, Flowing Penguins had determined that enemy targets would be in the Vard region at that time, or soon after. This information was circulated amongst those who were present.

Whilst this was taking place banter between teammates continued, however it became game, not 'real-life', orientated – the team were coordinating themselves, focussing and building up to the game. Organising tactics for the upcoming mission initially took the form of friendly banter. The team recalled successful, and not so successful, missions from their collective memory. Tactical mistakes by individual players and the team as a whole were discussed. Although unsuccessful team play was reviewed with humour, individual mistakes were mentioned and individual players were mocked for them, there was an air of seriousness, anticipation and suspense developing as proposed tactical amendments were assessed and planned for future implementation. The cue for the team to focus entirely on the game was subtle – but evidently familiar to the corporation. The fleet commander lowered his voice and took charge. There was no mistaking the authority the fleet commander had over his team – and no mistaking group recognition of the importance of his subtle change in tone.

The fleet commander outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the team they were about to confront. This included their key players (and therefore who the team should focus their attention on initially), the tactics the enemy had used in the past, the size and strength of the enemy fleet and the ship fittings (guns, ammunition, speed etc) they could expect to face. He then instructed the team on the tactics they would be using. A scout was to advance ahead of the team to confirm or refute their expectations of the enemy and its position. The fleet would focus on performing a unified attack on primary targets first and move onto secondary

⁶⁴ Not every gamer in Flowing Penguins gave me permission to use their names in this study therefore they will be anonymised - as will the names of any 'enemy' players who were not approached for inclusion in this research but appear in this analysis as participators in the event.

and tertiary targets when instructed to do so. Two heavily armed and defended ships (Guardians) were to form the initial offensive, engage the enemy and take early flack. Two swift but heavily armed ships should position themselves tactically in order to pick off and destroy any enemy ships that tried to withdraw from the battle and escape. The fleet commander then asked for confirmation that each player could fulfil the role to which they had been assigned - there was no dissent and no discussion, just one word confirmation.

Once tactics and positions had been arranged and confirmed the team approached their opposition. As they approached the enemy all banter and conversation stopped entirely and the fleet commander – in hushed tones – asked for confirmation that everyone was in position. This received one word confirmation ‘confirmed’, ‘yes’ or ‘here’ off each team member. Mutual trust was evident as details of roles and positions were expected and confirmed – they were not requested or given. The fleet commander instructed the scout to pass on any information regarding the enemy position and structure. At this point only two voices could be heard – the fleet commander and the scout as they relayed information to each other and to the rest of the team.

‘...successful talk has no gaps and no overlaps; no embarrassing pauses between speakers or within utterances, and a minimal amount of struggle over who gets the floor to speak’

(Collins 2004: 68)

Within the following transcript vessel/ship types will be denoted by bold writing whilst character names – anonymised – will be denoted by italics.

On the fleet commanders rallying call ‘**Guardians** in, **Guardians** in’ the team began to perform a unified attack on the enemy. .

Voice of the Fleet Commander:

‘Are they red boxing?’ (Are the enemy engaged?) - Confirmed by unknown team mate.

‘*Atlantis* in the **Tempest** is primary’ – Repeated twice

‘*Atlantis* is down, *Challenger*... is now primary’ – Repeated twice

‘*Endeavour* is secondary’ – Repeated twice

‘*Challenger*.. is down *Endeavour* is now primary’ – Repeated twice

‘*Endeavour* is primary, Secondary is *Discovery* ’ – Repeated twice

‘*Discovery* will be primary shortly’ – Repeated twice

‘*Discovery* is now primary’ – Repeated twice

‘All major threats eliminated – snag what you can find’ – Repeated twice

‘Let’s get out of here – Sorry that you lost a ship out there it was worth a shot’

‘Everyone in, everyone in – spread points – good work!’

In conclusion: a successful team performance in EVE Online (or any other team based video game) requires cooperation and coordination. This is achieved through reiterated training practices and reiterated skills and drills in a competitive environment amongst a team of similarly motivated players. Through reiterated training regimes individuals acquire certain key skills and learn how to coordinate with, and the value of coordinating with, others in the pursuit of an ideal synergised performance. Achieving absolute synergy is difficult to achieve and the process of team bonding and team cohesion, which necessarily precedes the accomplishment of the totemic performance, is a process that requires dedication and

persistence. To begin with team members need to develop the skills that imbue confidence in the gamer and their team that they can cope in the competitive arena. Much of the work necessary for developing these skills is mundane and repetitive; however this is also its strength. Through these training regimes team mates learn to coordinate their bodies, central to establishing awareness of being part of a team or community, they learn about others' skills and capabilities and how to perform in order to gel with the team as a whole. By leading these training rituals experienced team members pass on the practices, methods and ethos that are familiar to the established team and that have been proven successful in the past.

When actions (including language) have been mastered allowing team mates to coordinate themselves the development of a rhythm becomes a real possibility. In EVE Online this rhythm manifests as cohesive combat in the field of play/contest – a cohesion which once recognised as significant by team mates is then nurtured through further ritualistic and reiterated social practices. Training and contest (practices central to the activity itself) facilitate a coordination of movement where EVE Online gamers become attuned to each other and they begin to develop a shared rhythm geared towards achieving a common goal. Everyone in the team comes to understand team objectives and recognises their specific role in achieving it. The resulting cohesion, made possible through coordinated bodily movements, allows a team to achieve, or at least recognise as possible, an optimum performance to which they must aspire – a totemic performance where synergy is experienced, and effervescence is felt, as the team act as one in the pursuit of a universally recognised ideal – one that experience, and training, tells them is possible and is the key to success. A desire to repeat the synergy and experience, as a group, its associated 'collective effervescence' encourages and inspires lasting social cohesion and an enduring gaming community. Members of corporations, or guilds, or teams, on MMORPGs such as Eve Online or World of Warcraft are members of the densest of gaming communities and the desire, obsession – or addiction – that causes them to return, and keep returning to the game is not individual and anti-social. Gamers' motivations to return to the game are consequent to the benefits and outcomes of membership in a networked virtual community. In particular the collective memories, teamwork, synergy, rhythm and contest which, when performed at their optimum produce, or promise, a collective effervescence. A collective effervescence

that lives with gamers after an event has taken place and which inspires a return to the community wherein it took place and which was responsible for bringing it into being.

Chapter 8: Fan communities: Social Cohesion, Consumer Behaviour and Sales

Although video gamers are often cynical about the marketing methods undertaken by video game companies, and disappointed by the lack of originality in their products, sales of games known to be, or anticipated to be, lacking in originality remain high. The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to understanding why amongst educated and experienced consumers sales of 'generic games' remain high and there is still, amongst gamers, a strong desire to experience a new game, even one that is known to be 'just like the rest' on the day of release, and share that experience with other members of the lifeworld. The central argument here is that video gamers are not mystified dupes of advertising by video game companies, and neither do they (always) comply with rational actor theory and act in the manner of logical consumers – considering potential merits of future purchases on the evidence of previous ones, weighing prices with anticipated pleasure and waiting for reviews and feedback from their peers or professionals in magazines and online blogs for example. Sales of generic products remain high because video gamers, consequent to their interactions with networks of video gaming communities, act in a manner akin to a football crowd - they are swept along by the effervescence and ecstasy of the multitude.

Crawford (2012: 102) recognised that '...there is little agreement, even within the fan studies literature, as to what or who constitutes a fan' and reflects upon whether the label fan is fitting for all video gamers. For the purposes of this chapter a distinction between consumers and fans will be drawn from Jenkins (1992) who, in an analysis of 'textual poaching', determined that consumers consume (media) texts whereas fans engage with the texts in an active and creative way. As Burn (2006: 88) asserts 'particularly committed [video game] fans go further, joining online communities of fans, and contributing to message boards, art galleries, writing groups and other forms of expansive embroidery of the game and its components'⁶⁵. So, herein active members of video game forums – moderators

⁶⁵ These particularly committed video game fans discussed by Burn (2006) and Jenkins (1992) are ones who, in the terms of this thesis are 'career' gamers. They are gamers who have become increasingly immersed into, and committed to the video game lifeworld. Whether they are lone, physically social, online gamers or a combination of these they have, as a consequence of their commitment, gained skills, knowledge and experience of video games and video gaming. Consequently they are courted by the video game industry trying to achieve growth through 'reflexive accumulation' (Lash & Urry, 1994)

and regular contributors - will be included within the definition of a video game fan. Belonging to, and contributing to, a forum is not an intrinsic or essential part of being a video game consumer. Active forum members do not simply consume their product, they actively engage with it, socially, beyond the immediate moment of game play. Active video game fandom in the guises of modders, hackers and walkthrough writers has been analysed extensively elsewhere⁶⁶. Modders use their knowledge, skills and experience in order to amend, *and enjoy the process of amending*, generic products in order to transform them, whether for personal, communal or commercial reasons, into games that provide a rewarding and fulfilling experience. It is less clear, however, why fans and consumers without the skills or motivation to transform or modify a generic product into a more favourable one would continue to purchase goods that are known to be, or anticipated to be, 'just like the last one'. Within this chapter it will be argued that social practices amongst members of active fan networks, comprising conference attendees, forum administrators and contributors, bloggers and journalists (professional and amateur), create a 'buzz' around a new product encouraging fans and passive consumers alike to purchase those often generic and unimaginative products. When it comes to consumption choices in the video game lifeworld what is of interest and significance here is not (only) the impact of structures on agency – in this case the impact of advertising and marketing on consumer behaviour – but social relations, social networks and social action.

The first section of this chapter will present a Neo-Marxist perspective on the labour processes that take a video game from an original idea, concept or an existing intellectual property to a product on the shelves of a video game store or to a point of digital download. The work of Hardt and Negri (2000) and Lazzarato (1996) on immaterial labour will be applied to the video game industry to show how immaterial labour processes, that fall under the category 'formal capital accumulation', such as advertising, marketing and organising corporate events are undertaken by professionals within the video game industry in order to favourably influence sales of new and upcoming products. Then the immaterial labour of video game consumers (fan culture) and its influence on the video game market will be considered. This will be achieved by drawing upon Arvidsson (2005) who documented how unpaid immaterial labour carried out by consumers can be an integral element of brand

⁶⁶ For a full discussion see Crawford (2012: 97-119)

development and maintenance, and applying this conceptualisation of 'immaterial labour' to the practices of video game fans.

The second section of this chapter will offer an alternative to the Neo-Marxist perspective by reconceptualising 'immaterial labour' as a collection of voluntary social practices willingly undertaken by members of social networks operating within the video gaming lifeworld. Whilst accepting that the industry does court and make use of the knowledge, experience and opinions of 'career' gamers, or fans, in the pursuit of profit through 'reflexive accumulation' (Lash & Urry, 1994) it will be argued that a Marxist position, that determines capitalism to be a 'total system', fails to recognise the fundamental importance of community both to the video game industry and, most importantly, to members of a myriad of gaming communities. Examining fan practices, particularly but not exclusively, on a UK based video game forum BritXbox (britxbox.co.uk, 2011) will reveal that these practices, which whilst of economic importance to the video game industry, are equally significant in terms of the maintenance of valued video game communities, and their networks of social ties. Therefore, although they are targeted and utilised by the video game industry in the pursuit of profit, neither the fans' nor the industry's actions can be adequately theorised within a Marxist paradigm that condemns all consumers as exploited dupes of the industry, and all the social practices they undertake as necessarily exploited or exploitative.

An analysis of social practices amongst a community of Manchester United Football Club fans (King, 1997) will facilitate a comparable analysis of the social practices of fans on the BritXbox forum. This will reveal how through reiterated social practices video gamers unite and 'gather' around their unifying collective interest - video gaming - and thereby create a 'social euphoria' as they anticipate, and celebrate, the release of a new video game. As the release of a new video game approaches, just as when a new game of football approaches (King, 1997), or when a religious festival is imminent (Durkheim, 1976), anticipation, expectation and rituals celebrating the lifeworld and the community's unifying collective interest elevate video game communities into a 'collective effervescence' which, in the case of video games, produces a frenzy of consumption. Consumption of new video games that are necessary to fully experience socially constructed ecstatic moments of celebratory play, and which serves to maintain the myriad of gaming networks (communities) and the video game industry that produces them.

8.1) Neo-Marxism: Traditional Manufacturing and Development in the Production of Video Games

Video gaming is a 21st century economic and cultural phenomenon. In the UK alone there are over thirty one million active gamers, spending a combined forty three million hours a day playing video games with a total outlay of £3,6000,000,000 on video games alone (Newzoo, 2011). Video gaming is not confined to any particular social class (GMI/Mintel 2010), age or gender (www.theesa.com (1))⁶⁷. From an Neo-Marxist perspective high volume video game sales amongst a diverse demographic are consequent to a range of labour process that include traditional manufacturing and development, overt sales and marketing techniques such as corporate ‘immaterial labour’ and exploitation of the hidden unpaid ‘immaterial labour’ of fans and consumers.

The video game industry is a powerful force in the high-street and in the virtual retail environment. A significant element of the labour process that go into making a successful product to be sold in these locations is the material labour that produces a finished product, whether that is a DVD disk for sale in high street retail outlets or a digital download available from any number of online locations. Commonly the development of a new product begins when an investor – often a publishing house – approaches or is approached by a game development company with a new idea for a game, or with a view to utilising an existing intellectual property. Game development professionals then begin the production process. This can begin with developers and designers thinking about how the mechanics of the game will work, and then apply the look and style of the game to the established mechanics.

‘What I am saying to the guys developing it is: what are the mechanics of the game, how are you explaining the narrative, explaining why he is at one point in the world, and then at another doing different things, what is the failure penalty for the player.’

‘That needs to be nailed down quickly’

(Bryant, 2011)

⁶⁷ A more detailed analysis of sales figures can be found in Chapter 4.2

Or developers can begin with an idea of the look and style of a game already formed – as was the case with *Little Horrors* an interactive browser game - and work out how to apply game mechanics to that idea.

‘Little Horrors is a social game for six to twelve year olds. Its early days in its development (now released). I can’t work out who thought of it originally. It's a combination of Monumental bosses and an Irish artist Fergus who gave it the style. So style came first and now we are trying to latch a design onto the style that matches the bosses idea of keeping it simple and focuses on allowing exploration of the world in a non threatening way.’

(Goodchild, 2011)

Game development can be agile or non-agile. With agile development, core pillars of the game are established such as reward systems and methods of exploration and discovery. Then the main story points are developed for example ‘intuitive spell casting, students fighting Dumbledore, exploring Hogwarts, flying or whatever’ (Bryant, 2011). Non agile development is closely associated with licensed games and franchises where the key elements of the game are already decided and new releases are more about tweaking and improving than innovative game development. Whichever development method is utilised developers and programmers are allocated ‘material’ tasks that, in combination, result in the finished product. As the game is being developed the material labour that produces the artwork, boxes, disks, inserts, advertising flyers and all the other sundries that come with a game at the point of purchase takes place.

8.1.1) Neo-Marxism: Corporate Immaterial Labour and the Video Game Industry

In *Empire* (2000) Hardt and Negri introduced the concept of ‘immaterial labour’. It was, for Hardt and Negri, a concept that allowed them to understand and theorise contemporary labour processes and thereby continue a Marxist tradition that has followed the ‘plight’ of the working class through eras of social change from slavery, the feudal era, craft working,

industrialisation and into the post industrial world. In a social world no longer defined by industry and mass employment Negri and Hardt argued that labour = service. ‘Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we define the labor involved in this production as *immaterial labour* – that is, labour that produces an immaterial good, such as service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication’ (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 290).

Lazzarato (2006) advanced this Neo-Marxist perspective by considering the role of immaterial labour in the service industry *and* in the production of tangible products. Lazzarato (2006: 132) defined immaterial labour as ‘... the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity’ arguing that in contemporary post-Fordist society companies cannot expect knowledgeable consumers to choose their product from amongst a range of choices without developing a social context for its consumption. As well as paying for production costs companies must also pay for ‘the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically public opinion’ (Lazzarato, 2006: 132). Supporting evidence for Hardt and Negri and Lazzarato’s ideas is all around us. Many large successful corporations have departments that do not produce anything tangible, but focus entirely on marketing through hosting events, organising product placement, advertising and other such means. It is now hard to imagine a social world without ubiquitous advertising facilitated by teams of specialist employees.

From this Neo-Marxist perspective the video game industry embraces immaterial labour.

‘To generate a hit that is profitable requires global marketing and distribution resources. And a huge investment in that marketing. Modern Warfare 2 spent more on marketing than some publishers’ entire budget for a AAA game. This is a big boys game at the top table and very few have the resources to play’.

Everiss (2010)

Marketing teams from across the industry are dedicated to building a social context for video games and video gaming. Marketers, such as Bruce Everiss (Bruce on Games, 2012) write blogs, in their official capacities as independent professionals or as representatives of video game companies, and also in their unofficial capacities as video game enthusiasts. Video game developers and producers establish fan pages on social networking sites such as Facebook, and post pre-release videos of upcoming products to YouTube. These are done in order to demonstrate and advertise their upcoming games, but also to receive feedback off consumers which is – from a Neo-Marxist perspective – free immaterial (fan) labour exploited by the industry in the pursuit of profit. These marketing tactics are designed to bring products to the attention of gamers who then spread the word amongst their peers. ‘[In fact] word of mouth is an immensely powerful marketing tool, especially amongst some demographics, such as school children. And it is a tool that marketers try and propagate using techniques such as viral marketing and online community marketing’ (Everiss, 2010). .

Celebrations for the release of blockbuster video games are now inspired by Hollywood red carpet events. The release of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* was celebrated with a star studded Premier in London’s Leicester Square followed by a VIP party and stores opening at midnight to queues of eager fans (TeamXbox Staff, 2009). Its successor *Call of Duty Black Ops* was released with similar fanfare in the UK with a ‘black carpet’ event streamed live around the world and midnight store openings (YouTube, 2009(a)). International conventions take place regularly and internationally. One of many such events, The Eurogamer Expo is Europe’s biggest game convention, it is organised by Eurogamer ‘Europe’s leading independent website for gaming news, reviews, previews and videos’ which allows gamers access to games which are due to be released in time for the Christmas market (www.gamesindustry.biz). Another is the *Electronic Entertainment Expo*, held at the Los Angeles convention centre which is attended by ‘leading computer and video game companies, business partners, media and industry analysts from over 80 countries... [welcoming] ... software developers, buyers and retailers, programmers, distributors, entertainment industry representatives, financiers and venture capitalists, importers and exporters, manufacturers, resellers, researchers, educators, financial and industry analysts and worldwide electronic and print media’ ([www.e3expo.com\(1\)](http://www.e3expo.com(1))). Conventions are intended and designed to develop a buzz around new products, a buzz which, as I will return to, is then

spread by fans, via a myriad of gaming networks, to other fans and passive consumers at little or no cost to the industry.

8.1.2) Neo-Marxism: Fan Culture and the Immaterial Labour of Video Game Fans

Immaterial labour carried out by and within corporations is one element of formal capital accumulation. The costs of this labour will appear alongside traditional labour costs on the company balance sheets. However a large amount of the work that is done to create video game sales is carried out by the consumers themselves. Arvidsson (2005: 235) argued that ‘brands build on the immaterial labour of consumers’ and that brand management is responsible for steering that free labour in a way favourable for the company. Consumption builds a brand as information about the brand is passed on (for free) by the consumers. In our ‘information economy’ communication and production are inseparable (Arvidsson 2005: 240). Through interaction and socialising consumers work to build a brand by incorporating commodities within social relations, adding value to it by giving it meaning and providing a meaningful context for its consumption. The modern consumer is not passive. “In short, consumption produces a common in the form of a community, a shared identity or even short lived ‘experience’ that adds dimensions of use-value to the object” (Arvidsson 2005: 242). The immaterial labour of consumers on which a brand is built provides context, meaning and a social relation to the consumption of the brand.

Arvidsson’s account of the immaterial labour of consumers provides a Neo-Marxist analysis which can be applied to the video game industry. The video game industry is embedded in online video game communities. By visiting forums industry professionals observe, and get involved in discussions about video games and then feed that information back into the workplace – thereby utilising fan labour and fan culture in the pursuit of profit⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ It is significant that that on video game forums, although they cover a variety games and gaming activities, it is rare to find a game related topic or message board focussed on games other than ‘masculine’ games – and extremely rare to find any mention of ‘feminine’ games. Therefore when the professionals seek, gain and utilise opinion from ‘career’ gamers on forums they will inevitably feed back masculine themes, interests and perspectives into the industry.

‘[At Crytek] we interact with forums who discuss games and then invite forum members into the studio to play and to discuss. It’s good advertising, they are good evangelists. It’s part of the process.’

(Bryant, 2011)

The immaterial labour of consumers encourages consumption amongst video game enthusiasts, and video game communities. Young video gamers explain some of their purchasing decisions by referring to the effect of ‘formal capital accumulation’ such as influences from advertising, either on television or on the internet or from official fan pages on social networking sites, groups and channels on YouTube (YouTube, 2011(a)) or articles and reviews in magazines dedicated to the industry. Many are also influenced by the ‘immaterial labour’ of other consumers: they read unofficial online reviews, evaluate games using walkthroughs (and their associated comments) which are posted on YouTube or simply through information gained by word of mouth (evangelism).

‘I find out about good games through word of mouth’ (B4, 2011)

‘Walkthroughs are a good way of seeing if a game is worth getting’ (A1., B1., C1, 2011)

Arvidsson (2005) considered ‘the immaterial labour of consumers’ in the development and maintenance of brands using contemporary Marxist thinking that seeks to recognise and theorise new forms of labour processes specific to a post-industrial, post-Fordist, society. In this light he argued that the free immaterial labour of consumers is managed and exploited by corporations through brand management in the pursuit of capital accumulation. The free immaterial labour of consumers is realized through extracting a premium price and on financial markets ‘in the form of share prices or easier accesses to capital’ (Arvidsson 2005: 250). This Neo-Marxist perspective concerning the corporate exploitation of fans’ immaterial labour has been applied directly to the video game industry, specifically by Kücklich (2005) who in his analysis of ‘Playbour’ (the process through which video gamers – modders- modify games to their own specifications using the tools provided by the game

manufacturers) pointed out that despite the work done by gamers and its benefits for the industry in terms of increasing the shelf life of a product, increasing customer loyalty, as a source of innovation in a risk averse industry and as a recruiting pool, modders did not receive any of the financial reward accrued by the industry. Consequently Kucklich (2005: 7) argued that modders should re-conceptualise their ‘playbour’ as ‘precarious labour’ and look to take a share in the economic benefit of the work they do.

So, from a Neo-Marxist perspective, in the world of video gaming ‘immaterial labour’ is a significant element within the industry’s business strategy. Corporations employ a range of marketing techniques including advertising, ‘black carpet’ events and conventions which are all opportunities for the industry to introduce new games, produce a social context for their games and thereby positively influence sales by driving consumer behaviour. And, as we have seen, the industry seeks to profit by exploiting the ‘immaterial labour’ of its fans by taking an interest in forums and blogs, exploiting the work of modders and by analysing fan produced online reviews of games and the industry. Actions carried out in order to profit, through ‘reflexive accumulation’ (Lash & Urry, 1994) by finding out what is important to gamers, what works, and doesn’t work in their own games and those of their rivals. Exploitative processes which are utilised by the industry in order to maximise their profits while offering no financial recompense to the immaterial labourers.

8.2) Towards an Alternative analysis of Fandom in the Video Game Lifeworld

‘We have a tendency to assume that, since capitalism and its attendant forms of value are so clearly dominant, then everything that happens in the world somehow partakes of its essence. We assume that capitalism forms a total system, and that the only real significance of any apparent alternative is the role it plays in reproducing it... For two hundred years at least, artists and those drawn to them have created enclaves where it has been possible to experiment with forms of work, exchange and production radically different from those promoted by capitalism... Total systems don’t really exist, they’re just stories we tell ourselves, and the fact that capitalism is dominant now does not mean that it always will be’

Graeber (2008: 12)

Maintaining a Marxist perspective on the relationship between the video game industry and its fans by focussing exclusively on fan practices as exploitable labour is reductionist. Capitalism is not a total system and the practices of the industry and its fans are too nuanced and complex to be fully understood within the exploitative, exploited binary. Whilst methods of formal capital accumulation – advertising, conferences, events – certainly help to bring new games to the consuming public’s attention, that consuming public is not, as discussed in Chapter 2.3.1 and Chapter 2.3.2 a collection of isolated, mystified, passive dupes controlled by institutions and the screen. Video game consumers are informed, interpretative and active participants in a complex lifeworld wherein social networks and communities are of paramount importance, and where the social practices of video gamers are motivated by the collective action of their communities and towards maintaining these valued networks and communities. In the video game lifeworld social practices and relationships between its members – whether that is within the industry, between fans or where the two meet – often fall outside of the Marxist paradigm.

8.2.1) Video Gaming: A Complex Lifeworld Where Consumption meets Production

The Marxist paradigm that maintains an exploitative binary between producer and consumer fails to recognise historical systems of production and consumption, possible alternatives to the capitalist system and how advances in technology have facilitated greater interaction between producer and consumer networks.

Campbell (2005: 27) argued that the craft producer is not one who, as a Marxist would argue, creates value through the investment of time with a view for commodity or money exchange – but ‘... one might say that the craft producer is one who invests his or her personality or self into the object produced’, and the ‘... craft consumer is someone who transforms ‘commodities’ into personalised (or, one might say, ‘humanised’) objects’.

‘This model [of the consumer]... rejects any suggestion that the contemporary consumer is simply the helpless puppet of external forces...

Rather, the assumption here is that individuals consume principally out of a desire to engage in creative acts of self-expression’.

(Campbell, 2005: 24)

Alvin Tofler (1980) asserted that in the post-industrial age there will be a movement toward ‘prosumption’. ‘Tofler defines prosumers as people who produce some of the goods and services entering their own consumption’ (Kotler, 1986). In contemporary society prosumption has not been ‘confined’ to the physical goods and services such as those anticipated by Tofler (1980) and Kotler (1986). Participatory production, or prosumption, is the defining feature of two of the three most visited internet sites – www.youtube.com and www.facebook.com. “As a media company, YouTube is a platform for, and an aggregator of, content, but it is not a content producer itself. It is an example of what David Weinberger (2007) calls ‘meta business’ – the new category of business that enhances the value of information developed elsewhere and thus benefits the original creators of that information” (Burgess & Green, 2009, 4). YouTube is a platform for the storage, distribution and sharing of videos, many of which have been recorded, produced and posted by individual registered users of the site, the rest by business advertising and distributing their output. Consumers can establish, for no payment, their own channels to attract other users and thereby share their interests with a community. The owners of YouTube and its parent company Google Inc (with Google.com being the most visited website) do not make money through producing and selling their own products, but through selling advertising to companies attracted by popular amateur videos and those posted by major corporations, such as CBS and other television production companies that post clips and reviews to the site. Similarly Facebook is a ‘meta business’ that beyond supplying the layout for the site does not contribute to its content. The content is produced and consumed by registered users, both amateur and corporate, and the owners of Facebook, Facebook Inc⁶⁹, makes money through attracting advertisers interested in its users, which in 2012 are in excess of 845 million. Twitter also survives and profits through external advertising and promoted tweets directed towards its user base which create and add content to the site in a micro-blogging format.

⁶⁹ Facebook Inc is a newly publicly listed company and its investors and owners include include venture capitalists, corporate investors and individual shareholders.

Lee & Lin (2011) examined how the worlds of consumption, production and work can collide in the video game life world. Their study focussed on how MMORPG gamers could earn an income by meeting online in order to sell and trade virtual objects and currencies for real money – a process known as ‘real money trade’. Milner (2009: 491) recognised that video game enthusiasts often contribute, for free, to the production of the games they later pay to consume. This ‘uncompensated labour’ he asserted is seen as a foregone conclusion by video game enthusiasts who freely contribute to the betterment of the game. Interactive gamers want to improve the game they enjoy; they evangelise about the merits of the game, create modifications of the game including characters and story lines. However unofficial, all these activities are essentially labor since they are all forms of productivity that ‘build the brand’ of the media text’ (Milner, 2009: 492). And these practices can be, and are, used by game manufacturers in the pursuit of profit through ‘reflexive accumulation’ (Lash & Urry, 1994). However they are primarily intended to contribute to and enrich the experiences of fans and fan communities by creating a more fulfilling collective interest through intertextual contributions to, for example, artwork and books. ‘Fan productivity is directly monitored by the organization that owns the text’ and productive fans hope that their labour is recognised by the corporation producing that game - however of primary interest to these gamers is “the text” and when they labour they ‘working for the text’(Milner, 2009: 493).

Game manufactures are motivated to preserve their business by controlling the potential financial costs, and harnessing the financial benefits, of modding – ‘... EULAs [End User Licence Agreements] usually insist that mods exist only as an addition the existing video game, and hence cannot be played without a legally owned version of the original video game. Moreover, most EULAs ensure that any mods or add-ons are automatically the property of the company that owns the original video game source’ (Crawford, 2012: 124). However, as Milner (2009) points out, financial reward is not expected or requested or of significant interest to these modders/fans. In 2012 fans of a video game Half-Life resurrected this game by developing an update and expanded version. This was made possible when the company that originally created the game Valve released their programming tools. The game, created by enthusiasts for enthusiasts, was to be made available on a free download on 14th September 2012 (bbc.co.uk, 2012). As May (2002) points out the gift giving economy of modding and sharing mods is primarily about a fan establishing their own reputation within

their community. When these fans are as astute and aware of the workings of the video game industry and the impact of their practices, and are willingly gifting their labour and its output to the gaming community it is inadequate to simply theorise this labour as exploited, or the actions of the game company as exploitative.

Consumer impact where production meets consumption in the video game lifeworld is not always productive, it can also take the form of withdrawal and rebellion as gamers choose to disrupt the gaming process or withhold payments from corporations until their voices are heard, acknowledged and acted upon.

‘2011's been a year of unexpected protests. We've had the Arab Spring reconfiguring the political map of various Muslim governments and the Occupy movements calling for financial reform. This summer, a video-game equivalent happened on the servers of CCP's cult sci-fi MMO EVE Online..... **Protests took the form of a massive spaceship sit-in, where thousands of users went outside of one of the game's most popular trade hub stations.**’ Senior producer Arnar Gylfason recognised threat this had to be dealt with ‘And deal with that, they did. Canvassing the community for feedback, CCP also admitted that they'd not been as engaged with EVE as they'd previously been. Gylfason say that the admission was that "we made a mistake. We're sorry for it. And now we're going to improve." Consequently, to deal with players' issues CCP, the game developer issued a new game expansion – ‘Crucible’. ‘Crucible addresses the quality-of-life issues people have had for a while, he offers, balancing some ancient features in some cases, fleshing out production lines, adding new modules and fixing UI issues. ‘"I think we've now shown with Crucible that we've heard you loud and clear," Gylfason says. "And we are back on track and doing what has made EVE and CCP great for all these years. Here we are. This is us."’

(Narcisse, 2011)

In this case, game developers had made amendments to the PC game *Eve Online* - amendments intended to drive profits - which did not meet with the approval of core gamers. After consumer 'rebellion' and consultation with the fans CCP (the game developer) retracted those amendments and made further concessions to the consumer population.

Campbell (2005), Tofler (1980) and Kotler (1986) exemplify how production and consumption can be conceptualised from outside of the Marxist paradigm. Milner (2009), Lee & Lin (2011), May (2002) and Narcisse (2011) - the *EvE Online* rebellion - illustrate the complexity of the video game lifeworld by showing when, where and how the practices of production meet the practices of consumption in a mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship. There is, therefore, scope for an analysis of video game fan culture, and consumer behaviour that avoids the theoretical reductionism inherent to the Marxist perspective. The remainder of this chapter will examine video game fan culture from a perspective that focuses on the social practices that comprise the video game industry and fan communities. Social practices that serve the interests of all involved in the video game lifeworld by maintaining fan communities and benefit key players in the video game industry by motivating consumers to participate in development and in the frenzy of consumption when a new - if often predictable - video game is produced.

8.2.2) Football and Fan Communities: Exemplifying a Complex, Symbiotic and Mutually Rewarding Relationship

The game of professional football (as seen in Chapter 3) has developed from chaotic folk football into a rationalised organised sport characterised by rule bound activity and standardised equipment. Similarly, crowd administration at football matches has become rationalised and organised through the uniform infrastructure that characterises modern stadium development, the crowd control procedures in operation within stadiums and the ticket restrictions that determine who is, or rather who is not, permitted entry to matches. However despite this rationalisation crowd behaviour, or football fandom, cannot always be understood from a rational actor perspective. King (1997, 2003), from a Durkheimian

perspective asserted that there is a need to recognise football as a social ritual. Through an ethnographic study, involving fieldwork and interviews, King (1997: 332-333) concluded that that 'Replicating the ecstasy of Durkheim's clans, 'The Lads' [a particular sub-culture within Manchester United football fans defined by masculine traits such as drinking, singing and fighting and by their expensive designer clothing] too reach heights of euphoria in their support for the team'.

'The Lads', sons and grandchildren of the 'old guard' felt themselves to be defenders of the true working class masculine culture and community that had, until recently, dominated fandom at Manchester United Football Club. 'The Lads' believed that the working class domination of Manchester United's fan base, along with their rites, rituals and 'invented' traditions were under threat from rampant commercialism at the club which had removed the location for traditional forms of working class fandom to be expressed (the terraces) and focussed on bringing in a new affluent fan base from the middle classes and the world of commerce. They saw the new breed of Manchester United fan as dominated by a glory hunting crowd of outsiders, more interested in buying memorabilia and replica kits than in the true history and traditions of the club. 'The Lads' (King, 1997) believed that they, and they alone, represented the true essence of Manchester United Football Club. 'The Lads' didn't want to see their fan practices and imagined traditions die and they also wanted their beloved Manchester United Football Club to thrive. So, in the face of the rationalising process going on around them, there was, necessarily, both compliance and resistance. There was resistance to the ever increasing season ticket prices that they saw as restrictive to the working class demographic they felt characterised the club and its 'true' fan base. This took the form of casually verbalised annoyance amongst 'The Lads' but also through organised resistance groups such as HOSTAGE (Holders of Season Tickets Against Gross Exploitation) and IMUSA (Independent Manchester Supporters' Association) (King, 1997: 336-337). However dissatisfaction with ticketing policies and prices did not deter this 'hard-core' group of masculine fans from renewing their season tickets year after year. Once inside the club on match days 'The Lads' put aside their dissatisfaction and indulged in rituals of communal practice, particularly the singing of songs, which celebrate their love for club, culture, and community and which induce a feeling of 'ecstatic solidarity' which they call 'the crack' (King, 1997: 332-333). These ecstatic moments are significant because in the act of worshiping the unifying totem of their community (Manchester United Football Club) by

reproducing their fan practices and traditions, “The Lads” both celebrated and enacted the working class culture that they felt they embodied and characterised, and through creating a ‘collective effervescence’ they revitalised their motivation to buy the season tickets that enabled them to gather at the club that makes the ecstatic expression of their culture possible.

The actions of ‘The Lads’ are, from a Neo-Marxists perspective, ‘immaterial labour’ commercially exploited by Manchester United Football Club. Through the social rituals enacted in the worship of their totem ‘The Lads’ add value to the club through their ongoing financial support and their work in creating an exciting and enduring atmosphere at the club on match days which contributes to continuing support by those consumers not directly affiliated to ‘The Lads’, or any other active fan community. However the fan practices of ‘The Lads’ have causes and consequences that are more complex than an exploitative/exploited perspective can conceptualise and explain. Of course their celebratory practices, and purchases of season-tickets, have the effect of financially supporting the club. However ‘The Lads’ are not mystified dupes of the club or capitalism. Financially supporting the club is something that they want to do – even though they are aware, of unhappy with, its ‘rampant commercialism’. As fans of the club they want the team to be successful and fully realise that if this is to happen then it needs the finances that ticket sales and commercialism brings. And, furthermore, by contributing to the financial integrity of the club ‘The Lads’ are also maintaining the platform upon which their community is dependent. Without a club there would be no ‘Lads’ and without The Lads’ the traditions that they uphold would die. The relationship between the club and ‘The Lads’, therefore, is a complex network of social relations characterised by mutual support and interdependence.

The club is an arbitrary totem (a unifying collective interest) around which this community – ‘The Lads’ - unites through reiterated ritualistic practices. The success of the club provides a platform for their community to form reform and enact their social practices. It also facilitates positive collective memories which contribute to the unity and status of the group (King, 2001). Therefore the financial contributions they make to the club have a positive purpose and outcome for club and community alike. ‘The Lads’ practices, financial and otherwise, do much more than support and add value to Manchester United Football Club,

they facilitate the continuation of their culture – a culture which, for them, is a positive aspect of their individual and collective narratives. Similarly other communities than ‘The Lads’ occupy spaces within the total Manchester United fan community and enact rituals of their own that support the club and their own collective. There are those that wear replica shirts, others that travel long distances, often from overseas, to watch the games live, some more affluent fans or corporate fans who are invited to the club to watch from corporate boxes for example. For each of these groups Manchester United Football Club is an arbitrary totem that allows them the opportunity to enact rituals with the effect of bonding their particular group, whilst also benefiting the finances of Manchester United Football Club. Each community is separate entity from each other and from the club itself. However they operate, with each other and with the club, in a complex symbiotic relationship to create a whole lifeworld united by a single totem – or unifying collective interest.

8.2.3) The Video Game Industry and Fan Culture: A Mutually Rewarding Relationship of Participation, Rituals, Effervescence and Community

‘Though the traditional image, often encountered in the popular press, is of an isolated anti-social gamer, sitting alone in front of a video game screen, ignoring the world around them and everyone in it ... research on video game culture, time after time, has highlighted its social nature’ (Crawford, 2012: 97). Although video games are often vilified for isolating family members from each other, it is common for gamers young and old to play in the company of their friends and families. And, as mentioned in Chapter 8.1, communities of video gamers are brought together at huge and well populated conferences and marketing events. A central feature of online gaming is that it facilitates play between multiple global networks of gamers through features built into consoles such as Xbox Social, Xbox Party or the Sony PlayStation Network service. As well as meeting and gaming through these built in features many active video gamers, fans, choose to meet other gamers beyond game-play and contribute to independent forums where they can – united by a common interest - develop friendships, social bonds and enduring communities. Contributing to these forums is not necessary for the purchase and consumption of video games. It is not necessary for indulging in moments of play. It is not necessary for seeking and receiving recommendations, tips, trick or gaming advice. It is not necessary for non-game related chats and advice and neither

is it necessary for obtaining consumer advice about the world of video gaming. All these 'needs' can be met through the game consoles or elsewhere on the internet. But these, and other non gaming related practices, are common across video game forums and are central to their existence.

If the video game industry is to thrive it needs to engage its existing, and potential customer base – which it does, as we have seen, through a range of marketing techniques. And, furthermore, if video game fan communities are to survive then they must contribute financially to the video game industry by purchasing the products that unify and refresh their collective. However it is wrong to assume, as the Marxist model does, that video gamers are mystified dupes of a coherent and exploitative capitalist enterprise. The industry pursues profits but it does so by, in part, integrating itself with, and integrating the views, requests and needs of its experienced, educated and informed fans. And fan communities support the finances of the video game industry but they do so willingly in order to support not only the unifying collective interest of their communities, but the communities themselves. Active members of video gaming communities in the video game lifeworld are fully aware that the products they are buying, and the companies they are buying from, are pursuing profit often to the detriment of quality and variety of output. However they also recognise the central role of a vibrant and productive video game industry for maintaining the gaming communities of which they are members: communities wherein high status confers privileged access to games and the industry, and communities that offer loose and close knit social ties, provide advice and support (both orientated to games and 'real-life') and, significantly, allow integration into the world of organised play and social gaming. Fan communities and the video game industry are separate entities, but ones in a complex and symbiotic relationship maintained by the social practices of their members – practices that preserve valued gaming communities through engagement with their unifying collective interest, and financially support the industry by contributing to game development and sales.

So, from a Neo-Marxist perspective the video game lifeworld is exploitative of its fans and consumers. Within a simple exploitative, exploited binary the industry encourages, through advertising and marketing, mystified consumers to provide their ongoing support as consumers, it exploits their knowledge and experience by seeking out their assistance in the development process and it exploits the creative 'Playbour' of modders. However, when the

lifeworld is examined from a social ontology – ‘social action’ - as opposed to a dual ontology - ‘systemic determinism’ - what can be seen is world wherein the relationship between the industry and its consumers is a complex and mutually beneficial one characterised by willing participation and integrated, enduring and valued social networks - not a structural binary characterised by systemic divisions and exploitation. Through their continued participation in the lifeworld, willing consumption, and contributions the development process video gamers develop a valuable gaming and social experience. Therefore ‘Playbour’ can also be seen as characteristic of mutually beneficial symbiotic integration between consumer and producer networks, and as evidence of a far more complex lifeworld that (Kucklich, 2005) allowed for as, through their social practices, video gamers support their unifying collective interest and maintain their warm, inviting and valued social communities.

8.2.4) Hype, Social Cohesion and Sales: a Symbiotic Relationship

Professionals from the video game industry, enthusiastic gamers, and occasional consumers of video games recognise that most new mainstream games are modifications of, sequels to or spin offs from those that went before.

‘Executives see a game succeed so they just rush in and pillage the brand to make money. Meaningless sequels geared up for maximum exploitation are not the long term road to success’.

(Everiss, 2010)

‘The majority of the press are busy writing about Duke Nukem, no that’s not a misprint from 1994, yes actually Duke Nukem is getting some attention. Along with another Tomb Raider (yawn), another Call of Duty, another Halo, another Gears of War, another Bioshock, another Battlefield, the list goes on... you get the idea. Read IGN’s E3 winners, it’s so dull you may cry but it’s a perfect reflection of what the mainstream games press is focused on’.

(tumblingdicemedia, 2011)

‘Gorgeous game engine. Looks like this'll take a dump on most other military shooters. But that's the thing... military shooters... *yawn*’

(MoBiUGeArSkIn(1),2010)

And, within the industry there is an acceptance that the business has become risk adverse, relying on existing intellectual property or previously successful game genres, due to the huge costs involved in producing and marketing a video game and the need for sales figures to match.

‘The game industry is where the film industry has been. There has been a lot of inventive and original stuff produced. But the price of production has rocketed so a degree of playing safe is apparent – repeats, sequels, franchises, licensed products. Crysis [a game produced by Crytek] had a hundred people working on it in Nottingham and one hundred and fifty people in Germany working on it. It needs six figure sales to justify the investment. The risks of original output are just too big for developers these days. In the early 1990s games were developed by developers for game developers who are now all in their late 30s now. Now we have to make games for others’

Bryant (2011)

So, in a lifeworld populated with educated and informed consumers what is it that encourages video gamers to keep buying video games?

Within the video game lifeworld active consumers – fans – within their social networks enact social practices that hype up new products and build up expectation of a ‘great event approaching’ - the release of a new and exciting video game. Every game of football is essentially the same: same rules and regulations, regulation size pitch, equivalent ball and environment but the anticipation and promise of an ecstatic episode at a new game induces fan communities to attend time after time – exemplified by ‘The Lads’ (King, 1997). Similarly, in the world of video gaming the anticipation and expectation of ecstatic moments

of game-play when the release of a new game is approaching brings together, reforms and unifies a disparate community of video gamers. A 'collective effervescence' elevates the reality, or the significance, of the great event which consumers buy in to (through pre-release sales) in order to fully experience the ecstatic moment of celebratory play on the day it arrives. The collective behaviour of the social group as they reiterate familiar social practices, not the product itself (or rational reviews created through the immaterial labour of consumers) or the 'exploitative' marketing practices (immaterial labour) of the industry creates 'collective effervescence' and excites video game enthusiasts into consumption. A collective excitement as individuals 'gather' around a unifying symbol of the community is beneficial for producers and consumers alike. The effervescence created by reiterated social practices has the consequence of reforming and thereby maintaining fan communities, which are of great significance to its members, whilst also encouraging fans and more passive video game consumers to financially invest in a new (if predictable) video game.

As discussed above corporations staging, sponsoring and presenting at international gaming conferences are a recognised method of creating a 'buzz' around a new product. Conferences are a conventional marketing tool aimed at bringing new products to the attention of the gaming public with the goal of favourably influencing consumer behaviour. And, when members of the video game lifeworld are invited, or pay, to attend a convention (or other marketing event) they expect and relish the opportunity to preview new developments - with the possibility of making a purchase at that time, or a later date. Pre-release video games, or games still under production, are the primary focus of video game conventions, both for industry representatives and representatives from the consuming public. And pre-release video games hold a special 'sacred' status within the video game lifeworld. By focussing upon these unobtainable unifying products video game conferences initiate an excitement that is spread, through the social practices of active gamers, fans, through the video game lifeworld via a myriad of global gaming groups.

'...the feature that distinguishes the sacred entities is that they are withdrawn from general circulation; they are separate and set apart. The common people cannot enjoy them. They cannot even touch them. Those who have a kinship, as it were, with sacred items of this kind, can

have access to them – that is, those who are sacred as they are: the priest, the great, and the magistrates, especially where these latter have a sacred character’.

(Durkheim, 1957: 143)

A powerful few in the video game lifeworld initiate access to games amongst the myriad of global gaming networks - games that are withdrawn from general circulation that the general population of passive consumers cannot enjoy and cannot even touch. ‘The great’ of the video game community: industry professionals, professional and amateur journalists and (often amateur) established forum administrators and bloggers are invited to high profile video game conferences – periodic opportunities available to an elite group where they can be close to, and even touch, ‘sacred’ items.

‘Around the thing appropriated, as around the sacred thing, a vacuum formed. All individuals had to keep a distance, as it were, except those who had the required qualifications to approach it, and make use of it’.

(Durkheim, 1957: 143)

Those who attend the Electronic Entertainment Expo, for example, have to prove their ‘...direct and professional affiliation to the interactive entertainment industry’ (www.e3expo.com (2)). And fans, consumers who are active in pursuing their interest, are able to attend non-professional events. These fans are drawn to events, such as the Eurogamer Expo, by the opportunity to ‘worship’ their unifying interest in a collective experience - and thereby they experience the collective, and collectively constructed, thrill of the crowd. The corporations running these collective events excite the ‘congregation’ by presenting their latest work. A ‘buzz’ or ‘collective effervescence’ develops at these events that excites the attendees and which they take away from the event with them before sharing with their particular gaming networks – whether that is, for a journalist or a blogger, their readers, or for forum administrators and active contributors, their community members. And there are always more celebrations/conventions to follow which ensure that the buzz is never

entirely forgotten and that the community will once again be unified, reformed and celebrated.

The right of access to, and possession of, 'sacred' items carries with it a rewarding high status within a particular gaming community. A high status that is dependent upon the survival of the 'connoisseur's' particular community which they contribute to by evangelically refreshing the group's focus on their unifying collective interest. Sacred status depends upon the privilege, and responsibility of evangelism. In specialist magazines, on forums and in blogs those who have achieved 'sacred' positions preach to the 'profane' masses about their knowledge and experiences of pre-release video games, writing reviews, posting pictures and extolling the virtues of 'sacred' items that are, to the multitude, still untouchable. The video industry, by monitoring game journalism and involving itself in blog analysis and forum activities recognises effective and engaging professional or non-professional evangelism and it will invite, or re-invite, suitable contributors into the consumer elite by inviting or repeating invites to conferences, asking for advice and opinions on development or by requesting their help as testers and reviewers. These high-profile, high status, game connoisseurs are highly significant to the industry. And they are equally valued by passive consumers who are interested in the opinions of trusted non-professional expert members of the video game lifeworld for tips, tricks and recommendations – trusted non-professionals who are accessed through membership of a myriad of gaming communities. High status fans form an essential link between networks of producers and networks of consumers. They form a bridge between the industry and its mass user base. Their social practices, professional and amateur, are central to bringing new and upcoming video games to the attention of the consuming public. And the hype they create around new video games encourages both social cohesion and sales of new games: games which, as we have seen, are viewed with cynicism by many consumers convinced, even before seeing them, that they will be just like all the rest.

So when corporations stage conventions and social events and invite evangelists they know, because they engage with blogs, journalism and forums that their congregation will, through communication and interaction, create a positive social context for the consumption of their product. The effectiveness of this strategy is clear to see on video game forums. The build up to a football game, as experienced and produced by 'The Lads' through their communal

practice of support, induced ecstatic solidarity and ‘the crack’ (King, 1997: 333) was ritualistic and followed a well trodden path of drinking, chanting and singing songs. On video game forums the rituals leading up to the release and ecstatic moment when a new game can be played is equally ritualistic and well trodden. Several weeks, or even months, before a new game is due to be released active forum members, often administrators, begin to share information about upcoming game releases – refreshing their collective interest and thereby the communities on which their sacred status depends. The information may come from magazines (on or offline) such GameInformer (<http://www.gameinformer.com>) whose journalists have access to conferences and pre-release access to new games through publishers and developers (in beta form to induce them into being evangelists) due to their status in the community of consumers. This information is then shared by active forum members who have invested time and effort into pursuing the latest information and gaming news. Or the original information comes from active members of the forum who have had access to pre-release games through industry organised focus groups or conferences, either through payment or invites by contacts within the industry forged through prior evangelism.

Expectation builds as the community of ‘everyday’ gamers join administrators and those more privileged members of the forum in excited discussions about upcoming games, their merits, possibilities and expectations. Initially administrators and regular contributors express their excitement about a forthcoming event – the release of a new game. Then a trickle of active members, whose activities and opinions are viewed and monitored by passive forum members or viewers, begins to excitedly post and review videos and trailers of the game under discussion – either in response to previous comments or containing the fruits of their own research into upcoming games. Like interviews from football managers being dissected on television programmes and online forums, interviews from game designers involved in the new project are sourced and dissected by forum members. The trickle grows until a community of gamers is making several posts a day, often totalling hundreds or thousands before the game is eventually released. This process of pre-release evangelism and its role in diffusing a buzz amongst a community is exemplified by a story of fan action taken from the BritXbox forum that depicts ecstatic solidarity and hype developing in the build up to the release of a new game in the Halo series - Halo Reach. The message board for Halo Reach begun by staff writer Noir in 2009 is still active (its 2724th post was made on

04/01/2012). It demonstrates a community becoming more excited with anticipation, and an ecstatic solidarity developing, as the moment of celebratory play approaches.

The first post on the message board established to discuss the release of Halo Reach, posted by Noir (2009), stated: ‘Is this just Bungie playing silly buggers again?’ was accompanied by several links to web sites presenting trailers and reviews of the forthcoming game. Following on from this forum members, initially other site administrators and other frequent contributors, shared their excitement about a new release:

‘I think I just shit myself. "The definitive Halo.’

(MoBiUGeArSkIn(2), 2010)

As the buzz of the convention, social events and pre-release access to video games was shared amongst the wider community fans became prolific contributors on the focus group’s Halo message board, talking with enthusiasm about their expectations for upcoming releases:

‘Announced. Awesome! That teaser got me very excited. All those Sierras (Spartans!)’.

(Hallben, 2010)

‘My hype meter has gone up, this game is going to be epic!’

(uk matt uk, 2010)

‘Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiick!’

(MoBiUGeArSkIn, 2010)

Community cohesion grows as dissenters denouncing games for their inadequacies (often for their lack of originality) are admonished and silenced by the voices of the increasingly excited majority. Game challenges are laid down. Rivalries are renewed. Arguments break out. For Durkheim (1976), periodically, a disparate community is reformed around a totem, and through the enactment of rituals the group experience a ‘collective effervescence’. This

effervescence is felt by the group as spiritual, causing the group to be united as 'elevated' individuals immerse themselves in the collective experience. Video game forums become sites of 'collective effervescence' as the release of a new video game (a game not so different from the last) is ritualistically built up by the community into a cultural event, and a cultural phenomenon whose influence far exceeds the constituent parts of the game or the ritual itself. Members of the community are 'elevated' and swept along by the fervour and become anxious to take part in the event necessitating purchase of the game and thereby support of the video game industry. Some highly committed fans demonstrate their dedication to the unifying interest of the group by advertising that they have booked holidays to coincide with the release date and look forward with enthusiasm to the day when the mundanity of everyday life, jobs, work, family and other such responsibilities can be put aside and they can lose themselves in ritualistic acts and celebratory play⁷⁰.

Effervescence reaches its peak on the day of release. With invites sent to other community members, days off work and holidays booked gamers share their thoughts, actions and movements as they wait to celebrate. Posts are frantically made on message boards expressing frustration and anger when delivery is anticipated and not forthcoming. Conversations develop as members of the community discuss where, how and from whom they should have bought their copy of the game. Questions are asked about who has received the game and what their first impressions of it are. Community members anxiously sit by their front doors awaiting delivery of their game so they can become part of the rituals and upcoming celebrations. As rational consumers the community members know that, in terms of game-play and long term enjoyment, it does not really matter if, or that, they receive the game on release day the next day or soon after. But for those who receive their game on time there is much excitement. Members are quick to tell their community that they are in a position to play and the celebration begins that allows gamers to be free, temporarily, from

⁷⁰ These forum members are expressing a degree of immersion into the video game lifeworld that appears obsessive or even addictive – often determined to be so by the members themselves. Video gaming is dominating their behaviour and causing them to withdraw from 'real life' in order to gain a rewarding experience. They are sacrificing work, holidays and time with their families in order to indulge in the pursuit of play. However, their obsession, or addiction, is not individual, anti-social and driven by the controlling power of the screen or by game content and systems. Their behaviour is driven by a desire, or compulsion, to integrate with, and immerse themselves into, a networked gaming community and experience the socially constructed ecstasy and effervescence of the multitude.

the mundanity of everyday life - a mundanity that those not taking part in the ritual and celebration are forced to endure.

The excitement and eagerness to be involved in the rituals and celebration stems from involvement in and the elevation of the social, not from direct advertising or from the product – as the product has not been released. And the disappointment consequent to lack of involvement comes from missing out on the social euphoria and incorporation within a group united in a celebration. Structural exploitation and technological determinism are not the primary drivers of behaviour here. Experiencing the euphoria encourages gamers to keep buying games, and disappointment on missing out inspires future purchases in order to experience the collective excitement. At the point of celebration, for those unable to join in the disappointment is huge: not because they will miss out on the game - they already know about the story line, mechanics, that nothing of significance will change before their copy of the game arrives a day or so later, and that this game will be ‘just like the last’ - but because they recognise that without the game they are eliminated from the social group and the ecstatic moments that follow. Those who have the game are aware not only that they can celebrate, but that have joined an elite group, ‘the great’, in enjoying their ecstatic moment – an incentive to return to the community and its unifying collective interest time and time again in order to repeatedly experience its associated and fulfilling collective effervescence. Like ‘The Lads’ the video game community consume, and will consume next time an event is announced, because without complying and consuming their membership in a community, and that community, with all its memories and social and cultural rewards, will cease to exist.

Forums are, therefore, a space where reiterated social practices create an effervescence wherein games are talked about, discussed in terms of merits and pitfalls, hyped up and elevated - a process that boosts sales of these games to the financial benefit of the industry. However this is not the sole, or the essential, purpose of these practices. There are many other easily accessible locations in which gamers can extol the merits of particular games, consoles or corporations (gaming magazines, blogs, conferences and other forums are just a few of these). Gamers choose to enact these practices within a particular forum because of the importance given to these communities by the members themselves. By choosing to carry out social practices, such as the ones above, on their forum gamers are celebrating, facilitating, solidifying and maintaining their ‘*gaming community*’ – and for the elite this

means maintaining their valued and rewarding ‘sacred’ status and consequent access to ‘sacred items’. Gamers on forums identify themselves as a community by celebrating their mutual unifying pursuit of video gaming. Within this space there exist social practices more consistent with a ‘*community of gamers*’ rather than ‘simply’ a ‘gaming community’. Originally unified by a common interest discussions take place on all kinds of personal and professional matters - for example the ‘Off Topic Lounge’ on Britxbox covers topics as varied as ‘Babes’, Whitney Houston’s death, favourite superheroes or villains avatar, national stereotypes and significantly birthday and holiday greetings directed towards other forum members that depict enduring social connections external not only to specific moments of play but external to play itself. Clearly these topics are not significant in any way to the pursuit of video gaming, working for the text or self expression, and neither are they the exclusive domain of this community or this location. The social practices of members of this forum (and other gaming forums as they tend to follow the same structure that encourages discussions on a wide range of topics – gaming and otherwise) maintain a not only a ‘*gaming community*’ but significantly also a ‘*community of gamers*’. Thereby forums become dense communities of highly immersed and engaged consumers – and as with the dense online MMORPG gaming communities discussed in Chapter 7, in these social environments obsessive, compulsive or even addictive behaviour seems to arise.

King’s (1997) experience of football fans and communities demonstrated that there is a complex relationship between the club and its fans as ‘The Lads’ don’t like the merchandising or the high season ticket prices at Manchester United Football Club, but they like the club having money to buy players and win matches, and are prepared to pay the ticket price to protect their vision of the clubs tradition (King, 1997: 340). In the world of video gaming attitudes, relationships and behaviours are equally complex. Gamers are also resistant to the commercialism at work in the video game industry. They feel as if the price of new games is too high and they resent the marketing techniques that companies use.

‘That takes the piss no? That was all obviously ready before launch or could have been, and after we all buy the game, they then charge for some maps and content a couple months after release. Fuck off Bungie’.

‘Then it should be free, fair enough charge for a large amount of content. More like an expansion pack or a vast amount of maps, however, 3 maps (that don’t

look great tbh) and new achievements is hardly worth 800msp. Also to Slicker I think they should know the 'trends' by now it is basically the same game as Halo so the general 'feedback' will be the same. That is a bullshit excuse for ripping gamers off. Next they'll be charging msp for updates and patches'.

(SaMuRaI cGs 2010)

In order to circumvent some of the high prices, and their associated resentment, members of video game forums, and other video game communities, share consumer advice with other forum members. Once again these practices are unnecessary for the industry, the pursuit of gaming, 'working for the text' or for self expression – but good for the community. Community members bond as a '*community of consumers*' by selling games, consoles and accessories amongst themselves:

'Im selling my 320gb slim PS3 for £200. Only had it a month. Also throw in LBP. Its an emergency so i need to get it sold'

(Bateman, 2011)

Or regularly posting consumer advice regarding the best, quickest and cheapest place to buy the new game and gain access to it:

'I got Singularity for £9.99 in Currys and ModNation Racers for £14.99 at Argos. I wanted Red Dead Redemption for £14.99 at Gamestation but they was sold out of it. So far, I was hoping for more, I remember last year it seemed like more was cheap but it could be due to games going cheap all the time just lately so it doesn't make the sales as impressive'

(Kevin, 2011)

'The Steam Chritmas sale is currently running. Ridiculous amounts of bargins everyday!!

(Shlub, 2010)

But, despite their reservations about prices and marketing techniques, like ‘The Lads’, video gamers also – somewhat begrudgingly - compliant in that enthusiastic, or core gamers, are willing to pay the price for new games as they are released. If gamers are to maintain their valuable gaming communities, and their positions within it, then they have to purchase the latest goods and evangelise to their community. Though reluctant to spend their money on ‘tired products’ their community would collapse if they did not do so. A situation that obviously benefits the video game industry as rather than protesting with their wallets, or waiting for a radically different product to be developed, gamers buy generic games in a process that protects theirs, and a myriad of other valued communities united by video gaming.

In conclusion: A commodity having social context - a meaning and a social relation for consumption - is integral to its success in the market. This social context is, in part, created by people employed by companies to influence public opinion. Neo-Marxism has labelled the work done by marketers, advertisers, event companies and by consumers who provide a social context for a product through interaction and conversation as immaterial labour. A rational consumer perspective contends that a consumer with free choice will make a purchasing decision based upon the final outcome of the material and immaterial labour that goes into making a product or brand. However an analysis of video game fan culture, focussing particularly on the social practices of active forum members, illustrates that the video game lifeworld is more nuanced and complex than the Marxist, or rational consumer model, can depict or explain.

Active forum members, fans, perform social practices that celebrate and maintain the valued and enduring communities of which they are part. They come together on forums, such as BritXbox, in order to discuss, promote and complain about their unifying collective interest – video games. And, furthermore, they come together on forums in order to enact social practices that connect community members through social relations that are beyond the world of video gaming. – i.e. sharing jokes and sending birthday and holiday greetings. Active forum members, fans, are the first to promote new and upcoming video games within

their communities – especially those high status forum administrators who have been invited to exclusive conferences for those with a professional interest in the industry or active fans who have attended conferences and have, thereby, gained early access to as yet (for passive consumers) unobtainable items. Active forum members bring with them to the forum the buzz surrounding a new product from the conferences (or promotional events) they have attended or from journalists and bloggers whose work they actively follow and actively pass on to members of their community. In the process of evangelism that ‘buzz’ is circulated through the community and maintained through conversations and postings that follow a well trodden path towards hyping up expectations of the game and the fun that it will facilitate. Video game fans (in the guise of active forum members) forge a vital link between networks of producers and consumers. In the act of unifying and maintaining their independent but symbiotic social collectives they also maintain their status, the communities upon which their status depends and the industry that produces their unifying collective interest by raising the profile, hyping up its (often generic) and unimaginative products and extolling their virtues to fans and passive consumers thereby sweeping them along into a frenzy of consumption.

Chapter 9: Multisensory Participation: Agency, Performance, Sociality and Community

This project began by considering the enduring concept, and widespread fear, of video game addiction. Consequent to evidence of an ever growing and diversifying video gaming population that has not exhibited an exponential rise in cases of video game addiction - as recognised by experts from fields of pathology and psychology – a position was taken that although the existence of video game addiction cannot, and should not, be completely discredited it is not a sufficiently powerful, comprehensive or empirically grounded concept to explain the enormous popularity of video gaming, or, more significantly, the amounts of time video gamers are prepared to invest in their pursuit – time which for many indicates addictive behaviour. And furthermore, consequent to empirical analysis – focus groups amongst young people, interviews and conversations with older gamers and periods of participation observation in the lifeworld it became apparent that although the discourse of addiction is readily used amongst those who inhabit the video game lifeworld it is essential, when considering video game addiction, to recognise the social and cultural context in which video gaming takes place (a finding that has consequently influenced the thesis throughout) and the specific meaning that the terms and discourse of addiction have therein.

The second enduring concept, and widespread fear, related to video games and video gaming that was discussed at the beginning of this thesis was the idea that exposure to video games and video gaming, particularly violent video games causes violence and other pathological behaviours in video gamers – such as diminished propensities for empathy and sympathy. Once again whilst these ideas were not discounted they were revealed to be, with the support of quantitative evidence of the numbers of gamers compared to the small numbers of cases of violence directly related to video gaming, to be a rare occurrence only to be found at the extremes of the video game life world. Therefore following this line of enquiry was considered unlikely to be helpful in understanding the popularity of video games and how and why video gamers became immersed into them – particularly the vast majority of gamers who appear to have a healthy relationship with their pursuit.

Through an analysis of these dominant theories of video game addiction and expositions and accounts of the harmful effects of playing video games, in academia, journalism and personal narratives it became clear that that these powerful concepts and enduring fears were rooted in a conceptual paradigm that posited structure, specifically the video game industry, its content and systems, as determinate over agency, the behaviour of individual gamers who indulge in the pursuit of video gaming. And, furthermore, it was determined that this tendency towards a structure/agency paradigm in theories and expositions on video games and video gaming exemplified and reflected a technological determinism that has thus far dominated and driven wider video game theory. An approach with a tendency to 'situate power exclusively with the game itself' (Thornham, 2012: 1) and an enduring focus on '... video games themselves, such as their content and systems, or the direct engagement of a player, or players, with a specific piece of game technology (Crawford, 2012: 2)

Reflecting on why this structure/agency paradigm might have become so powerful in this field revealed that adopting such a position has not been limited to analyses of video games and video gaming. It is a reflection of wider, enduring and powerful social critiques of the 'controlling power of the screen' over an ever more isolated population. Theories regarding social separation and the controlling power of the screen were found to have become somewhat axiomatic in social theory and particularly in studies of electronic entertainment, and they have now become powerful in analyses of video games and video gaming. However they were also revealed to be strongly contested, particularly in an age of electronic technology, communications, the internet and its associated telecommunications technology. In terms of corrosive individualism Stonier (1983), McLuhan (1969), Wellman et al (1996), Wesch (2009), Wright (2007), Mangold (2009) have all pointed towards a process of 'retribalization' wherein people have, and have taken, the opportunity to develop new networked communities. And concerning the 'controlling power of the screen', challenging Baudrillard's (1990, 1993) nihilism and Sennett (1986) and Putnam's (2000) theories of social breakdown and a tyrannical system of one-way information, King (1998) challenges Baudrillard for Cartesian reductionism and presents a powerful argument, one that is supported by empirical research into the world of video games and video gaming, that consumers of information through the screen are not passive recipients of content (Sennett, 1986, Putnam, 2000) or non-interpretive passive 'parts of the machine' in an era of

‘hyperreality’ (Baudrillard, 1990: 1993), but they are active, analytical and interpretative agents.

Technological determinism, in analyses of electronic media, posits structure as absolutely dominant over and determinate of agency. Concerning video games and video gaming specifically it maintains that the video game industry, and the content and structures in the games it produces, are determinate of the behaviour of those who enter the video game lifeworld and consume their products. At the extremes of the lifeworld they cause addiction and pathological behaviour, and in ‘everyday mundane gaming practices’ it is the content and structures of video games that create immersion into and engagement with a video game or video games. However the ‘inadequacies’ of technological determinism in explaining the popularity of video games and video gaming amongst an ever growing and diversifying gaming population, its weaknesses in adequately conceptualising the extent of human interaction in the world of video gaming by following an axiomatic, but flawed, critique of individualism, its theoretically and empirically unsound perception of human agents as non-interpretive mystified ‘victims’ of electronic media and electronic entertainment, and its failure to look beyond moments of game play and at the social and cultural environment in which video games and video gaming take place became, in this thesis, a foil for an alternative approach to researching, analysing and presenting the video game lifeworld.

Whereas technological determinism focuses on the power of content and systems on individual behaviour, this thesis has prioritised an analysis of human agency in and amongst a vibrant and immersive social world. It has taken a social ontology (as opposed to the dominant dual ontology) in order to develop a picture of a video gaming lifeworld - the rationale being that it is what people do, *and do together*, that should be the focus of sociological enquiry in general and specifically in the world of video games and video gaming, and that it is within an analysis of social action and interaction that insights into, and explanations for, gamers’ immersive social practices and behaviours will be found. Consequently the pursuit of video gaming has been approached as one that has to be understood from a position that looks beyond the immediate moment of game-play and towards the social and cultural environment in which it takes place. Whilst it is accepted that

content and structures in video games certainly influence certain gaming practices, and are used effectively to appeal to video gamers (for example gender specific characters and an inbuilt reward system – Chapter 5), by determining the fundamental characteristic of video gaming to be organised play (Chapter 3) it has been argued that video gaming in an inherently social pursuit. When video gamers play, even those that play alone, they *actively* immerse themselves into ‘ludic structures’. But the ability and willingness to do so is not (wholly) determined by the specific content and structures therein, it is consequent to a social history that precedes electronic entertainment but has influenced game design and content - a social history that has established organised, rationalised rule bound play as both familiar and central to human culture and expression.

Established as an inherently social pursuit, and one that can be looked at from a social as opposed to a dual ontology, empirical research into the social practices, networks and communities in the world of video games and video gaming revealed that video gamers should not be thought of, or analysed as, a homogenous group - and the activities, interests and social actions of video gamers must not be considered to be consistent and universal. With different tastes, interests, degrees of interest and levels of immersion into the video game lifeworld and the communities to be found therein, despite the unifying interest of video gaming, there can be no single definition of a video gamer. And, furthermore, there can be no single conception or theory of how, or why, video games are popular immersive and engaging or how, or why, video gamers immerse themselves into this lifeworld. So, in order to take into consideration the diverse world of video gamers, games and video gaming, in order to depict and understand the variety of gamers’ interests, degrees of immersion into the video game life world and thereby establish and analyse the range of social practices and motivations for immersion and engagement into the video game lifeworld, this thesis used the ‘video gaming career’ as a conceptual framework. Consequently we have seen that video gamers can, and do, occupy positions – sometimes one, two or more – on a career ‘continuum’ from occasional lone gamer to social gamer amongst peers in the same location to fully immersed gamers in MMORPGs amongst enduring, meaningful and rewarding communities, dense communities wherein gamers develop an environment in which to play, take specialist positions, learn, use and act out situational and group specific languages and performances. And at each stage in the ‘career’ there are different or complementary actions

and motivations for engaging and staying engaged with video games and the video game lifeworld.

In a diverse lifeworld, such as the world of video games and video gaming, there is no possibility of finding homogenous gamers or homogenous practices therefore the pursuit of a universal explanation for, or theory of, video game immersion, engagement or addiction is unrealistic. However through an analysis of the video game lifeworld from production to consumption – developed by constructing a video game system of provision (Chapter 4) - and through an empirical study of predominantly male, and masculine, video gamers, game networks and communities, this thesis revealed a constant that has facilitated an analysis of video gaming's key consumer demographic - from lone gamer to MMORPG enthusiast. It is a constant that has characterised organised competitive play and contest throughout history, and it is one that despite advances in technology and social change still dominates organised competitive play and contest in contemporary society. It has consistently characterised the video game industry from its inception in the 1970s – 1980s to the present day. It typifies the practices of the gamers under investigation here (a section of the male gamers who comprise video gaming's core consumers) from lone gamers to fully immersed MMORPG enthusiasts. And therefore it is one that facilitates a unified theoretical exposition on immersive and engaging gaming practices – both for lone gamers and those who play in a social environment. The world of video games and video gaming, consistent with competitive play and contest throughout history, is a male dominated and masculine lifeworld. And, furthermore, the social practices, networks and communities found within are characterised by typically masculine practices that facilitate rewarding masculine performances - often to the exclusion of women from key areas of the video game lifeworld.

In an industry dominated by men, and men who are not 'only' businessmen but also very often enthusiastic video gamers, the industry has historically produced, and continues to produce content that is designed to appeal to its core male consumers. Most games, those that have had heavy investment in order to achieve commercial success, are geared towards a male audience and present not only familiar, aspirational and typically masculine characters, but they are also, as Walkerdine (2006: 520) argued, 'the site for the production of contemporary

masculinity because they both demand and appear to ensure performances of heroism, killing, winning, competition, action, combined with technological skill and rationality'. And, furthermore, when video game developers interact with their consumers in order to reflexively accumulate (Lash & Urry, 1994) it is with active forum members, journalists and other game connoisseurs that they do so - gamers who prioritise 'masculine' games – thereby feeding back into the industry the priority amongst its core consumers for continued focus on typically masculine themes and interests. Gearing video games towards a masculine audience through the presentation of familiar and aspirational masculinities with an emphasis on action, killing and winning allows the lone gamer to actively interpret and engage with characters and events on screen, consequent to a cinematic apprenticeship. Through their active interpretation of, and identification with, familiar cinematic representations of masculinity – enabled by skills developed during that cultural and cinematic apprenticeship - coupled with the agency inherent to video games and video gaming masculine game enthusiasts enact typically masculine practices. As they narcissistically identify with onscreen content gamers craft themselves as the protagonist and act with assertion, determination, action and a competitive spirit in order to preserve their masculinity (and avoid emasculation) on screen and off, and thereby they maintain their socially constructed, and socialised, fantasised self-image of heroic masculinity. And, as discussed in Chapter 5, a typically masculine drive to actively preserve that fantasised self-image of heroic masculinity inspires, or even compels, video gamers to keep returning to the screen.

In the process of crafting themselves as the onscreen protagonist, advancing through or immersing themselves into a video game, video gamers perform socially constructed masculine practices on the screen. And essential for doing so are off screen 'cerebral' masculine processes, assertion, competition and fantasised heroism for example. Interpreting and enacting socialised ideals of masculinity, and aspirational masculine performances, encourage gamers to choose particular games, identify with a game, its characters and its content and keep returning to the game in order to preserve their situationally threatened narcissistic self that is under threat of emasculation on and off the screen. When they do video gamers also, as they seek and achieve the suspension of disbelief and immersion necessary for a rewarding as opposed to an instrumental gaming experience, exhibit and perform typically masculine embodied practices from gestures to actions to verbal

articulations. In the process of crafting themselves as the protagonist male/masculine video gamers on screen and off screen, cerebrally and physically, enact a total masculine performance. Immersion into and engagement with a 'masculine' video game involves heroism, killing, winning, competition and action on screen, driven by socialised masculine characteristics such as assertion and competition, and it also involves a physical performance that involves excessive and aggressive micro-practices on the controller, throwing, hitting and shaking equipment, shouting - at themselves, their character, other characters, the game mechanics as a whole - and the aggressive use of verbal, and misogynistic, rebukes and insults at other characters (mostly enemies) in games. A cerebral and embodied performance of typically masculine practices that are central to immersion into, engagement with (and potentially addiction to) video gaming. A performance that helps to create a rewarding, as opposed to an instrumental gaming experience - one driven by content and structures alone - and therefore a performance of masculine practices that encourages, or even compels, future engagement with the video game life world.

The typically masculine practices and performances through which video gamers actively interpret and immerse themselves into video games when playing alone (above) are also central to immersion into video gaming communities. Communities wherein gaming is characterised by cooperation and competition and where a failure to perform appropriately will lead to a gamer leaving or being expelled from a group, or suffering regular 'emasculatation' until that gamer, if they are determined to advance their 'career' and become a successful social gamer, learns to perform appropriately for the social situation - by learning and using appropriate language, skills and embodied practices. Performances of masculinity amongst and between video gaming groups, within and between different games and gaming situations vary greatly, from the aggressive misogynistic performances and language practices appropriate to Call of Duty: Black Ops to the nuanced pseudo-military environment that characterises Eve Online. However masculine practices and performances, of one form or another, facilitate engagement with others and the game, immersion into a community and game-play, and facilitate an enjoyable, rewarding social gaming experience - rewarding experiences that gamers are keen to repeat by returning to the game *and the communities* that made those experiences possible. The form and extent of these masculine practices in video gaming communities and the video game lifeworld (as we saw in Chapter 6.9) very often operate to exclude women through misogynistic language - a locker room mentality - and

thereby maintain video gaming, video gaming communities and the video game lifeworld as a male dominated and masculine environment - which, for many men, means that performances and typically masculine practices create an inviting, 'safe' and rewarding lifeworld.

Active immersion into social gaming and gaming communities, whether small groups in the same location or MMORPGs, requires more than a willingness to perform masculine practices. It requires the skills necessary to play the games. A gamer has to be able to physically cope with the virtual environment in order to achieve the suspension of disbelief, experience a rewarding gaming experience, and interact with a gaming community. Gamers have to develop their skills (micro-practices on a controller or keyboard) in order to perform appropriately amongst a gaming community. And this skill development is very often undertaken under the supervision and guidance of another male gamer. Historically boys have been taught by their fathers, and taught how to play the games favoured by boys and men. Older newcomers to 'masculine' gaming are introduced to games and the basics of game play by male friends and peers. Early career gamers entering the world of social gaming will be also introduced to the environment, and learn the basics of social play, by male friends or peers. And newcomers to an MMORPG will be trained in the necessary skills for successful and rewarding play by male gamers, or perhaps by female gamers familiar with the masculine environment and the practices necessary for successful immersion and enjoyment.

In the introduction and training process for new social gamers, whether physical or online, gamers will not only be trained in the instrumental practices necessary to operate a game successfully. They will also be trained in the collective masculine practices that characterise the game and the social group to which their instructor, and other members of their social group belong – from the son and father in the family environment, to the gamer playing with a group of friends in the same physical location, to the MMORPG noob in their online corporation. And ambitious gamers will actively immerse themselves into the video game lifeworld in order to achieve a skill set, a skill set that facilitates the social performances of masculinity required to fulfil their gaming ambitions. So, although a gamer's original attraction to a game might have been its content – a war game for some, a sport simulation game for another or a science fiction fantasy game for another depending upon the interests

they bring from beyond the video game lifeworld or previous moments or episodes of play - the gamer actively immerses themselves into and engages with a game in order to perform, and perform well enough and appropriately (physically and verbally), to interact effectively with a community of gamers and thereby achieve a rewarding social gaming experience. Communities of gamers, as we have seen in Chapter 7, wherein they can experience - through coordination, synergy and rhythm – rewarding episodes of game-play and the ‘collective effervescence’ that comes from being part of, and remaining part of, a social collective bonded by a collective interest and pursuit.

Video gamers enter fantasy worlds wherein through interpretation and action they forge the digital image and create an environment in which to play. Participation in these fantasy worlds is far from passive or exclusively visual - the essential criteria for Baudrillard’s hyperreality (1990) and Sennett’s (1986) tyrannical one way flow of information. In any game, and for every gamer from the lone gamer to the MMORPG enthusiasts’ participation in the video game lifeworld is active and ‘multi-sensory’. ‘Even’ gamers who choose to play games on their own – so called lone gamers – do not play in full isolation, they remain connected to a loose knit network of enthusiasts – fellow gamers, bloggers, posters of walkthroughs on YouTube, online reviewers and journalists in specialist magazines for example. Through verbal communication with other gamers video games review, discuss, praise and criticise games. And they boast, taunt, mock and praise fellow gamers. Video gamers need to act, and act skilfully, in order to advance through a game, to see the plot unfold and to advance or immerse themselves in a game and this requires skilled micro-practices on the controller, or keyboard. Gamers engage with a game through multisensory participation - embodied practices: leaning, swaying, shouting, swearing, throwing and staring. Gaming requires listening skills in order to follow the plot as it unfolds and to determine how they (as the onscreen protagonist) are to advance through the game – an auditory significance in the lifeworld once lost through the ubiquity of text since the Guttenberg era (McLuhan, 1969). And lone gamers, as we have also seen in Chapter 6, interact verbally with the lifeworld - shouting at the medium when it appears not to respond to their actions, shouting abuse at their opponents, shouting encouragement at themselves and their character and adding sound effects when jumping falling or flying for example.

Playing World of Warcraft, Eve Online, Rift, The Lord of the Rings Online or any MMORPGs also requires multisensory participation, not just to interact in the world but to actively build the world and its characters. MMORPGs are huge virtual worlds in which gamers, through their individual and social practices and multisensory participation create meaning for themselves, their characters, their fellow gamers and the medium itself. Like MUD enthusiasts (Turkle, 1997, Rheingold, 1994), MMORPG players can communicate with others in the game through text – wherein the conversations that take place are not ‘hot’ (McLuhan, 1969) provisions of information, they are analogous to the free exchange and interpretation that takes place in oral communication – like the conversational hybrids of oral and written communication recognised by Turkle (1997). Also, many people who play these fantasy MMORPGs communicate verbally, facilitated by a headset (that includes headphones and a microphone) and by making use of free software programmes such as TeamSpeak. Thereby they open up the medium to more than visual stimuli. The information on the screen provided by the game is just the start of the interactive and participatory journey that fantasy MMORPG gamers go on. For lone gamers and MMORPG enthusiasts alike video gamers first encounter a ‘cold medium’ (McLuhan, 1996) but it is one that is enthusiastically warmed up, and through their active multisensory participation it becomes meaningful for the active, interactive and participatory members of the video game lifeworld.

Video games are also ‘warmed up’, as we have seen, through the multisensory social, interactive and participatory activities of their fans. Through internet forums enthusiastic video gamers gather and celebrate their unifying interest. They discuss textually, but once again in the hybrid form of a verbal/written conversation observed by Turkle (1997), the merits and pitfalls of different games. They post pictures and videos of upcoming games, events and marketing products for the visual enjoyment of their community members, thereby encouraging continued interaction through verbal or textual conversation or reciprocal postings of visual material. And furthermore, as we have seen (Chapter 7), video gamers even interact and participate in the lifeworld through posting videos of their gaming activities on YouTube whereby identities are constructed and teams and communities are united through a multisensory form of gift exchange. Video gaming therefore is far from an isolating and tyrannical force as perceived by Horkheimer and Adorno (1997), Putnam (2000) and Sennett (1986). Rather it is one that facilitates the retribalization anticipated by

Stonier (1983) and McLuhan (1969) through interaction enabled, but not determined, by the electronic technologies that are increasingly characteristic of 21st Century living.

Beyond their uses as a games machine video game technology (software and hardware and the internet) have further propensities for facilitating multisensory social practices. The functions of the modern video game console go far beyond facilitating lone and cooperative video gaming. They facilitate many other activities that encourage social participation and integration. Games consoles are, of course, internet compatible. They have to be in order to facilitate the social practices that create, maintain and develop the life-world that has been depicted throughout this thesis. And with this internet compatibility the video game console developers have, in recent years, added new functions. Turning on an Xbox or PS3 allows entry into a vast mediated world, and the human agent has the opportunity to operate it, and respond to it, using multiple senses amongst an integrated population. Console owners can watch DVDs, or with an internet connection they can download, or stream, films off the internet. This allows them to view movies in the home environment and therefore enjoy them on a medium that they can interact with due to 'TV's tactile power... [that] involves the active participation of the viewer' (McLuhan, 1969). They can shout at the screen, pause it, fast forward it and rewind it – activities that 'passive' cinema goesers cannot. The modern game console allows a film viewer to interact/chat with a group of friends, perhaps around the globe, as they watch a film together when one of the group hosts an Xbox Live video party. Through a headset game console owners can discuss the film (or anything else for that matter) whilst watching it. And that is not all. Xbox console owners are – or will be in the near future – able to stream live television through a partnership between Microsoft and SKY, again with all the participatory benefits, and multi-sensory engagement, of television but with the added ability to chat amongst friends around the world at the same time.

Video game consoles can be used as an electronic storage device allowing music and videos to can be downloaded viewed and played – adding further auditory and visual elements to engagement and participation with the medium. And users can not only store photos and enjoy them; they can share and discuss them with friends using the 'Photo Party' facility and headset combination, thereby transforming 'hot' photos into a 'cold' medium to

be warmed up through multisensory participation. Furthermore, the game console also allows owners to present a personal profile which is accessible – depending upon the owner’s privacy settings – for all or some of the video game community to see; a personal profile that details various bits of information which is used to encourage interaction with like minded gamers through pictures, stories, songs, videos and statistics. The PS3 allows full internet access, the Xbox360 until recently has just allowed access to a limited number of sites – but these are the sites most utilised for the presentation of self, communication with and building social relationships with multiple, globally situated others. These include Facebook which we know from the work of Miller (2011) is a ‘Time Suck’ all of its own on which many users can easily spend more than six hours a day expressing their self, posting and commenting on their own and others’ photos, indulging in banter and exchanging virtual gifts amongst many other things. And YouTube which can occupy many hours of time, especially a gamer who uses it to get tips, watch walkthroughs, post videos and view the reciprocal videos posted by others. And all these social practices are now becoming increasingly accessible through voice prompts rather than traditional button pressing and written text, thereby adding a further, exciting element of multisensory participation with electronic technology and those that consume it. With all these functions, on top of the immersive life-world of video gaming, it is not surprising that so many of our population are happy to spend so much time, often for concerned others, a worrying amount of their time attached to that electronic box in the corner of the bedroom or living room

To conclude this thesis, it is worth considering the wider implications of this study. Through an empirical analysis of the world of video games and video gaming the pursuit has been shown to be an inherently social one, one that has been impacted upon by the wider socio-cultural environment which it takes place, and one that has had an impact on that socio-cultural environment. The enormous global popularity of video gaming, particularly online gaming, is consequent to the forces and outcomes of globalisation. And, in return video games and video gaming have contributed to the process of globalisation. Video gaming is dependent upon, and a contributor to, the global electronic telecommunications technology through which a global population communicates and it is a significant element of a global culture in which communication through telecommunications is not just accessible but also familiar and, for many, a ‘natural’ part of everyday life. A critical element of video gaming in contemporary society is communication and community formation in a virtual environment. The games people play rely on communication, they rely on interaction (cooperative and

competitive) and they rely on sociality. Individuals as part of social groups, whether physical or virtual, engage with the video game lifeworld, they do it together and they do it socially – with all the benefits and costs that that entails. And this leads us back to the initial concepts that acted as a foil for this thesis.

Horkheimer and Adorno (1997/1944), Putnam (2000), Sennett (1986) and Baudrillard (1990, 1993) demonised electronic media. They respectively argued that the electronic media indoctrinated passive individuals into mystified pawns of the capitalist system, undermined ‘social capital’, tyrannically subjected isolated people to a one way flow of information and caused the ‘disappearance’ of the active interpretative subject. However video games and video gaming counter these critiques and defy this perceived trend. The world of video games and video gaming is not one wherein individuals are isolated, where electronic media causes social fragmentation, where isolation reduces social participation and a one way flow of information on the screen produces and controls a non-interpretative population. The world of video games and video gaming is not where sociality ends but a location for a new form of sociality – a sociality characteristic of life in the 21st where global, networked, active and interactive electronically mediated communities are have become, and increasingly are becoming, commonplace, meaningful and significant. Video gaming, and its associated technology, relies upon and facilitates social networks - communities. Like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube it a social space where people around the globe can gather, talk, discuss, interpret and respond to online events, but equally to ‘real life’ events. However what the world of video games and video gaming offers that other online social spaces do not is an environment where masculinity and the performance of masculinity are paramount – surviving and thriving in the online world of video gaming requires more than ‘just’ a multisensory performance – it requires a multisensory masculine performance in and amongst a global population of similarly motivated peers.

Glossary of Terms:

Action game: A game that focuses on ‘physical’ challenges for the protagonist.

Action adventure game: A game that combines exploration, puzzle solving and ‘physical’ challenge.

Adventure game: A game that focuses on exploration and puzzle solving.

Campaign Mode: Is a series of single or multi-player offline adventures in a video game.

Console: An electronic device designed specifically for playing video games – often have other built in functions for use with internet capabilities.

Corporation: In this thesis a corporation is a cooperative team of video gamers playing Eve Online.

Cut scene: A cut scene is a cinematic interlude in a video game wherein the video gamer has no control over events. Cut scenes are used to advance the plot, introduce characters, and provide information to the gamer or gamers.

Flash Game: A computer game played over a web browser.

FPS: Is a first-person shooter video game wherein use of guns play a central role: they are played with a first-person perspective so the player experiences the action through the eyes of the protagonist.

Guild: In this thesis a corporation is a cooperative team of video gamers playing World of Warcraft.

Lone Gamer: Lone gamer is a term widely used in the video game lifeworld to describe someone who exclusively plays single player games – and rejects social gaming

MMORPG: (Massively multiplayer online role-playing game) is a genre of role-playing video game wherein many players interact, meet and play in an online virtual environment.

MUD: Multi-User Dungeon, Multi-User Dimension or Multi-User Domain - is a real time, virtual world text based role playing video game

Noob: is a slang term for a novice or newcomer to a video game or to video gaming.

Open world game: A game where the gamer is encouraged to roam freely through the virtual environment.

PC: A general purpose computer – used by gamers for playing games.

Platform Game: A game characterised by movement from and to platforms confronting obstacle along the way.

PvP: Competitive Player versus player gaming.

Re-Spawning: Is the recreation of a character or item in a video game after its death.

Role play game: A game wherein the game takes on the role of a character in a fictional setting.

Sandbox game: A game where the gamer is encouraged to roam freely through the virtual environment – see open world game.

Simulation game: A game that replicates real life, or fictional ‘realities’.

Social network game: Usually played on a web browser, promoting, using and relying upon social networks.

Social simulation game: A game that focuses on simulating real life social interaction, between gamers or between a gamer and the game.

Strategy game: Video games that emphasise strategy and planning to achieve success.

Spawning: Is the creation of a new character or item in a video game.

Stealth game: A game where stealth, not direct attack (more characteristic of FPS games) is used to overcome problems and opponents.

Third Person Shooter (3PS): Is an action game wherein the use of guns plays a central role: The players character is visible on-screen.

Games List:

Angry Birds: Strategy puzzle game – Released 2009 - Developed by Rovio Entertainment, published by Chillingo/Clickgamer

Animal Crossing: Social simulation game - Released 2001 - Developed and published by Nintendo

Assassin's Creed: Action adventure open world stealth game (historical setting) – Released 2007 - Developed by Ubisoft Montreal, published by Ubisoft

Assassin's Creed Brotherhood: Action adventure open world stealth game (historical setting) – Released 2010 - Developed by Ubisoft Montreal, published by Ubisoft.

Bubble Popper: Action Game – Released 2008 – Developed by Digital Chocolate

Bulletstorm: FPS – Released 2011 - Developed by People Can Fly and Epic Games, published by Electronic Arts

Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare: FPS – Released 2007 - Fourth instalment in the Call of Duty video game series - Developed by Infinity Ward, published by Activision

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 - FPS – Released 2009 - Sixth instalment of the Call of Duty series Developed by Infinity Ward, published by Activision

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3: FPS – Released 2011- Eighth instalment of the Call of Duty series -Developed by Infinity Ward and Sledgehammer Games, published by Activision

Call of Duty Black Ops: FPS - Released 2003 - Seventh instalment of the Call of Duty series - Developed by Treyarch, published by Activision

Close Combat: Action adventure game (World War II setting) - Released 1996 – Developed by Atomic Games, published by Microsoft

Club Penguin: MMORPG – Released 2005 – Developed by New Horizon Interactive, published by Disney

Cooking Mama: Simulation Game – Released 2006 - Developed by Office Create, published by Taito, Majesco Entertainment, and 505 Games

Dino Run (Escape Extinction In Style): Flash game - Released 2010 – developed and published by PixelJAM and XGen Studios

Doodle Jump: Platform Game – Released 2009 – Developed and published by Lima Sky

Doom: FPS - Released 1993 - Developed and published by id Software

Duke Nukem: Platform game - Released 1991 - Developed and published by Apogee Software

Eve Online: MMORPG - Released 2003 - Developed and Published by CCP Games

Fable II: Role-playing open world game – Released 2008 - Developed by Lionhead Studios, published by Microsoft Game Studios

Fallout: Open world role-playing game – Released 1997 - Developed and published by Interplay in 1997.

FarmVille: Simulation social network game – Released 2009 - Developed by Zynga, published on Facebook.

Forza Motorsport 3: Car racing game – Released 2009 - Developed by Turn 10 Studios, published by Microsoft Game Studios

Gears of War: Third-person shooter (Military science fiction) – Released 2003 – Developed by Epic Games, published by Microsoft Game Studios

Gears of War 2: Third-person shooter (Military science fiction) – Released 2008 – Developed by Epic Games, published by Microsoft Game Studios

Gears of War 3: Third-person shooter (Military science fiction) – Released 2011 – Developed by Epic Games, published by Microsoft Game Studios

God of War: Third person action-adventure game - Released 2009 - Developed by SCE Santa Monica Studio, published by Sony Computer Entertainment

Grand Theft Auto: Open world action adventure game – Released 1997 – Developed by DMA Design (now Rockstar North), published by BMG Interactive

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City: Open world action adventure game - Released 2002 - Developed by Rockstar North, published by Rockstar Games

Grand Theft Auto IV: Open world action-adventure game - Released 2008 - Developed by Rockstar North, published by Rockstar Games

Guitar Hero: Guitar simulation game – Released 2005 – Developed by RedOctane and Harmonix Music Systems, published by Activision

Halo (Combat Evolved/ CE): FPS – Released 2001 - Developed by Bungie, published by Microsoft Game Studios.

Halo Reach: FPS – Released 2010 – Developed by Bungie, published by Microsoft Game Studios

Halo 3 ODST: FPS – Released 2009 - Developed by Bungie, published by Microsoft

Half-Life: FPS (Science fiction) – Released 1998 - Developed by Valve Corporation, published by Sierra Studios,

James Bond GoldenEye 007: FPS – Released 2010 - Developed by Eurocom, published by Activision for the Wii video game

Kinect Adventures: Sports simulation game – Released 2010 - Developed by Good Science Studio, published by Microsoft Game Studios

L.A. Noire: Action adventure game (Crime solving) – Released 2011 - Developed by Team Bondi, published by Rockstar

Lord of the Rings: Role playing game (Fantasy setting) – Released 19984 – Developed and published by Interplay

Mass Effect 2: Action adventure role playing game – Released 2010 - Developed by BioWare, published by Electronic Arts

Medal of Honor: FPS – Released 2010 - Developed by Danger Close, published by EA Digital Illusions

Metal Gear Solid: Stealth action adventure game – Released 1998 Developed by Konami Computer Entertainment Japan, published by Konami

Metal Gear Solid 2 Sons of Liberty: Stealth action adventure game – Released 2001, Developed by Konami Computer Entertainment Japan, published by Konami

Minecraft: Sandbox building game – Released 2011 - Developed and published by Mojang.

Mob Wars: Role-playing game – Released 2009 - Developed by David Maestri, hosted on Facebook

Moshi Monsters: Social simulation game (Adopt and nurture a pet) - Released in 2007 by Mind Candy

Need for Speed: Car racing game – Released 1994 – Originally developed Distinctive Software, published by Electronic Arts (EA)

Need for Speed Hot Pursuit: Car racing game – Released 2010 – Developed by Criterion Games, published by Electronic Arts

Pac Man: Arcade Game – Released 1980 – Developed and Published by Namco

Pet Society: Social simulation game (play with pets and friends) – Released 2009 - Developed by Playfish, published on Facebook.

Professor Layton: Puzzle game (series) - Released 2007 – Developed and published by Level-5

Rift: MMORPG (fantasy setting) – Released 2001 – Developed and published by Trion Worlds

Saints Row: Action adventure open world game – Released 2006 - Developed by Volition, Inc., published by THQ

Saints Row The Third: Action adventure open world game - Released 2011 - Developed by Volition, Inc, published by THQ

Shrek: Adventure game – Released 2001 – Developed by Digital Illusions CE, published by TDK Mediactive

SimCity: Simulation game (City building) – Released 1989 – Developed by Maxi, published by Electronic Arts

Snake: Arcade Game – Released 1976 - Developed and published by Gremlin

Spider Man: Action game – Released 2002 - Developed by Treyarch, Published by Activision

StarCraft: Strategy Game (military setting) – Released 1998 – Developed by Blizzard Entertainment, published by Blizzard Entertainment

Tomb Raider: Action adventure game – Released 1996 - Developed by Core Design, published by Eidos Interactive

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater: Simulation game (Skateboarding) – Released 1999 - Developed by Neversoft, published by Activision

Transformers: Action adventure platform game – Released 2007 - Developed by Savage Entertainment, published by Activision

World of Warcraft (WoW): MMORPG (Fantasy setting) - Released 2004 - Developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment.

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Boyz n the Hood 1991. Directed by John SINGLETON. USA: Colombia Pictures

Casablanca 1942. Directed by Michael CURTIZ. USA: Warner Bros

Dark Knight (Batman) 2008. Directed by Christopher NOLAN. USA: Legendary Pictures

King of New York 1990. Directed by Abel FERRARA. USA: Seven Arts Pictures

Rambo First Blood 1982. Directed by Ted KOTCHEFF. USA: Anabasis Investments N.V

Ransom 1996. Directed by Ron HOWARD. USA: Touchstone Pictures

Scarface (1983) Film. Directed by Brian DE PALMA. USA: Universal Pictures

Scum 1979. Film. Directed by Alan CLARKE. UK: Blue Underground

The Deer Hunter 1978. Film. Directed by Michael CIMINO. USA: EMI Films

The Godfather (1972). Film. Directed by Francis Ford COPPOLA. USA: Alfran Productions

The Maltese Falcon 1941. Directed by JOHN HUSTON. USA: Warner Bros.

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A1 - A6

B1 - B6

C1 - C6

D1 - D6

E1 - E6

F1 - F6

Refer to focus group participants: Focus groups are numbered A-F, participants are numbered 1-6. B2 therefore represents participant number 2 from focus group B.

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